

SACRED FAMILIES

DEVELOPING THE FAMILY
ACCORDING TO GOD'S DESIGN

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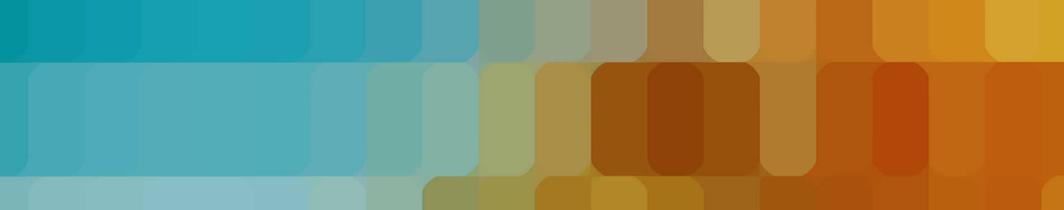
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1. Biblical Marriage

The title and theme of this book is *Sacred Families*, and under this banner I will attempt to describe the spiritual formation for each part of the family in order to set it apart for God's glory and purpose in this world. A family is truly sacred (set apart) when it is purposefully designed and offered to God for His use and honor. Hopefully, you will understand more clearly how this can be accomplished with your own family as you read this material.

The secular world places a great emphasis on the importance of family, and rightly so because it is the basic unit of society. As the family goes, so goes society. However, as Christians we realize that there is an extra dynamic to family that we see and strive for that society ignores or even rejects. This extra element is the role of family as an instrument of God's will in expanding His kingdom on earth, and as a type or preview of what Christ's relationship with the church will be like in heaven (Ephesians 5:31).

For the sake of clarity, therefore, when I mention the family it will not only be about how to make families more functional or peaceful (although there will be some of this). The goal of this book is to understand what our families are called to be in Christ. The Lord calls us to not only be well-balanced and happy as families, He also calls on us to become sacred families. This means that in addition to fulfilling His purpose for the family in everyday life, God calls upon sacred families to reflect in their everyday lives a measure of the glory that will ultimately be seen when the "bride" (church) and the "lamb" (Christ) are finally united forever in heaven (Revelation 19-22).

With this idea in mind, therefore, we are going to explore the three main components of family in order to learn how we can develop a more sacred view and experience of each.

Component #1 - Marriage — The family rests on the initial relationship between a man and a woman. There are many views and styles of marriage today, but we will examine the biblical pattern for marriage found in the book of Genesis which contains the DNA code for what marriage was meant to be. We will also examine the goal of every marital relationship.

Component #2 - Parenting — I will be discussing this vocation from several perspectives. One section will be devoted to explaining ways that parents can instill true spirituality into their children, and not simply imparting the knowledge and fear of the Law (rules and punishments). In addition to this, I will also review the very important lessons that God teaches all parents through their children and discuss the necessary changes to parenting that adults are required to make as their children develop from one stage of maturity to the next.

Component #3 - Home — The final section of this book will look at an overall view of the home. A Christian home is not only the place where you live, it is also the place where you live out your love. We will examine seven different ways a home nourishes and molds a person's life, and how a Christian home sustains and promotes a sacred family life.

Component #1 – A Biblical Marriage

Building a sacred family begins with a biblical marriage. In other words, a marriage based upon and put together according to God's original design. There are three elements in this design found in Genesis 2:18-25. In most cases, problems in marriage can be traced to a malfunction or neglect in these areas:

A. Knowledge of Self

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him." ¹⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

- Genesis 2:18-20

Notice that Adam was first taught about his environment and then about himself. He was created as an adult person in touch with his world, emotions and needs. Through his experience and knowledge he quickly recognized that he was alone and thus incomplete in this state. Note also that God did not create woman immediately. He allowed Adam the time to know not only himself and his surroundings, but also the needed experience to discover this sense of "aloneness" in his life.

This basic teaching in the Bible about self-knowledge and marriage is echoed by marriage counselors today. These professionals tell us that the best time to get married is when we have reached a certain level of both social and emotional preparedness which include:

Social Readiness — You are socially ready for marriage when you have some idea of what you want out of life and have a basic set of convictions that guide your major decisions (e.g. religious or moral

standards). You are ready for married life when you have learned to function within society independently. In other words, you may love and respect your parents, but you are now taking care of yourself by yourself. These are not the only factors that point to social readiness, but considering marriage without having these basic things in place would be unwise.

Emotional Readiness — You are emotionally ready for marriage when you recognize your need for marriage. In other words, wanting to be married not because this is what your parents want or what your beloved wants, but what you want for yourself. You are, therefore, emotionally ready for marriage when you are prepared to stop being alone. This is important because some people want to marry but they continue to live and think as single people. You know that you are emotionally ready to take this important step when you are prepared to make a full and lifetime commitment. If you have to be talked into it by your partner, your family or friends, you are not ready emotionally.

A good way to assess if two people are ready for marriage is to evaluate the four variables present when trying to decide if it is time to enter into marriage. What often happens is that you have two people and four variables that do not match. For example, he is ready socially but not emotionally (he has a job and an apartment but is reluctant to leave his "buddies" and bachelor ways); she is ready emotionally but not socially (wants to settle down and have a family but lives at home with her parents and hasn't finished school yet). The marriage plans never begin because one or more of the variables are not in place. The ideal situation is that the partners are both socially and emotionally ready.

In Genesis 2:18-20 we see that Adam was ready for marriage socially because he knew his position and role in the world, and he was ready emotionally because he realized that he had a need and desire for a partner to complete his life. God, in His majesty and wisdom, then created woman to be a perfectly suited social and emotional companion to the man as he would become to the woman.

In God's plan for marriage the partners know themselves and know their position within God's creation. They are also ready and willing to

leave their single status to enter into the lifetime commitment of marriage.

Another element in God's plan for marriage...

B. Knowledge of our Partner

²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. ²² The Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones, And flesh of my flesh; She shall be called Woman, Because she was taken out of Man."

- Genesis 2:21-23

I am not sure about the idea of having one partner especially created for another one (match made in heaven; soulmates, etc.). I think Adam and Eve were the only ones specifically designed for each other. I do know, however, that only one man was designed to be with one woman; not men with men or women with women; not three women with one man, etc. This being said, I know that the goal for this man/woman combination is that they become one, and the only way to achieve this goal is through the ongoing effort of the partners to know and understand each other.

In every society the road from being single to being married is different. Each era and cultural setting has its own system of pre-arranged marriages: long courtship and engagements, family introductions, pen pals and, in our day and age, internet match-making. In the end, however, the thing we want most to do is to know the other person so we can draw closer to them. This is an important part of the marriage sequence because it is through this process that we establish not only a material contract (marriage license, vows, dowries in some countries), but it is during this process of gaining knowledge about the other that we establish an emotional contract as well.

Two people who have adequate knowledge of their environment and themselves need to spend time learning to know each other as well. It is during this effort to truly know one another that the couple begins to lay down the groundwork for their unity or "oneness." Unfortunately, people in our society today are bombarded with the notion that having sex is the only or best way to really know someone else. The truth, however, is that engaging in sex before the commitment of marriage actually hampers the process of getting to know the other person. The reason for this seeming contradiction (sexual intimacy decreases the possibility of intimate knowledge) lies in the understanding of God's purpose in creating the sexual component in human relationships. He has given sex as a way for married people to express emotional, physical and spiritual realities to one another. For example, sexual intimacy is:

- A way to express our commitment to the "oneness" shared by the partners in marriage ("we are now one").
- A way to express loyalty ("I am yours").
- A way to surrender self ("I am all yours").
- A way to establish family (an extension and growth of our oneness).
- A way to provide emotional comfort (comfort without words).
- A way to experience and share physical pleasure, intimate enjoyment and play (without guilt or shame).

The point here is that we are not usually ready to do all of this with someone we do not know well. Sex before marriage, therefore, can provide physical gratification, but if entered into without the other elements designed to create permanent oneness, simple gratification becomes emotionally and spiritually confusing and painful. There are much better and less risky ways to increase our knowledge of someone we care for.

Going back to the Bible and the very first partners in a marriage relationship, we see that Adam was ready socially and emotionally, and God fashioned for him a perfectly matched partner. In the pre-sin world of the Garden, Adam immediately recognized the suitability of God's

final act of creation: Eve. In other words, Adam knew her completely and she knew him in the same way. These two were ready for the commitment because they knew each other in perfect wisdom and understanding as only ones who were without sin could know.

We should take special care in getting to know our prospective mates because unlike Adam and Eve, we are marrying weak and sinful people. Knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses enables us to go into a marriage commitment with our eyes wide open, and that is precisely what God wants.

C. Unity

If we know ourselves and know the other person, we then need to know what we are getting into when we marry. Marriage is the uniting of two people into a lifetime relationship that only death can legitimately end. Most people understand that marriage involves a ceremony and a legal contract as well as a personal promise or commitment. These are the things that accompany, legitimize or sanction a marriage in society and in God's eyes. This is why living together is not marriage. Simple cohabitation is not marriage or equal to marriage because it lacks the elements (legal contract and lifetime commitment) that make marriage the highest form of personal commitment possible between two people, not to mention the framework that God requires for men and women who seek to share physical and emotional intimacy.

On the wedding day when you say, "I do," what you are saying is, "I do promise to live with you as your spouse until I die." This is a high and noble thing, but very difficult for weak and sinful people to accomplish, so the Lord gives us three rules to follow in order to keep that vow for a lifetime.

²⁴For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- Genesis 2:24-25

RULE #1 - SEPARATE TO UNITE

You need to leave parents if you are to cleave to your spouse ("cleave" means glued to). The commitment in marriage is to be glued to your partner not your parents, or buddies, or work mates, etc. When you decide to marry, the decision is to make your partner the priority over family, friends, hobbies or work. You cannot have unity unless your spouse is your first priority in this physical world (in a Christian marriage it is understood that God is before all things).

RULE #2 - PERMANENCE IS PERMANENT

In marriage you become "one flesh," there is no room for any other flesh. In the one flesh union the couple does not necessarily think or act alike. One flesh means that both partners are absolutely committed to the union they are equally a part of. You do not give up identity in the one flesh relationship, but you do give up independence.

Life has many stages, and marriage has been designed by God to bring people through each of life's marker points together. The goal is not simply to be one, the goal is to live all of life as one because God has designed life to be experienced in the one flesh paradigm.

RULE #3 - INTIMACY MUST BE WITHOUT FEAR

The final verse says that they were naked and unashamed. The word "naked" here does not simply mean without clothes, it means that they were laid bare before each other. Adam and Eve were totally honest, expressed openly their feelings, had no reservations about their sexuality because they were without sin and totally transparent with each other. God created sexual intimacy and placed it last (not first) on the basic foundation made from: a) knowledge of self, b) knowledge of the other, c) commitment to unity, and then d) sexual intimacy. When these elements are placed in this order, the marriage reflects the form that God intended and will have a greater chance of success.



2. The Goal of Biblical Marriage

A family is truly sacred or set apart by God when it follows the design and purpose for family according to God's will. In the previous chapter I said that what sets families apart as sacred is that they see themselves as instruments of God's will in building His kingdom and not just families who want to be happy, stable, rich, etc.

I mentioned that the Christian family is a type or preview of what our heavenly existence will be like. This is why we follow God's design for the family, because it is supposed to point to something beyond ourselves.

This is one reason why the Bible forbids homosexuality. It does so not only for the obvious sexual immorality of this activity (it is forbidden, therefore immoral), but also because the gay marriage model does not reflect accurately the ultimate heavenly reality that marriage was designed to do. Gay marriage may be a legal union and entered upon by sincere people who care for each other, but it does not fulfill God's purpose for marriage on a spiritual level.

Finally, I talked about the basic elements necessary to create a marriage based on the model given to us by God in the book of Genesis. These elements were:

1. Knowledge of self: You have to know yourself before you can know another.
2. Knowledge of your partner: The root of many problems in marriage is that couples do not make the effort to know each other deeply.
3. Commitment to unity: Marriages begin when both partners are committed to being one, and they begin to unravel when one or both partners begin to back away from that commitment.

I also laid out the proper sequence in building God's model for a successful marriage:

1. Knowledge of self (maturity)
2. Knowledge of other (love)
3. Commitment to marriage (unity)
4. Sexual intimacy (oneness)

When we neglect one or more of these or get them in the wrong sequence, relationships suffer.

I have laid down some basic principles concerning biblical marriage. I imagine that many who are reading this book are already married and can look back at their original motives or situations in order to compare their experience to this model. Whatever the results of this comparison, the key question is not how the marriage started but where should it be going. In other words, what is the purpose or goal of marriage here on earth? Some might say that the goal is to raise a family, or provide a secure future for both parents and children. A high-minded person might even say that the main goal is to serve God in some way. These answers are all true, but secondary to the primary goal of any marriage which is to love one another for life.

Without love, raising a family is just work. Without love, there is no motivation to provide for the future. Without love, staying married for life is commendable but joyless. Without love, serving God is a burden or duty at best, and most important, without love, our marriage does not preview heaven's experience.

The biggest misconception when it comes to marriage is that married couples cannot love each other for life. The prevailing notion is that there is some excitement at the beginning of conjugal life, but that quickly fades to a point where you either end up bored and hating each other, or drift apart and divorce. My answer to such skepticism is that if God created marriage to be a lifetime relationship, He then also provided the element to keep people together for life, and that element is love.

If, therefore, the goal of marriage is to love our partner for life we must then examine what must be done in order to continually cultivate and keep that love alive. Of all the elements that contribute to the creation and maintenance of love, the single most important one is the ability to communicate. I say this because almost everything experienced in marriage is done within the context of communication. If we want to have love for life, therefore, the thing to continually work at will be our ability to communicate with our spouse.

Knowledge Through Communication

Marriages are held together by love, and love is built through communication.

Better is open rebuke
Than love that is concealed.
- Proverb 27:5

This proverb says that arguing and disagreeing in a relationship is better for the health of that union than no communication at all; at least there is a sign of life. Uncommunicated love feels the same as no love. In our society many believe that saying, "I love you" is the only way, even

the best way, of communicating love. In the digital world (TV, movies, the internet) we place a great emphasis on oral communication. We think that if it is not communicated with words or images (we can hear it, read it, watch it) then for some reason what we are trying to say has not really been effectively communicated.

We need to understand that the language of love can be communicated in many different ways, not just by words and images.

VARIOUS LANGUAGES OF LOVE

1. **Words:** Expressions of appreciation, loyalty, affection, love, admiration, attraction, etc. (communication that actually uses words of love).
2. **Gifts:** Tokens of love and appreciation. Things you buy, things you make that say I love you or I appreciate you.
3. **Actions/Service:** Actions to please and comfort the other, the home, the family, care of the other's possessions, etc.
4. **Time:** Giving attention, quantity time, listening, observing the other's work, hobby, performance.
5. **Physical Affection:** Touching, holding, sexual intimacy.

Gary Smalley, in his popular book, "*The Language of Love*" tells us that one of these five is our primary language for love. In other words, one particular language serves as the "hot button" that reassures us that we are truly loved. Usually, when love dies it is because we are no longer sure we love or are loved. We can receive many of these expressions of love but if our "hot button" is not pressed, we will not feel loved, no matter what the other person does or says. The main lesson Smalley teaches in his book is that if you do not talk to me in my language of love, then I will not feel loved.

EXAMPLES OF THE LOVE LANGUAGES IN ACTION

The wife's hot button for knowing she is loved is words. Love expressed in poems, love notes, saying sweet things, compliments on her looks, confessions of desire and the repeated words of love. The husband, on the other hand, grew up in a household where his dad was the strong and silent type. No fancy words. The husband has grown up like his dad in this way but has learned to say I love you through generous service: he fixes her car, he takes care of the house, he does a lot of repair work for her elderly parents. What tends to happen here is that she will not feel loved because he is not expressing it in the way she needs it expressed (she needs words, not a new carburetor on her car). She will question his love and he will point out all the things he does for her, but she will not be satisfied because he is not speaking in her language of love. This is how affairs begin, someone else discovers your language of love and begins speaking it, and you let them because it feels good.

An interesting feature about this language of love business is that people tend to receive their love messages in the same way they express their love messages. So let us go back to our couple and see how this works. Remember, she receives love through words, so this is usually the way she gives it; and he expresses love through action/service, so this is usually how he receives or recognizes love as well. In a situation like this, she tells him she loves him and gives him mushy birthday cards and wants to talk about their relationship, but she is not interested in hanging out in the garage with him or working on projects together. He needs to hear, "I love you" by her involvement with him in his interests and things. In the end, he feels smothered by her words and she feels rejected by his silence. Both are trying to love but each is missing the point, and the sad thing is that they do not even realize it.

SUMMARY

We have examined the basis for the sacred family which is marriage, and the goal for marriage which is love for life.

Marriage was conceived by God to be a preview of our heavenly existence, and following God's design and sequence for marriage will lead us to this experience here on earth.

The goal we work towards in marriage is to love each other for life, and the way to cultivate this love is to continually improve the communication between the partners.



3. Productive Communication

So far in this study we have set forth the idea that sacred families (the ones that are truly set apart for God's service and glory) begin with biblical marriages. Most marriages have correctly understood the one man and one woman element of biblical marriage as well as the long term commitment necessity, but many have trouble with the "in love for life" requirement. I have suggested to you that among the many important practices in a marriage, none is more essential to cultivating and maintaining love than effective communication between the partners. When there is little to no communication this usually means that there is little to no love in that marriage. Communication is the currency of love.

In this chapter I want to examine some of the ways to improve communication skills within marriage.

Previously I have said that some people want love, need love and desire to give love, but fail in love because they cannot communicate it well. The answer for these individuals is not to start loving, they are already trying to do that; nor is the answer to love differently, since I do not think people can change their basic personality in order to accomplish this. For example, touchy-feely people cannot simply change the way they are because being touchy-feely is not a superficial thing, it is who they are. The answer, I believe, is to find more effective ways to communicate our love for the other, and hopefully, better receive the love we need for ourselves.

I am convinced that the way to do this is to make the communication you do have more effective and productive. Think of it as building a communication bridge between you and your beloved. The idea is that if you improve communication, you will automatically improve love. There are ways to improve the communication between you and your spouse. Here are three basic communication elements that will make you connect more effectively at every level:

Communication Must Be Totally Honest

but speaking the truth in love...
- Ephesians 4:15

For communication to be productive it needs to be honest, even if this is risky at times. A common mistake made by both men and women in a marriage relationship is that they often say what the other person wants to hear in order to get what they want. This works in the short term but is disastrous for long term relationships. The best example of this is when we compare the hierarchy of needs that men and women say that they need from each other. This survey shows what men and women acknowledge privately as their top five needs, but rarely acknowledge to each other for fear of ridicule or rejection.

MEN

1. **Sexual fulfillment:** It is number one because that is the way God created them. The natural production of seminal fluid in a man causes the constant need for gratification. It is the greatest single struggle each man must deal with in order to mature emotionally, socially and spiritually.
2. **Playmate:** Men want their wives to be their buddies and friends.
3. **Attractive:** A wife's looks and demeanor either build up a man's pride or bring it down.
4. **Domestic support:** A quiet, clean and welcoming home (he feels welcome when he comes home to his own house).
5. **Admiration:** Respect and encouragement.

WOMEN

1. **Affection:** Not necessarily sex. Romance, cuddling, holding, tender words and touch.
2. **Attention:** The sharing of thoughts. Really listening with feedback.
3. **Trust:** Her world, especially when there are children, is supported by him. She has to be confident that she is his priority.
4. **Financial security:** Enough to live on and provide for the family. Enough to give the children advantages in education and social mobility.
5. **Involvement:** Getting involved in home and family matters. Truly providing leadership.

What the survey showed were things we kind of knew from experience and observation. Men are generally immature and more self-centered.

They want attention and gratification and are not always willing to give in exchange for these.

Women are more high-minded and usually willing to make a greater personal investment in order to succeed in marriage. However, women tend to ask for conflicting things. They want security for their children which places a greater burden on the husband if he is the primary earner. At the same time, they want him to be more involved at home which requires time, time that may be needed at work.

I've cited this brief survey simply to show that without honest communication, there is little chance for growth in the relationship or the deepening of mutual understanding and its natural byproduct, love.

Communication Must Be Clear

For communication to be productive it also needs to be clear. More arguments, divisions and hurt feelings come from communication that is unclear than from intended insults. Those who speak need to make sure that the hearer has indeed understood what was said and the meaning of it. Hearers need to reassure the speakers that they have truly been understood. Our words and actions need to convey what we mean. If what you are doing means, "I am truly sorry" and not just, "I'm tired of arguing" make sure the other person knows it.

Practice good feedback methods. Say or do what you will but always make sure, through feedback, that the other person is understanding your words and intentions ("tell me what I have just said").

Communication Must Be Complete

We must tell the truth, express it clearly and tell it all. Some do not agree on this point but when one area of discussion is taboo, or one of the partners declares a problem or discussion "off limits," this creates frustration, resentment and a gradual closing down of the communication network between people. There is no greater joy or

protection than a loving partner with whom we can share all of our hearts.

SUMMARY

I would like to remind you that as Christians, we rarely have an opportunity to make a dynamic or public witness for our faith (few are executed for the faith, few write famous books, etc.). Most of us live ordinary lives and it is with these ordinary lives that we make our statement of faith.

Faithful, Christ-centered and loving marriages are the single greatest witness that we will probably ever make for the Lord before this unbelieving world. To be in love for life with our marriage partner is a true and powerful service to God and reveals His glory to those who see it and are blessed by its warm glow. It is the brightest star in the crown of a sacred family and honest, clear, and complete communication will serve to first ignite and then maintain that married love for a lifetime.

4.

Parenting 101

BREATHING GOD'S L.I.F.E. INTO YOUR CHILDREN

So far in our study we have talked about marriage, which is the basis for a sacred family, and I have shown that a marriage based on the design found in the Bible (one man + one woman for life) is the foundation for building a sacred family devoted to God. I then described the type of communication necessary to cultivate a love in marriage that lasts a lifetime. Our next subject for discussion is the raising of children, a task that naturally follows for those engaged in a loving marriage.

First, a quote we can all relate to, "If it was going to be easy to raise kids, it never would have started with something called labor" (Anonymous). Next, a question for all parents to consider, "Why did you have children?"

There are a number of reasons that we can put forth in answer to this question, but the one that is the most useful in seeing us through the many challenges of parenthood is this: God commands us to have children (Genesis 1:28). Not only are we to continue to multiply until Jesus returns, but the Bible also says that we are to raise spiritually sensitive children who will know God and His will (Sacred Parenting - Gary Thomas - Zondervan 2005).

¹ Listen, O my people, to my instruction;
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
² I will open my mouth in a parable;
I will utter dark sayings of old,
³ Which we have heard and known,
And our fathers have told us.
⁴ We will not conceal them from their children,
But tell to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,
And His strength and His wondrous works that He has done.
⁵ For He established a testimony in Jacob
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
That they should teach them to their children,
⁶ That the generation to come might know, even the children
yet to be born,
That they may arise and tell them to their children,
⁷ That they should put their confidence in God
And not forget the works of God,
But keep His commandments,
⁸ And not be like their fathers,
A stubborn and rebellious generation,
A generation that did not prepare its heart
And whose spirit was not faithful to God.
- Psalms 78:1-8

¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
- II Timothy 3:14-15

It is helpful in dealing with our emotions concerning parenting if we understand that having children is not only about us, how we feel or what we want. Having children is first and foremost about God because He has specifically called on us to bear and raise children for His glory, not our own. When parents accept this fundamental spiritual component as part of their mission, the trials and sacrifices that come

with parenting are more easily borne. It is no longer how my children make me feel (proud/ashamed/worried), but rather how faithful have I been in my duty to God as a parent.

To pin our hopes and dreams on an immature and imperfect human being (our child) is not a recipe for happiness. When we as parents accept that the reason and work of parenting is to breathe the life of God into our children, and family is the divine framework where this is done, several things change:

1. We gain an overall vision of our responsibility as parents which in turn helps us persevere in this lifetime process. There is less confusion and worry because we see the "big picture" and know what our task really is.
2. We save ourselves from the "performance anxiety" that comes from relying on our children to provide us with self-affirmation through their accomplishments. Obeying God in parenting godly children provides the esteem and encouragement we need regardless of how many trophies the kids collect in their various activities. Relying on our children's accomplishments to make us feel good creates a lot of pressure for them, and often leaves parents feeling disappointed.
3. Breathing the life of God into our children also affords us a greater opportunity for future reward. Ask any grandparent whose children and grandchildren are faithful Christians!

There are many aspects and issues concerning the parenting experience that I will not address in this book because they are too numerous (e.g. discipline, eating habits, bed wetting, sibling rivalry, preparing for adolescence, etc.). However, this chapter on how to breathe God's life into your children will be helpful in effectively navigating these and other common issues associated with the raising of children.

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

- Genesis 2:7

²⁰ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹ So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." ²² And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

- John 20:20-22

In these two passages we witness first Adam, and then the Apostles, receiving the life of God. Adam received the Spirit or "likeness" of God in order to separate him from lesser forms of life. The Apostles, on the other hand, received the Holy Spirit Himself in order to separate them from those who were not saved and did not have eternal life. When, therefore, I talk about breathing the life of God into our children, I am referring to the same kind of action. The Life of God that is within us as Christians is breathed into our children in order to separate them from those without spiritual life.

William Gaultiere, in an article about the spiritual development of children, says the following, "I believe that the primary purpose of Christian parenting is discipleship. I invite my children into my walk with Jesus, investing in them the life of God that I have come to experience so that they grow into being new creatures in Christ. (II Corinthians 5:17)" He also mentions four elements that are necessary in order to breathe that life of God into them.

A - BREATHE LOVE

Loving your children as God loves you. The practical aspect of this idea is found in II Corinthians 12:14.

Here for this third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be a burden to you; for I do not seek what is yours, but you; for children are not responsible to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

- II Corinthians 12:14

The parenting relationship should be focused on the parent providing for the child's needs, not the reverse. It is God, in His love, who provides for us, and in the same way we provide for our children in our love. Understanding this helps neutralize the bitterness often expressed by parents tired of the demands of parenthood. For example, parents who say, "I did not have it so easy when I was a kid" are really expressing their resentment because their own children do not have to experience the hardships (lack of love) that they themselves had to deal with as children. These parents need to realize that just because their parents, for whatever reason, did not meet their needs, this does not justify them making the same mistake with their own young ones.

Children learn love from observation and experience, and they make the connection that God is love from the example of their parents (i.e. Mommy is love, Daddy is love). Children who are not loved by their parents have a hard time perceiving God's love. After all, if they cannot see evidence of parental love from people they see, how are they to understand the love of someone they cannot see? Of course, this parental love is not just theoretical, it is very practical, even mundane at times. For example, love is breathed in the following ways:

- Meeting basic physical needs.
- Physical affection.
- Listening, watching ("Watch me Daddy!").
- Verbalizing affirmation ("Atta boy/girl!").

- Playing at their level, not them watching you play.
- Offering comfort, discipline, advice.
- Giving gifts, favors, "specials."

There is a lot more that can be said about love, but let me just emphasize two things about breathing God's love into your child.

1. It takes time

Finance is the enemy of love because love takes up a lot of time and time is money. There are no short cuts to love because cultivating love requires a large quantity of time, not simply "quality" time. Most families with their hectic, overly-scheduled lives think that "doing" many things together is the same as "being" together. We are not human doings, we are human beings. Better sitting around the house where the main activity is just being together than a jam-packed day watching each other scurry from one activity to another.

Taking the one-on-one time with each child, and the together-time with the whole family in order to develop loving relationships will cost you in the advancement of your career, the rate of getting all your projects done and your standing in little league, but this is the choice you make when you have children. Less time for me and singular interests, more time to love and create love in my children. There is a payoff in this love investment and it usually comes in the form of spending less time dealing with the fallout produced by children who are acting out in destructive ways because they are hungry for love.

2. Show your child how to express love to God

Children soon learn to return their parents' love by being obedient and helpful. This exchange teaches them the joy of shared love which they will need in order to build healthy relationships in the future. As parents, we should add the dimension of prayer to our children's lives and help them see this as a genuine expression of love as well. "Why do we pray?" they ask, "Because we love God" you answer.

It is endearing to see young ones bow their heads or clasp their hands in prayer, and it is! However, we must be careful not to transform what can be the beginning of their spiritual communication and expression of love towards God into a kind of "children's theatre" where the child is performing or on display. Teach them why, when, what and who prayer is about by modeling it and allowing them to participate meaningfully: for meals (before or after), before a long car ride or trip, when someone is ill, during a celebration or happy occasion and when making decisions.

Teaching them early to express their love to God in prayer will set into motion the spiritual life and attitudes you hope they will develop in later life.

B - BREATHE IMAGE

You must establish your child's identity in God's image. Loving and caring for our children is a natural impulse for most parents, but helping them establish a godly identity is very much a matter of choice. Children need structure and discipline to enter into God's ways and take on His image, and this requires the structure and discipline of ourselves first.

Solomon says that parents need to be like warriors pointing our children like arrows towards a firm target, which is godliness (Psalms 127:4-5).

Paul, the Apostle, says, "Bring them (children) up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Note that this is not just any discipline or instruction, but the type that comes from, and leads one to the Lord.

Parents can do this consciously in a variety of ways:

Lead by godly example

My mother smoked, I began to smoke; my father drank alcohol every day, I began to drink alcohol; my parents went to nightclubs as entertainment, I began to hang around in these type of places as well. When I became a Christian, however, I had to unlearn (repent) these

habits in order to live the godly life I had been called on to live as a Christian.

If you, the parent, pursue a godly image, your children will follow. Children can be taught theory about godliness from Sunday school or Christian summer camp, but they learn the practical side of godly living from watching you, the parent. The old saying is still true today, "Children don't do what you say, they do what you do."

Establish godly traditions

It is amazing to note that while they were in the desert, the Jews' entire life experience revolved around their worship of God: preparing sacrifices daily, moving and reassembling the tabernacle, feasts, prayer times, teaching, and the Sabbath each week to mention a few of their religious responsibilities. These were given in order to chip away at the sinful shell that living in a pagan land for four centuries had produced, and mold a people into a godly nation.

The work of breathing a godly image into our children is similar in approach. On a daily basis we mold them with rules and discipline according to biblical principles and morals; speaking the truth in love; disciplining in fairness without anger; affirming their individual personality and unique spiritual gifts; and encouraging personal devotion and prayer, just to name a few. Little by little, the tedious everyday work of molding them into spiritually minded and spiritually sensitive people is accomplished.

In a larger context we also begin to see markers that provide meaning and practice to their spirituality (e.g. regular attendance at worship, summer camp, youth rallies and family dinners at Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving). Some families even create traditions that are spiritual in nature and unique to their own family (e.g. our family had a devotional each evening when together at family vacations). We need to establish spiritual habits and traditions that celebrate and constantly remind children that we are God's people.

C - BREATHE FORGIVENESS

Forgive your child as God has forgiven you (Colossians 3:13). God is a God of mercy, and to breathe the Spirit of Him into your child is to help him experience forgiveness. If a child does not learn this key virtue, that child will have difficulty learning about God's mercy, and will struggle with relationships later on.

Part of this training includes:

- Saying, "I forgive you" when they sin.
- Not holding on to their past wrongs.
- Model saying, "I am sorry, please forgive me" because sometimes the parent is in the wrong.
- Listen to their angry feelings and do not become angry because they are angry.
- Discuss biblical examples of forgiveness (e.g. Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32). This is a wonderful teaching/imprinting opportunity.
- Train them in the Christian process of forgiveness.
 - Talking it out.
 - Accepting responsibility.
 - Asking for forgiveness or offering forgiveness.
 - Receiving forgiveness (gratitude).
 - Reconciliation (peace).
 - Renewal (letting go of the past).

God's ultimate purpose in bringing Christ to earth was to offer us forgiveness. A child who is not schooled in the meaning and experience of giving and receiving forgiveness is incomplete spiritually.

D - BREATHE ENTHUSIASM

The fourth element necessary in breathing spiritual life into you child is enthusiasm, what the Bible calls joy. The English word enthusiasm comes from the Greek word "ethnos" which literally means "in God." It is what Nehemiah had as he led the Israelites in the hard, dangerous and discouraging work of rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. He exhorted them saying, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). In the same way, Paul said to the church, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). Enthusiasm/joy is the pleasure we experience when our hearts are in tune with the Lord.

Children need to learn that their faith is the cause and the source of joy in their lives, not simply adherence to rules, and certainly not acquiring things or money. Again, there are practical ways parents can cultivate the spiritual environment around and in their children so that they can actually feel the enthusiasm produced directly by their growing faith.

Model enthusiastic faith and service

There is a component of joy that is essentially viral, you catch it from someone else. If there is no enthusiasm for spiritual things coming from the parents, there will not be any from the children either. They catch it from you.

Encourage Christian friendship

As children grow, much of their behavior and attitudes will be influenced by their friends. While you can, breathe into their lives every opportunity for them to bond with other Christians. Most congregations provide various Christian activities, camps, rallies, and at some places Christian school. Encourage them to offer hospitality to other Christians, and most importantly, let them know that you expect them to marry a Christian one day.

Include them in ministry

Just like you encourage them to help you bake a cake or build a birdhouse using grown up tools and equipment, let them know the joy that comes from working alongside you in ministry (visiting the sick, cleaning the church building, preparing a baby shower, etc.). Nothing bonds parent and child more in the spirit and joy of Christ than serving together in His name. A child who equates spirituality with joy will be inoculated against the counterfeit happiness promised by the sinful practices of this world.

SUMMARY

What we are aiming to do as parents is to have our children internalize the image of God that we are modeling and teaching them. William Gaultiere (quoted in Gary Thomas' book, Sacred Parenting p.189) puts it this way: "As parents, we want to try to pass on the love, identity, forgiveness and enthusiasm of God to our children so that they can internalize it for themselves and then share it with others."

This spiritualization will effect how they see themselves (forgiven, loving, godly and joyful) and how they will see and treat others which will prepare them to breathe God's life into their own children one day. Remember, those will be your grandchildren.

5.

Preparing for Teen Parenting

In his book entitled "Teen-Proofing", psychologist John Rosemond talks about the work that goes into parenting before children become teens. His point is that if you do the hard work of parenting when your children are young, you will have less problems when they reach the teen years. I can highly recommend his no nonsense approach to parenting. He is a family psychologist who has rejected much of modern psychology's notions of parenting in favor of more common sense and traditional ideas about raising children. Much of this chapter is a brief synopsis of the first section of his book.

THE PROBLEM

One hundred years ago there was no such thing as "teen culture" (adolescents with income, media devoted to teens, marketing/products directed exclusively to teens and pre-teens, youth ministers, counselors specializing in this age group). What we have created in the last century is a significant portion of society that has an enormous expectation of leisure, freedom and buying power without the corresponding checks and balances of accountability, responsibility, and productivity. This amounts to approximately eight years of expensive parental maintenance with little return.

It was not always this way. The teens of the late 19th and early 20th centuries spent their time integrated into the family as junior partners

in helping maintain their homes. It was common in my father's day that young people this age worked after school and summers to provide additional income for their families. Fathers taught sons a trade, schooled them about the family business or farm, and daughters learned and practiced home-making skills alongside their mothers.

I am not saying that we have to go back to this because times have changed, and so has the makeup of families and work. What I am saying is that with an evolution to "teen culture" we have created a generation of young people who are, as Dr. Rosemond says, "emotional toddler[s]... irresponsible, narcissistic, and oblivious to risk (i.e. Just do it! Why not?)." It is not that you, the parents (especially Christian parents) want them to be this way, it is that without serious parental intervention, this is how today's society will turn them out. Modern American culture is not a good partner when it comes to raising Christian children.

The moral shift in our society is evident as sexual practices considered unacceptable 50 years ago are now seen as morally neutral. A recent example of this happened to a teenaged girl (a member of the church where I was preaching at the time) who complained that two girls kissing romantically in the hallway at school was improper. To her surprise she was accused of being prejudiced against the gay lifestyle and was the only one censured by the school in connection with this incident. Today, teens exchange sexually suggestive or explicit pictures of themselves using their phones or computers and see this as "no big deal." Modern youth culture not only accepts, it applauds sexual freedom and diversity.

Our education system has, in many cases, weakened or eliminated its disciplinary practices. Teachers complain that it is nearly impossible to effectively discipline disruptive or non-compliant students because of the threat of lawsuits by the parents or reprimands by their superiors. It is very hard to maintain proper discipline in the home when this notion barely exists in the classroom.

The fact that teenagers are now coveted consumers also adds a degree of difficulty to parenting that was not present in previous generations. Parents cannot keep up with the demands of their children who are

stimulated by the constant marketing barrage of the media. Eight-year-olds want their own cell phones and teens believe that having and driving their own car at 16 is a "right," not a privilege and great responsibility. I remember our eldest daughter's embarrassment and pain when on the second day at a new school she was attending, a girl in her class asked her why she wore the same jeans two days in a row. For a 14-year-old girl, this kind of "fashion shaming" was enough to make her want to change schools or upgrade her wardrobe. Fortunately, she used this episode as motivation to develop her own particular style in clothing (as opposed to having lots of clothes) since her father's means as a minister did not permit a big shopping budget.

As I stated previously, raising children is difficult in this type of social environment. When children reach their teen years, parents want to prevent them from becoming secretive, argumentative, defiant or fall in with the wrong crowd. They fear their children will begin using drugs and alcohol, become sexually active or run away, perhaps harm themselves, take foolish risks and, oh yes, become depressed or even worse, suicidal. Have I managed to cover all the fears that parents have about their teens?

Instead of worrying about the terrible things that might happen to our adolescent children, what we should do while they are still young is develop a parenting model that will eventually produce two things when they do become teens:

1. Parenting that develops their character in such a way that they will take progressive and responsible control of their lives as they enter and grow through adolescence.
2. Parenting that helps them make self-protective rather than self-destructive decisions as teenagers.

These are the "Holy Grail" of teen parenting, but the work to achieve these two goals begins long before a child becomes a teenager.

BASIC CHILD DEVELOPMENT

There are three basic stages that children go through before they become adults, and how we parent them during these periods will have an impact on what kind of people they become. I want to briefly go over the first two stages because how we parent during this period will largely determine the experience we, as parents, have when they become teenagers.

Stage #1

Infancy and Early Toddlerhood (0-3 years)

During the first two years of life the child is treated like he was the center of the universe. Total strangers kneel before his throne just to get a smile. Parents are there to serve and fulfill needs quickly. This is normal because the child needs caring for and is only aware of his own central position in the world.

At around two years of age a revolution takes place. Parents begin (or should begin) to shift roles from caretakers to authority figures. At this point they start to teach right from wrong, obedience and begin to practice consistent discipline. We usually call this time the "terrible twos" because the child does not like this new order of things where Mommy says "no" five hundred times a day. The change that must take place is that the child will no longer be at the center of his universe, the parent will now occupy this position.

From now on the child will pay more attention to the parent (respond to/accommodate) than the parent towards the child (cater to/cave-in to). From about two years onwards the child must be made to understand that the parent is in charge, not the child. You know this is taking place when the child makes the parents the center of his attention, looks to them for definitions of right and wrong, feels secure that his parents are able, willing and actively taking care of and protecting him, seeks their approval (seeks to please them) and finds his identity within the family (big brother, mommy helper, daddy's girl) and not within his needs and wants. As I have already stated, at this stage the goal for parents is to go from caretaker to authority figure. Of course,

we are still caring for and nurturing our child, but we are adding the dominant element of authority to the mix.

Unfortunately, many parents are unwilling to pay the price necessary to force their children from one stage to the other. They fail to apply the pressure needed to force the unwilling child out of infantile self-centeredness. They cater, cave-in, give up or let daycare handle it. The results are seen in children who are self-centered, selfish, undisciplined and anti-social.

I tell our youngest daughter (who has a six-year-old, a three-year-old and a one-year-old) that she is at the bricklaying stage of parenting. Much like the task of laying brick, dealing with children going through this transition is hard physically, tedious, and seemingly endless. But every, "No," every disciplinary action seen to the end and every repetition of the rules is like laying one brick. Eventually the 10,000 bricks you have carefully laid form a solid structure, something that can withstand pressure and be used as a foundation for future construction. If you persevere in this task during this period, you will have well prepared your child for the next stage of development.

Stage #2

Early and Middle Childhood (3-11 years)

There are goals in parenting children at every stage of their development. When we are confused, tired and feel defeated, we should review these goals so we can be reminded of the things that we are trying to accomplish as parents. Of course, sometimes our strategies might change (the things we do to reach our goals), but the goals always remain the same. For example, the goal in the toddler stage is to establish your authority along with your child's positive and steady response to it. Your strategy to achieve this may have to change from time to time. Case in point, if "time out" is not working, go to some other form of discipline. I remember as an eight-year-old that when all else failed, my mother would have me put on my pajamas in the middle of the day and send me to stay on my bed without any books, toys or other amusements. There was no set time, I simply had to sit there and wait until she decided that my pajama time was over. This sometimes lasted

an hour or more. This strategy to obtain my compliance to her rules got my attention, she did not even have to raise her voice.

In the next stage of development, which is the early and middle childhood stage, there are several other goals that you are aiming for. Rosemond says, "During infancy and early toddlerhood parents are responsible mostly to their children. Now (during early and middle childhood) parents are responsible to both their children and to the rest of us." What he is referring to here is the goal of properly socializing children so they will be able to interact with others outside the family circle. I am not going to provide strategies for this here since they are different from child to child, but the following are the goals to aim for. By the time your child enters adolescence, he or she should have learned the following principles:

1. You, the child, are completely responsible for the choices you make. God has given you free-will and the exercise of that free-will largely determines what happens to you.

Parents need to reinforce the idea that their children's' behavior is due to their own choices, not their genes, their father's alcoholism, mom's cancer, or the fact that the family has too much money or is on welfare. In the end, the choices they make are very important, and they have to take ownership. For example, "You ate all your candy before the movie? No candy during the movie. Your choice!"

2. If you make bad choices, sooner or later bad things will happen as a result.

The religious instruction we give our children lays the groundwork for this truth, but we can reinforce it in everyday circumstances by not always covering their losses brought about by their bad decisions. For example, a mom warns her daughter not to leave her bike in the yard at night since it might be stolen. Nothing happens for months (when she leaves it out due to neglect or laziness) and then one morning it is gone, and it happens to be one day before the big "bike-a-thon" at school. If the parents cover her loss (i.e. they buy her a new bike so she won't miss the bike event at school) instead of letting her own her loss, they begin "enabling" her instead of teaching her a valuable lesson. If this child does

not learn that bad choices bring bad consequences at this early stage, imagine the problems awaiting her when she is a teen and driving her mother's car!

3. If you make good choices, bad things are less likely to happen.

This is the hardest lesson of all because it teaches children about sin, the imperfect world and the problem of suffering. Unfortunately, the message they often hear in school is that if you do something good, you deserve something good in return. This would be nice if it were true, but the world does not work like this and we do our children a disservice if we indoctrinate them in this way. The truth is that the reward for doing the right thing is the knowledge that you have done the right thing. Sometimes you are rewarded for it, sometimes you are not and sometimes you are even penalized. For Christian parents this is much easier to explain because our faith calls us to do right as an extension of who we are in Christ. The doing of good is a function of our new life in Jesus, not some ethical bargaining tool to gain favor.

A review:

The goal of parenting at 0-3 years, the parent is in charge (saying "no" 500 times a day).

The goals of parenting at 3-11 years. As parents we want our child to learn how to lead himself by:

1. Realizing that he is responsible for his own life and you are giving him this responsibility little by little as he matures. The rate of independence he has is based on the level of maturity he demonstrates.
2. Taking ownership of his choices and learning the lessons that his decisions teach him.
3. Understanding the motivation for making good choices (faith, not just reward) and accepting that the world is not always fair, but God will do justice in the end.

The early childhood and middle years are when parents teach the child how a compass works, the teen years are when the parents help the child use that compass.

Stage #3

Terrible Tweens-Teens

So, we have a period where the child is the center of his own universe, cared for, pampered, and catered to. Then there is the break into reality where the parent asserts authority. Next comes a long period of training in personal responsibility in order to properly socialize the child and instill in him his parents' values and spiritual life (1-They are responsible for their choices. 2-Choices have consequences. 3-Life is not always fair but doing the right thing is its own reward.).

But then, around 12 years of age, it dawns on this preadolescent that he will not be living with his parents forever, his future is not with them but with his own generation. During the pre-teen or "tween" period the child will "unplug" (disengage) from his parents and plug into his peers. At this point the media and the education system, along with the marketing companies, will all encourage this process. Dr. Rosemond calls it "peer group worship" (*Teen-Proofing* - p.34).

The problem for the parents here is that almost overnight they feel that they are losing control of the parent/child relationship. What is happening is the reverse of what took place at the "terrible twos" stage. At that time the parent removed the child from the center and placed the parent/authority figure in the center. It was a dramatic change for the child and caused trauma referred to as the "terrible twos." Now, the child removes the parent from the center of attention and makes their peer group the focal point. For some parents this is threatening and they fight to regain the central place in their child's world. These changes, if not understood and dealt with constructively, often begin a long conflict that starts at the tween point but can last throughout the teen years.

Of course, what pre-teens are doing is asserting their independence. For nine years the parent has been at the center and in authority. Now a change is taking place as the child puts peers at the center of attention

and starts looking to them for cues about how to act (what is right or wrong), begins acting like peer approval is more important than parental approval, and derives primary security, identity and acceptance from peers (it is not enough that parents accept you, you need your peers to accept you as well). At this point it is the tween who changes the rules and the parents who feel insecure. A tug of war begins over who has control. Parents have taught them to make decisions and take ownership, and now that they actually do, these same parents become frightened because they know from experience that the world is a dangerous place and from their vantage point their children seem so young.

In response to this change, parents usually do one of three things:

1. Micromanage

Parents redouble their efforts at establishing their authority. They strap a GPS device to their teen's ankle, snoop through their e-mail, and demand an account for every minute, activity, and friend. Micromanagers do not listen, discuss, or debate. They make and enforce rules because rules equal SAFETY! There is only one problem with this style of response: it does not work because it does not teach or build, it only creates conflict.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger
- Ephesians 6:4a

The Apostle Paul tells parents not to exasperate and discourage their children by the way they parent so that obedience becomes difficult. The more a parent micromanages, the more devious, resentful and ill-prepared for adult life the teen becomes.

2. Permissiveness

This is the opposite of micromanagement; these parents allow their child to control the parent/child relationship. The tween screams, whines and pouts, and the parents give in because they do not want to lose their child's friendship. This usually happens because the parents

were never able to establish their primary authority role at the beginning and have abandoned it now as well.

The rod and reproof give wisdom,
But a child who gets his own way brings shame to his mother.
- Proverb 29:15

There are many reasons for permissive parenting as a response to tweens and teens: guilt from divorce, a long illness of sibling or parent, absence of one parent for some reason, leaving the responsibility for parenting to just one partner, personality types, laziness. Whatever the reason for their permissive response, these parents do their teens a disservice in not providing them with what they really need to make it safely through their adolescent years, and that is a mentoring relationship.

3. Mentor

As tweens move into their teen years and shift their center of attention to their peer groups, parents have to transition from authority figures to mentors (experienced and trusted advisors). It is not done overnight, but the exercise of shifting from one to the other becomes the working out of the relationship between parent and teen. You are seeing and accepting that they are changing; they are seeing and accepting that you are changing as well.

Mentor-parents realize that what they control is the parent/child relationship, not the child. There are still rules based on those principles (learned during the previous stage) and there is enforcement of the rules. For example, there are still rules about curfew, the consumption of alcohol or drugs, sexual behavior, etc., but the relationship is not based on policing the rules, it is based on developing a new kind of interaction (teacher/student).

Mentor-parents control the relationship in that they control the consequences of the choices that are made, not the choices that are freely made by their children. Take, for example, Adam and Eve. God

allowed them to exercise free will but retained the knowledge of their potential choices and the exercise of the consequences if they disobeyed.

Allow me to share an example of this from my own family. In our home we had the "Mazzalongo Clean-Up Day." My wife, Lise, and I had four children close in age. This meant that they were all teenagers at the same time. Each had their own room and early on I would constantly be after them to keep their rooms clean and tidy throughout the week (like Lise and I kept ours). This constant nagging to "clean-up" did not work very well and demanded so much follow through on my part that it became a sore point in our home. Obviously we needed a way to have some order in the housekeeping, but without a major battle each day. This is when the Mazzalongo Clean-Up Day was instituted.

At a family meeting it was announced that the four teens could keep their rooms in the condition that they wanted until Saturday at noon. At that time there would be a room inspection to check for made beds, clear floors, absence of dirty dishes and the emptying out of trash bins, etc. If rooms passed inspection, plans for week-end activities could proceed. However, if the room failed inspection, there were no plans and the weekend would be spent in the house. With this arrangement our teens owned the choice, and we, as the parents, owned the consequences. I hated the mess all week but was willing to live by their choice without complaint or comment. They, on their part, accepted the consequences when they had to stay home and miss an activity with friends due to dirty laundry under the bed on Inspection Day. There was peace (on this issue) and not many failed inspections.

Mentor-parents are in the process of transferring the responsibility for their teen's life over to the teen, and the teen knows it. The goal is not absolute control by the parent or absolute freedom by the child. The goal is the responsible independence of the child facilitated by the parent so that the child can move through adolescence well equipped to embrace freedom and full adulthood without trauma.

SUMMARY

Obviously, there is so much more to all of this than what we have covered here about child development, but these things are important highlights.

Just a few things to remember:

1. Each child is different, but the parenting goals for each are the same. The strategies to reach these goals will depend largely on the child, the family situation, as well as the experience and background of the parents. Thankfully, there are many resources available for those who want to improve their parenting skills.

2. Each child has a mind of his own. You can mold and temper a child's character but you cannot change it. They are not blank pages that we write on, they come with a built-in program that we have to work with.

3. Parents also have to realize that they are not the only force/influence in their child's life. Children are subject to all the same temptations and false promises of Satan that we were at their age. As human beings they will sin to a greater or lesser degree (Romans 3:23 is for them as well). A Christian parent's task, therefore, is to help them know how to deal with the sin in their lives. If God Himself had children who sinned, why do some parents think that they can do better? God allowed them (Adam and Eve) to make and own their choices, but provided the way to be redeemed.

As a parent I feel that I have succeeded if my children go to Christ in faith and obedience to receive forgiveness for their sins and renewal from their failures in life. My spiritual goal is to raise faithful children, not perfect children. Preparing for teen-parenting is a long process. The more you invest at an early age, the more you will benefit when they become teens. I think this may be what Solomon was getting at when he said,

Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he is old he will not depart from it.
- Proverb 22:6

There is no guarantee that they will choose the right path. The guarantee is that if you teach them what the right path is and they choose to follow it, they will know what it is and will not leave it once there.

Rosemond, J. (1998) *Teen-proofing*.
Kansas City, MS: Andrews McMeel Publishing.



6. Role Reversal

I am an only child and my worst experience as a son came when my mother was near the end of her life, suffering from Alzheimers and living in an extended care hospital. She had soiled herself and was crying for me to change her diaper because the floor attendant was not responding to her call for assistance. It was an awful, embarrassing moment of total role reversal. Me, the son, had to calm and change my own mother as if she was a crying baby. Thankfully the nurse came and quickly took charge of the situation saving me and my poor mother from the prospect of having to violate her dignity in this way.

This episode makes me think about my own children, now all grown, and how in many small ways the role reversal between us has already begun. For example, my sons do not play as rough with me as they used to because they know that they are stronger and faster than the "old man," and then there are the constant reminders from our daughters to

be more careful going down steep stairs or carrying heavy boxes into the garage. They are not parenting the parents yet, but we can already see that there is an element of concern for us that was not present when they were children, when they thought we could do just about anything.

This role reversal in my family is nothing new. It did not just start when I had my 65th birthday. God has been using our children to teach us things from the very beginning, it is simply that we, as parents, do not realize what is going on until we are older and have time to reflect. I think Jesus was getting at this when He said that we had to, "become like little children" (Matthew 18:3). He did not mean that we had to take on a child's immaturity, but rather that we had something to learn from our children that would enable us to better enter into the kingdom/will of God. Of course, the school where we learn something from children is called parenthood. Oh yes, we are the teachers, the authority figures, the leaders in the parent/child relationship, but this does not mean that we cannot also learn valuable lessons from the interaction we have with our children.

Gary Thomas, in the book "*Sacred Parenting*," describes how raising children "shapes our souls." In this chapter I would like to share some of the precious spiritual lessons he mentions that our children teach us as we parent them. Here, briefly, are three of these.

1. CHARACTER AND SERVICE OVER COMFORT

Raising children teaches us to value character and service over comfort. Our material inclination in raising children is to make life as easy as possible for them. We want them to have a better life than we have had, and not make the mistakes that we have made. All we want for them is to be happy.

These are good and noble objectives, however, one thing that God is trying to teach us through child raising is the value of service and character over comfort. As Christians, we know this but it seems that we forget it once we become parents. As parents, we work hard at making our children as safe and comfortable as possible, and hope that the elements of service and character will somehow develop automatically.

As a result, we become hyper-vigilante parents that advocate for our children at every point of their development. For example, if the child gets bad grades, it must be the school, environment or teacher's fault. If our little athlete does not get enough play time in the game, it is the coach's fault for being biased.

We over-value and over-protect our children to the point where they never learn from failure. Schools ban dodgeball because of the fact that there are clear winners and losers in this game and, consequently, could harm a child's self-esteem if they are on the losing side. Imagine! When every child is "special," and failure or weakness is papered over with meaningless report cards or awards for being "friendly," children become programmed with a false image of the world which will be a cause for confusion and resentment later on in their lives. Success (even if it is fake success) may gratify parents, but failure (produced by an honest assessment of ability and performance) instills wisdom in children.

In his book on parenting, Gary Thomas quotes Dr. Melody Rhode, a child psychologist, "If we protect our children from all risk, challenge, and possibility of rejection, they likely will become developmentally stunted and... immature" (p. 26). Over-protection is for our benefit, it is comforting to us but, in the end, it is a grave disservice to our children because it traps them within childhood. I am reminded of an episode from my time serving as the Dean of Students at Oklahoma Christian University where I was responsible for student discipline. A female student had failed a breathalyzer test administered by one of our Hall Directors who had checked her into her dorm after the school's curfew. She was under-age and had also violated the college's rules concerning alcohol. To my disappointment, her father threatened to sue the school for false accusation instead of helping us deal with his daughter's alcohol consumption and joining us in encouraging her to participate in the counseling that was required when such incidents occurred. This man, when confronted with the facts of his daughter's misbehavior, could not accept the failure of his "princess." Rather than work with us to help her with this problem, he blamed the school.

Raising children forces us as parents to choose what we really want in life. This is important to understand because what we want for our children is really what we want for ourselves. Gary Thomas says that his children are the mirror of his heart. If, by our actions and influence we see that what our children are striving for is only to be happy, safe, and successful, then God, through our children, has shown us how worldly we are. What profit is there if a child has good esteem because he thinks he is special, never been seriously injured, polite, popular, or successful but unaware that his soul is in danger and the world is a fallen place in need of a Redeemer? I suppose what I am trying to get across here is that you will see how important spiritual things are to you by the place these things take in your child's character and soul. There are exceptions, of course, but this is the rule.

God reveals the depth of our commitment to Christ by the intensity of His presence in the life of our children. And we will see His presence in them if they:

- learn the truth about failure and how to deal with it their own lives.
- are trained to place service over comfort in their families and society.
- are allowed to suffer the normal setbacks that happen to everyone in this life.

Parents do not want their children to struggle, but in allowing them to do so we permit God to work out the character of Christ in their souls. This is hard for us as parents, but eventually brings joy to our children.

2. HOW TO HANDLE ANGER

A little story about anger: A preacher decided to preach a sermon on anger. When he offered the invitation at the end of the lesson, 19 people came forward for prayer, and every one of them was the mother or father of small children.

I never realized I had a bad temper until I became the father of four young children. Parenting brings out all kinds of emotions in us, especially anger, and God uses these moments to teach us how to deal with this explosive and potentially destructive emotion. Here are some of the situations that provoke parental anger:

- The terrible twos or tween stage.
- Breathtaking ingratitude.
- Disobedience and defiance.
- Dangerous behavior and foolish conduct.

In general, men tend to get angry because of emotional frustration. Men are not always well suited to deal with the variety and subtleties of emotions stirred up by parenting, especially parenting small children. Many times, it comes out as anger, not just towards the children but a shot-gun type of anger that bruises everyone in the family. Women, on the other hand, are more adept at handling complex emotions and tend to express their frustration as a type of woundedness. For example, in the place of raw anger some will say, "After all I have done, this is how you treat me?" This type of reaction is not evident as anger but it gets the job done emotionally.

God did not give us children simply to show us how easily we can become angry, but He does use this natural consequence of parenting to mature us spiritually. Gary Thomas says, "Learning to deal with anger [...] is graduate level Christianity. Our children constitute our homework, our mixed emotions become our textbook, and the character that results will reveal our final grade" (pg. 117).

DEALING WITH PARENTAL ANGER

Our goal as parents is not to eliminate anger but rather to learn how to handle anger without falling into sin. Anger by itself is not sin, it is simply an emotion. Anger can be righteous and motivational when it is a reaction to sin, waste or injustice of some kind in the world or ourselves. It is righteous and thus correct when it moves us to action in seeking

God's righteousness. For example, Moses' reaction when the people sinned with the golden calf (Exodus 32:19-21) or Jesus, in righteous indignation, cleansing the temple (Matthew 21:12-17).

Anger, however, is sinful when it is an expression of annoyance, inconvenience, wounded pride, loss of control or the desire to impose one's will, etc. For example, King Saul becoming angry because the people were praising David more than himself (I Samuel 18:8), or the elder brother angry with his father in the parable of the Prodigal Son because he resented his younger brother's return and restoration (Luke 15:11-32). The same emotion was being expressed in every one of these stories from Moses to the older brother, but made right or wrong by the cause and direction of that anger.

In parenting children, we have to first acknowledge and accept that this experience will provoke us to strong emotion, but thankfully God will help us through this process and guide us to spiritual maturity when it comes to anger. In the meantime, here are four ways to manage anger so that it does not become sinful:

1. Go Slow - James 1:19

- James tells us that we must be, "slow to anger."
- Parents need to be cautious when using any type of strong emotion with children, especially anger.
- Anger to point out and remove sinful, foolish and dangerous behavior can have its proper use.
- Anger to simply express annoyance or bully our way into accomplishing our will is counterproductive for parenting and sinful before God (James 1:20).

2. Have a Time Limit - Ephesians 4:26

- Paul says, "Do not sin by letting anger control you. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry."

- This is not a reference to actual time in minutes or hours, but rather a warning to keep anger in perspective.
- "The sun go down" is a metaphor suggesting that our anger should have its season, its time and not more lest it control us.
- Sometimes we have a right to be angry, but being angry all the time is not right.
- You cannot avoid being angry at times, but you can contain it to its proper season and thus escape the bitterness and resentment that prolonged anger can produce.

3. Control the Anger - I Corinthians 13:5

- "Love is not irritable (easily angered)."
- Paul says that those who aspire to be elders must not be "quick-tempered" (Titus 1:7).
- We need to govern our anger with reason, maturity and patient wisdom.
- Controlled anger is like a surge of energy that moves us to get things done, said, finished or started.
- Uncontrolled anger, on the other hand, is like a bomb going off that hurts everyone in the area.

4. Be Honest About Your Own Failures - Matthew 7:5

- Jesus said, "Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye."
- Some parents are easily provoked and give vent to their anger caused by their children, but rarely get worked up over their own failings.

Anger becomes a problem when we only use it to chastise or motivate our children, but not ourselves. If we hate the sin and foolishness in our

own hearts first, we will grow in the ability to practice slow, controlled, righteous anger with others, especially our children.

Of course, the response we ultimately want to cultivate is love, not anger. When the immaturity or sin of our children does provoke anger, God can use those moments to build into our character the highest form of Christian maturity. I again quote Gary Thomas where he says, "Just as God's response to His children reveals His character, so parenting reveals our character." God quickly teaches us the limits of our own patience through our children and invites us to be more perfectly remade into His image through the discipline required in parenting.

3. WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Billy Joel, the musician and singer, once said, "You cannot feel at home in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. You cannot get hugged by the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and you cannot have children with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I want what everybody else wants: to love and be loved and to have a family." Despite his fame and fortune, Billy Joel has managed to maintain his focus on what is truly important.

There are two things that are sure in this life:

1. We will all die. This includes people, elements in creation, as well as human institutions like companies and governments.
2. We will be forgotten. How many know the name of their great-great-great-grandfather's wife, or who won the gold medal for swimming 50 years ago? Except for the very famous, most are quickly forgotten.

And yet, despite the fact that we know this to be true, why is it that we invest so heavily into things that will surely pass away? For example, we live like there will be no death, or we build and work and save as if all of this activity will actually mean something in 100 years from now. Thankfully, through our children, God connects us to the reality of passing time. We once were children and now are parents with children who will soon become grandparents welcoming our children's children. Through these experiences we come to know that time really does pass

and with it our lives will pass as well. This sobering thought enables us to clearly fix our soul's attention on what truly matters and what is worth passing on to our children while there is still time.

Through the parenting experience, therefore, God reveals to us that the only thing that lasts beyond this life and this world is faith. The only intergenerational gift to pass on to our children that will endure beyond time as we know it is not wealth or power but the faith we instill in them that they will be able to pass on to their children's children as well. We often skip over those long boring passages in the Bible that simply list the names of the generations of the Jewish people (Genesis 5; I Chronicles 1-9; Matthew 1; Luke 3). For us, these are simply long lists of names that are difficult to pronounce, but in reality they are a roll call of the faithful, not the famous. These people lived and died like everyone else with nothing noted about them in most cases except that they passed on their name and faith to the next generation.

The insight into our own mortality that we gain from seeing our children being born and growing into maturity moves us to search for what is truly significant, what is valuable and what really matters. Again, to quote Gary Thomas, "Sacred parenting calls us to focus our brief lives on what will create the most impact for future generations. We will soon be forgotten on earth but remembered in heaven."

SUMMARY

My mother had a hard life. She was single and pregnant with me when, unlike in today's society, this was a great shame and hardship (1947). She was poor, isolated from her family and had little formal training. She did not have the means to provide me with a good education, always had to work and when she died, left me with no inheritance. However, against all odds she chose to have me, and for this one decision I will be eternally grateful to her. She enabled me to have a life, and now it is my turn to pass something on to my children. In addition to a life and a name, Lise and I have given our children the one thing that will outlive us and them: faith in Jesus Christ.

My great hope and constant prayer is that when the Lord comes there will be a sacred family here on earth related to us still faithfully calling on His name.

Thomas, G. (2004) *Sacred Parenting: How Raising Children Shapes Our Souls*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

7. Family Mobile



SEVEN WAYS TO LOOK AT THE CHRISTIAN HOME

When I talk about Family Mobile, I am not talking about mobility as in a mobile home, or portability. I am talking about an art form as developed by people such as Alexander Calder, the American sculptor and artist who was credited with introducing the "mobile" as an artistic medium in the early 20th century. Originally trained as an engineer, Calder studied art in New York and later settled in Paris. He returned to the U.S. and worked primarily as a sculptor and produced many large outdoor pieces (one for the World's Fair in Montreal's Expo '67 entitled *Man*). What he was best known for, however, were his mobile creations which were made with various materials attached together with wires and hung to display, usually moved by the wind. His mobiles had beauty, balance, form and motion. Anyone could make them with an unending number of materials and styles, but they were always recognizable as mobiles.

In the book entitled *What is a Family?* author Edith Schaeffer says that families are very much like these mobiles: connected yet different; counterbalanced so that to remove one element would upset the others; displaying a separate yet beautiful unit as a whole; and produced in endless varieties but always recognizable as a family.

In this chapter, therefore, we will look at the family as a living mobile and examine the different elements that can create beauty, balance, and form in the sacred family. Here are some of the pieces you might want to use if you were creating your own "Sacred Family Mobile."

ELEMENTS IN THE SACRED FAMILY MOBILE

1. A Balanced Environment

The family is God's design for the producing and maturing of human beings and, like the creation itself, it needs to be balanced. For example, many years ago the Communist Chinese government began a program to kill off sparrows because they felt that these birds were eating too much of the rice crop. When they devastated the sparrow population in one area, the insects that had been eaten by these birds grew and totally devoured the rice anyways. This experience taught the government that creating a man-made unbalance in nature had consequences.

In the same way, God created balance in the family so it would be fruitful in honoring Him and enjoy His blessings. When we tamper with His balance in the family environment there are always negative results. The particular balance that God created in the family was a sense of oneness despite the gender and emotional differences between the partners in marriage. For example, He made woman to be beautiful and desirable to man and vice versa. That opposite genders attract is something God created in order to produce balance and oneness in their marital relationship.

After the fall of man through sin, God instituted roles within marriage in order to mitigate man's tendency towards sin. This order would serve to maintain the oneness and balance that would now be continually challenged by human weakness and sinfulness.

The balanced environment consists of one man and one woman committed to a lifetime relationship in a legal marriage. This is the godly standard as opposed to two men, or two women; or purposefully single parents; or one man and several women; or a man and woman living

together without the commitment of a legal marriage. These arrangements are possible and becoming quite acceptable in our society but do not resemble the balanced environment originally conceived for marriage by God (Genesis 2:24).

This balanced environment also contains certain roles for men and women within marriage. Men as spiritual and moral leaders as well as protectors of their families. Women willingly offering their submission to their husbands and charged with the formation of the home and family.

Many debate or reject these roles in light of today's ideas about male and female roles, but what cannot be rejected or debated is that this is what the Bible describes as the roles of men and women in marriage. God has assigned these so that there can be peace and harmony within marriage and families. Considering the high rate of divorce among those who reject these "traditional" roles, we can assume that God has given us the best way to insure happy and peaceful relationships within marriage.

God's balanced environment also requires a commitment from both partners to the priority of family. Hillary Clinton (former U.S. Secretary of State) is fond of saying, "It takes a village to raise a child" and I think in a sense that she is correct that everyone should feel a responsibility for the well-being and discipline of a child. However, in the biblical scheme of things, the parents have the first and foremost responsibility for their children, and exercise this with the help of the village, not the other way around.

In today's society it seems that parents have given over their parenting duties to the village and bailed out. People get married, have children, and think that the home and children will care for themselves while they pursue careers, hobbies and other interests. There are many couples who do not realize that marriage makes your partner the priority over every other person in the world, and children make your home and family a priority over every other organization, activity or pursuit in your life. When both partners are committed first and foremost to one another and their family, they have then created the safe structure

necessary to build a real "home" no matter what kind of house or apartment they live in.

The first element in our sacred family mobile, therefore, is a balanced environment created by a focused commitment to build a home and family according to God's design, not what the present social fad for family happens to be.

Another element in the family mobile...

2. A Sense of Home

Now, "home" is more than just a place to sleep or stay warm. Home is where your memories live, it is where you are always welcome and the place you care for those you love. The point I want to stress about home, however, is that somebody needs to create the home, it does not just happen by itself. For example, our house has a stairway leading from the dining room to the bedrooms upstairs and there is a wall on one side of that stairwell. My niece, who is an interior designer, would have collected many pieces of art and decoration to make that wall colorful and pleasing to the eye. In her opinion this would help decorate our house. Instead, that wall is covered with family pictures from different periods (the wedding pictures of our four children, graduation photos from the military and college, a great picture of our son, William, surfing, etc.). All of these images are housed in mismatched frames with various colors that don't get high marks for decoration but say that this house is a home to this family. Every one of those photos captures something we as a family did together. They describe the culmination of hard work, cooperation, discipline and moments of joy that were shared at some time or another in the past. Although none of the things in the pictures happened in the house we now live in where the pictures are hung, the family that meets there is home to one another.

In my lifetime I have moved over 40 times (hard to believe, but true), so no single house represents home to me or to our family. However, the shared experiences that Lise and I have had with our children and the things we have purposefully done to cultivate our sense of family, these are home to us wherever we live.

3. A Place for Creativity

We are made in the image of a creative Divine Being. It is no wonder then that humans are creative. For this reason, the family should be a place where creativity is nurtured and given an opportunity to be expressed. Every member should be encouraged to act upon constructive creative impulses, even if the first attempts may be amateurish and limited.

Creativity is not only about music or art, but satisfying one's curiosity and sense of exploration. For example, I remember as a little boy I wanted to build my own hockey game. My mother could have said, "too complicated" or, "we cannot get all the springs and levers needed to work the players, etc." Instead, she allowed me to find wood and glue to stick on the plastic hockey figures as well as markers and grey paint for the ice. In the end the final product was just a flat piece of wood with plastic figures glued on and grey paint unevenly applied. My creation did not really function as a playable hockey game, but for two days I remember the creative rush of cutting, painting and putting together in material form what had only been an idea in my mind.

Some may think it requires money or personal artistic abilities to provide a home that encourages creativity. Of course, this can be helpful, but what is needed most of all is the permission to allow the creative impulse to be born and expressed freely without all the soul-killing reasons why something will not work or why an idea is impractical. There is plenty of time to evaluate things and analyze ideas without suffocating the creative impulses given to us by God as a gift.

One of the most valuable features of the sacred family is its ability to produce ideas that ultimately honor God and bless others with beauty and service.

4. A Training Ground for Relationships

Someone said to Lise when we were first married that we should have our children close together so that they would all be friends. We had four kids in five years, and it seems that all they did was fight for the first 15 of these years. One unfortunate example of this was when our

eldest son, Paul, tied his younger sister to a pole in the basement (they were playing cowboys and Indians), turned out the lights and left her there in the dark with the basement door closed. Needless to say Lise was not amused when she came to Julia's rescue after hearing her cries. Julia, however, was the first to jump in and defend her brother when bigger boys were trying to hurt and bully him.

A family is a training center for all kinds of relationships. It is where we first learn to say, "I am sorry; Congratulations; Happy Birthday; Let's surprise Dad; I will lend you this if you share that." A sacred family is also the place where children learn that other people are not machines or higher forms of monkeys, but are actually made in the image of God, and this is why we treat them the way we do. Family is where we teach and learn that the solution to a difference of opinion, an insult, selfishness, a lie, or a fight is not leaving home to find another family.

Training within families about relationships should teach us about forgiveness, perseverance, discussion, compromise, and patience. As far as the mobile illustration goes, training in relationships is the wire that holds all of the elements together.

Today, Paul and Julia talk on the phone several times a week and each considers their three siblings their best friends.

5. A Center for Truth

In the province of Quebec where Lise and I come from, the government has recently implemented a religion and ethics course in elementary and high school that promotes the idea that every religion is basically the same. Even private schools must teach this program. Of course, if a child is taught that every religion is the same, then no one religion is better than the other. When it comes to religion, the government has imposed the doctrine of Universalism or Pluralism (i.e. all roads lead to heaven) on all of the schools.

This teaching flies in the face of Christianity's main doctrine that says, "There is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). There was a time when

schools and the community at large could be counted on to support and confirm the moral values and broad teachings of the Christian home, but this is not true anymore. The responsibility for teaching about God, Christian morality and salvation in Christ has always been the responsibility of the home with the help of the church (II Timothy 3:15). Today, however, we are in danger of losing the present generation because they receive little to no support for their faith in society. The home, therefore, has to be the place where ideas are tested in the light of God's word, and it needs to become the center for truth where godless philosophies and false religions can be exposed, talked about, and debated. It must especially be the place where one can see the truth being spoken and acted out by parents, children, and the extended family.

Home and family should be synonymous with prayer-time, Bible reading, honorable behavior, church attendance, reconciliation, renewal and spiritual living. When someone goes home, they need to know that the people there will speak the truth in love to them at all times about all things.

6. A Museum of Memories

The Christian home serves as a museum that exhibits the shared memories of the family that lives there. Before, I spoke of the pictures that were on the wall, each capturing a special moment in our children's lives. A home is a museum in the sense that it houses treasured memories in pictures, souvenirs, artwork, trophies, and awards, each containing the essence of a special time or place.

One of the favorite pastimes for our children when they are all together is to go through our old photo albums. They have seen these many times, but our home is the place where the albums are kept and it is a special ritual to bundle up on the couch and go over the family photos together in order to reminisce over their childhood and teen years while they still lived at home. This is one of the disadvantages of digital photography where you store everything on a computer. Looking at digital images on your camera does not have the same feel or emotion as pouring over old photos in a well-worn photo album.

The point I want to make about the home as a museum of memories is that just like a regular museum, the home as a museum needs a curator. Those pictures are there because someone remembered to bring the camera to record special events and fun moments. In our family it was Lise who painstakingly categorized the pictures and created the albums the children love so much.

Special memories have to be preserved and this requires forethought and some work, but the rewards are quite wonderful. I would add that special memories and traditions can and should be created. For example, family dinners and reunions at special times done when children were at home should be reestablished in their own homes when they begin their families. Many families have all kinds of wonderful experiences and activities, but unless they are documented or memorialized somehow, they fade from view and their joy is not passed on to future generations.

The home as a museum for memories allows the family to have a sense of continuity and history about itself. In our house almost every piece of art, decoration and knick-knack has meaning and memory of some kind, it is not there simply as a decoration. In this way our home embodies the history and spirit of our family wherever we live.

7. A Shelter from the Storm

When I read the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, I am always struck by the attitude of the father in this story. The younger son does go away with his share of the inheritance. He does waste it on immoral living. He does bring shame on himself and his family, and when he returns, he does so with nothing left except an apology. But what does the father do? Accept him back with conditions? Review all of his mistakes? Tell him, "I told you so"? No, he hugs the boy and brings him back home. Oh, I am sure the son had bad memories and there were some consequences because of his bad choices, but on that night what was needed was the safety, assurance and acceptance of home.

Above all else, home needs to be a sure refuge, a place where you can go to find comfort, forgiveness and encouragement from the raging storms

of failure, rejection and other trials of life. The Prodigal Son did not think of going to his uncle's house when he came to his senses, he wanted to go home.

Our home should be a preview of what heaven is like because the Bible refers to it as our ultimate home (II Corinthians 5:8). In it we can retreat to a place where Jesus is the Lord and those who enter there are received as He has received us: with mercy, kindness, love, and acceptance. They say you can never go home again, but for the sacred family, home is where you are always welcome.

SUMMARY

Edith Shaeffer (wife of Christian philosopher, Francis Shaeffer) said in her book, *What is a Family?*, which is the basis for this chapter, "Family is a mobile blown by the gentle breeze of the Holy Spirit." And in the mobile that God directs and animates are the various and beautiful pieces that we described as:

- A balanced environment.
- A sense of home.
- A place for creativity.
- A training ground for relationships.
- A center for truth.
- A museum of memories.
- A shelter from the storm.

I pray that your sacred families can be all of these things and more as Christ dwells in your hearts and in your homes.

Schaeffer, E. (1975) *What is a Family?* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company.

Small Group Exercise

For those who are using this book or the video version as a resource for a small group, this added section contains an exercise that can stimulate discussion.

Listed below are questions that have been submitted to me when this series was presented in person. Print one or two of these questions on separate 3x5 cards. You should end up with several cards, each with different questions taken from the list (make up your own questions if they are not found on the list).

Next, divide your group into smaller discussion groups (five people max). Give each small group a card and instruct them to discuss and write down on the cards the various answers and solutions that they have come up with in response to the questions on their cards.

Finish with feedback from each small group to all in attendance on how they answered the questions.

Assign someone to collect the finished cards and type up all the questions and answers for general distribution at the next gathering.

PARENTING QUESTIONS

- When and how should we tell small children about death (family member, friend, etc.)?
- Children who grow up in the church tend to be bored and lukewarm about church, praying, singing, etc. Do you make

them "go through the motions" (i.e. close eyes, sing songs, etc.)? Does that make them legalists, keeping in mind how discouraging it is for visitors, especially other kid/teen visitors?

- How do you deal with this situation in sports: Your kids are mad about hockey, soccer, and they are on traveling teams that are expected to be at weekend (including Sunday) games. You feel the pressure of expectations from coaches and other parents, contrary to your own habits and convictions. What can parents do to balance these?
- Is it ok to say, "Wait until your father gets home" when it involves disciplinary issues?
- Is it possible to overdo Bible emphasis, church, religion and prayer in the home?
- What do I do when my child categorically refuses to do something (piano lessons, a chore, etc.)?
- We cannot get our youngest son (6 years) to eat vegetables. We have tried everything. Any ideas?
- How can I be sure my child is ready for baptism?
- How do you make the teachings about God attractive and not a burden to teens?
- My child draws very dark images (ghosts, people getting cut up, etc.). He says it is cool. Should I be concerned?
- My children complain that church is boring and say they do not want to go. What should I do?
- What is an average age to shift to the mentor-parent stage? What is too early?
- How can you protect children from the world?

- Our two children (12 years/10 years) always fight. How do we help them get along better?
- How do you encourage a teenager to serve the Lord when their way of life is not going in that direction?
- Our child is 3 1/2 years old and refuses to wear underwear, preferring to stay in diapers. How do we toilet train him if he refuses?
- Our child asked for a pet and promised to care for it. After several months this has become our responsibility because he neglects to do it. How do we get him to take charge of this pet once again?
- Does "time-out" work with teenagers?
- Our 12-year-old daughter wants to date a 14-year-old boy she has a crush on. How do we handle the situation without having her rebel against us?
- How do we handle children who enjoy community sports and a society that does not consider worship/Bible study when schedules are set out?
- How do you answer a teenager who does not want to attend Bible study with you?
- How do you handle the desire to be over-protective of your children as an over-reaction stemming from rebelliousness in your own youth and/or the weaknesses you see in their character that resembles your own?
- How do you respond to the statement, "Kids need to be free to explore and make their own mistakes/decisions" versus parental instruction?

- How do you balance maintaining standards of moral behavior with you children in the midst of an unsaved family without being offensive?
- How do I handle the "silent treatment" from my child?
- I cannot stand when our kids are fighting (arguing) and it happens more and more. What can I do to reduce and change this behavior?
- How do you get your children to listen and do what is asked of them, yet will listen to others and follow what they ask?
- Our 10-year-old daughter wants to be baptized. Should we wait or let her do it now?
- When is a right time for them to start dating? Age? Maturity?
- How much of the world do we let in?
- What do you do if you suspect your child is using tobacco/drugs/alcohol?
- At what age should we allow our child to have a phone/computer?
- When is the best time to talk to your child about sex?
- How do we deal with questions about masturbation?
- How much information should we give our daughters about having a "period"? Should boys be informed about this?



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The goal of this mission work is to spread the gospel to the greatest number of people using the latest technology available. For the first time in history, it is becoming possible to preach the gospel to the entire world at once. BibleTalk.tv is an effort to preach the gospel to all nations every day until Jesus returns.

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