



RESTORING *THE* CHRISTIAN FAMILY



A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO LOVE, MARRIAGE,
and PARENTING IN A CHANGING WORLD

JOHN LOREN & PAULA
SANDFORD



RESTORING
THE
CHRISTIAN
FAMILY



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*This book is lovingly dedicated to our
children: Loren, Ami, Mark, John, Timothy,
and Andrea, and their spouses.*

And our grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



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FOREWORD

PEOPLE WHO PIONEER ARE THREATENING TO THOSE OF US WHO resist change. Like prophets, they often have to make their way across the wilderness alone, dodging stones from friend and foe alike. Yet, what the majority of us, sitting back home in our theological rocking chairs, may describe as the “fringe” may indeed be the cutting edge instead.

That’s where I classify John and Paula Sandford—on the cutting edge. Perhaps it’s the Indian blood. More probably, it’s the prodding of the Holy Spirit that keeps thrusting them out, beyond the routine, into the exciting sphere of fresh revelation.

Pioneers look for new worlds to conquer, new heights to ascend, new depths to plunge. Spiritual pioneers do all this, plus they believe that in these places one can find a fresh revelation from God. Realizing the sacrifice of venturing beyond the ordinary, they raise the banner and march forward—determined to prepare the land for those who will one day follow.

The Sandfords did that in their first book, *The Elijah Task*. Some of my theological friends (the rocking-chair variety) had problems with that book. They could not accept the fact that God was reestablishing the office of prophet in the contemporary church. Their response went all the way from a shaking of the head with a solemn “tsk, tsk” to a fist-slamming anger that categorized the book as heresy.

But the Sandfords were right. Prophets are emerging, wandering in from the wilderness, and speaking forth the word of God as clearly as Elijah, Amos, and John the Baptist did. *The Elijah Task*, prophetic itself, has helped prepare the way for these modern prophets.

Now John and Paula have reappeared, this time with a book on the Christian family. In it they fulfill, again, the prophetic role. This book, like *The Elijah Task*, will make some angry and cause others to think. And for some, it will be the salvation of their homes. It is far beyond the ordinary leftovers served up by most who write in the area of the family. Here the Sandfords are once again pioneering, exploring new territory, daring to suggest that our concepts of God are much too small.

True prophets, they are far ahead of most of us. But sheep, as you know, are valley-loving creatures. In fact, if left alone, sheep will remain in muddy pens the rest of their lives. It's only when some daring shepherd scales the peak and begins to play his flute that the sheep follow.

So it is with the Sandfords. They have gone ahead. Now, in these pages, they are calling back, and with the mellow refrain of the music of the Spirit, they are beckoning the rest of us to "come on up."

—THE LATE JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

PREFACE



Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

—MALACHI 4:5–6

GOD INTENDS TO RESTORE THE FAMILY, THE CENTRAL UNIT through which He will raise His sons. The Lord will not fail (Isa. 42:4).

When we use the word *restore*, we do not mean to patch up what once was good and failed to function. Biblically, *restoration* means nothing short of full death to self with Christ on the cross and reformation into a new heart and mind and style of life (Gal. 2:20). Death and resurrection—not teaching of principles or correcting behavior—are the essence of restoration. Christian restoration is therefore always totally evangelical, always a more complete conversion. It is a continuing process of dying daily to our striving by receiving His gift.

Though we may lay out standards of behavior, describe roles for family members, and exhort others to obedience, we know it all leads to that confession of hopelessness in our flesh by which, and only by which, the hope of the Spirit in us can live. We are not soul builders. Neither is the family, though the soul is formed in it. Only Christ is the chief cornerstone, and we are *being built* into a lively house by Him as we submit to His government (1 Pet. 2:5). We are not laying down guidelines by which the family may restore itself. Rather, we are laying down understandings by which our instances of repentance may be more full, continuous, and joyous, that our redemption may be more complete. In no other way can we be restored.

Even though He taught, our Lord did not come to be a teacher. He did not come to be an example, though He was one. He did not come to be a healer,

though He healed. He came to die and be raised. We are to do the same: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24). Therefore, the purpose of this book is to demonstrate the need for individual death and resurrection and the consequent release of the Holy Spirit that will restore the Christian family.

PART I

1



THE “DEMON” THAT RISES WITH US

Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it.

—PROVERBS 22:6

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IN CHRISTIANITY TODAY IS THE restoration of the family. Wherever a Christian goes, he hears speakers say, “If we do not make it in the home, we aren’t going to make it anywhere. If we don’t live in Christian love in the family, our Christianity will be meaningless.” We believe that. To that end we write.

A destructive way of thinking has encroached upon Western minds. It is commonly called materialism. Usually people think materialism refers only to “things.” We hear sermons about having too many cars and houses, TVs and boats. But possessions mean little, one way or the other. Materialism is far more vitiating than that.

Materialism is a way of looking at life, a *weltanschauung*. A *weltanschauung* is more than a philosophy; it is a way of seeing that virulently controls and determines our thinking. It’s a process that prescribes what we shall see, experience, and value in the “reality” that surrounds us. Materialism as a *weltanschauung* is an apprehension of life that accords reality solely to that which the five senses or test tubes can detect. Only what one can see, touch, hear, smell, or taste is real or practical. Accordingly, we say, “No matter,” or “It doesn’t matter,” or “It didn’t materialize.” To us that means it wasn’t real; it did not become what we recognize and value—“matter.”

Such thinking omits nearly everything that Christians value. Things such as love are thereby relegated to a degree of lesser reality—love can't be seen; we can't hear it; no one can feel it materially; we can't taste it or smell it. Yet Christians know that without love nothing “matters.” Because of the materialistic mind-set, men in the world may give lip service to hope, desire, loyalty, honesty, truth, philosophy, principles, ideals, and faith, while in actuality they trust only the things that can be seen and managed—things that lead to success in the world's terms. Consequently, Christian belief seems to the worldly to be a departure from the sensibility of reality rather than being the true apprehension of reality it actually is. The end result of materialism has been the destruction of our society's understanding of what it is to have a spirit and a soul. Spiritual development is God's sole intent for creating the family. The family's greatest and first enemy, Satan's first tool in the destruction of the family, is materialism, a carefully created, mesmeric mind-set that subtly instructs families in how to view life. The born-again must sift all their thinking according to the Word. Throughout this book we will be shaking out the rotten fruit of materialism from the tree of family living.

One might ask, “Why did God create families in the first place? Why did He create the earth? Why did He create people?” He had already created angels, but in Jesus, God planned to bring to birth the first of a new order of sons—fully spiritual, fully human. He could have created some other sort of beings programmed to give back to Him love and worship—everything He desired—but that's just the point; they would have been programmed.

To have sons, God had to create an environment in which they could exercise free will. There is no other way for them to mature. Since He is the Father God who would have sons become like Him, He had to create fathers who would have sons.

God is interested in the spirit and soul of each individual in the family. It is within family relationships that He is building character and personality. The kind of character development that happens in the soul is His primary interest and purpose.

People ask, “Why does evil exist?” We cannot answer that question fully, but we do see that by putting children in sinful families, inside a broken people, God is able to raise sons who will have to deal with problems. Through their struggles, the sons of God will become alert and strong. If nothing else, our sinfulness will smash our pride, and this is a lesson worth

everything in human experience. Therefore, the title for this chapter is “The ‘Demon’ That Rises With Us.”

The first and basic scripture for child raising is this: “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). And in the New Testament we read: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:1–4).

The carnal flesh has an independent evil life of its own. Sometimes when we look at the way our children behave, we are certain of this. At other times, when we look at a child asleep, we think, “My, such an angel. How could I have thought the inner self has an evil life?” Yet the scripture is unequivocal: “You have not heard, you have not known. Even from long ago your ear has not been open, because I knew that you would deal very treacherously; and you have been called a rebel from birth” (Isa. 48:8). All have sinned. From the moment of our children’s conception, our propensity toward corruption becomes theirs—genetically, environmentally, behaviorally, and scripturally. In every way, from the beginning, our sin affects our children’s lives!

To understand how we develop in the family, we will begin with a closer look at Proverbs 22:6. The Hebrew reads, literally, “Train up a child according to the way of him, and when he is old, he will not depart from him.” To whom does the word *him* refer? Many assume it refers to God. Certainly, children should be taught to follow God, but that is not what this proverb means. The proverbs are sayings that were popular among the Hebrew people. Each was unto itself, without context. Therefore, the word *him* must refer to something within the proverb itself. In this verse, the only antecedent for *him* is the word *child*. So the verse is saying, “Train up a child according to the way of the child (that is, the child’s own natural bent)...” Look into his heart. Find out who he is. Teach him to be himself.

Each person grows from deep inside according to a blueprint and timetable that our inner being is set to follow. We have our own unique plan, our own peculiar timetable. Interestingly, even for those who do not know Christ or ascribe to the teachings of the Bible, secular worldviews do not always obscure the light of God’s eternal truths.

INFANCY

In infancy, a child learns, among all his specific achievements, one fundamental, pervading lesson—the capacity to hold himself open to others, to receive and give affection. This lesson is also referred to by some as “basic trust.” As unconditional love goes without regard to any other’s behavior, so basic trust is the specific ability to hold the heart open to the very people who might hurt you. It is the capacity to risk sustained heart-to-heart involvement with imperfect people and still believe that God’s love will touch you through them, just as David learned: “You made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast” (Ps. 22:9, NIV). If mankind were trustworthy, holding the heart open would be easy. Basic trust is an inner strength and resilience necessary to human relations. Since we must remain vulnerable and interact with others who can and will fail us or hurt us, basic trust is the essential building block of character, without which nothing consequential can be securely founded.

In the first six years of his life a child learns more than he will learn in all his remaining years, even if he earns several degrees. That learning is more intense in his first year than in all the rest. “Train up a child in the way he should go” does not mean that one begins to train the child’s mind when he is six. Training begins when the child enters the womb, continues when he is born, and accelerates and intensifies as he first experiences life in the world. It is in those very first years that his character and personality are formed. Life itself, not the classroom, is the teaching ground. If we would understand the Christian family and its uniqueness, we need to see clearly that those two primal parts of the soul—character and personality—are formed in the first six years. All subsequent learning is simply framing and embellishment upon that foundation. Understanding this fact may effect changes in our entire approach to child raising.

We tend to think that what happened in the past belongs only to the past. “So, let’s forget about it. It isn’t important now. It can’t affect us.” But that is not true. What happened in our first year can affect us all our lives. As Christians we are not so much interested in what happened in our first moments of existence as we are in how we reacted in our spirits, and what kind of automatic patterns of response we have built into our character.

If a child of two were to fall and break a leg, which didn’t mend well because the bone was not set properly, the child might limp the rest of his

life. We can understand that easily because we can see the malformation on the X-ray. Somehow we have failed to think as concretely about the soul. A familiar proverb says simply, “As the twig is bent, so the tree is inclined.” Assuredly, not to receive affection, to lose a father or mother, not to be nursed, or to be toilet trained too soon are injuries as real as breaking a leg. These are injuries to the soul. Reactions to emotional wounds are as real and vivid as reactions to broken legs, which are often only temporary, whereas people sometimes limp emotionally throughout their lives from sinful reactions to events in the very first moments of life! Moreover, when a particularly damaging event occurs and is repeated a number of times, the character may become structured to habitually respond in automatic, defensive, or hurtfully aggressive ways.

A baby lives by primal senses in his spirit. He feels the presence of people and their absence. He is affected by all that happened in the emotional and psychological experiences of the parents during his life in the womb, by coming through the shock of being drawn out of a warm womb into the noise and light and cutting and unfamiliar grasping of strange hands. A sleeping baby breathes many little sighs because he has been wounded and needs to be held and loved and comforted. This is the first thing a Christian family needs to understand, that much physical affection brings needful healing to a child. He cannot survive emotionally without physical embraces. He lives by those gentle touches that call forth and train his spirit to reach out to receive and to give back love and affection.

In the first few weeks and months of his life, the capacity to trust is largely formed. The soul, a living structure of character through which the spirit expresses life, from that time forward either enables or prevents the spirit to embrace another through the body.

Medical science has learned that if a baby is born through cesarean section, the doctors and nurses need to rub the muscles in his arms and legs. They know the baby needs the pushing of the mother’s muscles against his body, and if he does not experience this, his own muscles will not be fully activated.¹ In the same way, we are born with the capacity in our spirits to reach out through our bodies to embrace another, to be enfolded, to give and take. But that power is not fully awakened unless the baby receives the warmth of touching and holding in the first year. Call that faculty “basic trust,” because basic trust is the ability to open the heart and mind to give and receive. And that is the fundamental capacity to be human. Our

ignorance as parents, our divorces and broken homes, have raised an increasingly inhuman, incapable generation.

As our spirits enter into relationships with the spirits of others, our characters and personalities are formed. If a person receives continual warmth of affection, ways for the spirit to continue such joyous embraces are formed in the soul. But neglect and abuse either fail to form the structure by which such interchanges can happen or tempt children to build crippled structures of response.

Without nurture, infants do not acquire capacities to relate humanly. These abilities have to be built into us over a long period of time. The human baby remains helpless longer than any other species. Unfortunately, parents have too often seemed to think of babies as seeds in the wild, as though infants, untended and untouched, would grow like trees in a forest. A calf does not require a cow to learn to moo, a kitten does not require a cat to meow, and a puppy does not need to bark. But a human infant cannot learn to talk unless talked to. In similar fashion, a human cannot acquire many of the sensitivities and skills of human interaction without human nature. The quality of nurture greatly determines what kind of character and personality will be formed. A human being has to be walked, talked to, and loved in order to do those things in return.

In the first six years, we are called upon to learn how to walk, how to talk, how to eat, how to handle our emotions, how to control our bladders, how to control what we say, along with all the basic motor and human skills, and we learn those things only as they are imparted to us by other human beings. How important that is! “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us” (1 John 4:10). That is true psychologically as well, for if we do not first receive love, we cannot give it.

We Christians have too long let it be thought that a mother could give birth to her baby and then rush out to get a job. Almost totally unaware that her own physical presence is absolutely vital, she hires a babysitter or puts the child in a nursery. She thinks the baby doesn't yet have a mind, so it could not matter. Trained in this materialistic culture, she is too often unaware that her baby has a spirit that can sense her presence or absence. Consequently, the baby is not given her presence in those first six months when her nearness is so critically important. That breeds future parents who are incapable of human warmth, who raise others yet more incapable, who

raise others, and so humanity spirals downward. Only the mercy of the Lord stops the destruction of humanity.

Because of the influence of our materialistic culture, most fathers are unaware of the role they were created to fulfill in the lives of their children. Ignorant of the life of the spirit and formation of the soul, they fail to appreciate that all of their actions and attitudes affect the character formation of their children. A boy learns what it is to be a man by watching his father. Girls learn how to embrace a man or close off from him. Countless habitual unconscious practices (see Colossians 3:9) for relating are built into children as they live with their fathers. If fathers knew their importance, would they not be more inclined to discipline themselves to express the life of Christ for their children's sake?

For example, we took great pleasure in the fact that all of our children slept most of the night on John's chest when they were tiny. This experience taught them the comfort and security of the embrace of the father's strength, that their daddy was there for them when they needed, that it was not a fearful thing to trust themselves so close to someone who could by size and strength overpower them. Fathers need to know that their temper or compassion when forced to walk the floor with a six-month-old colicky baby affects the security of the child. Some of our counselees have discovered that their fear to come to us is derived from their early fear of their fathers.

TODDLERHOOD

Some children mature much more quickly than others. The rate of development is nothing about which we ought to be either proud or ashamed. Geniuses often mature emotionally and socially more slowly than others (Albert Einstein, for instance). It is important to know that a child should not be required to accomplish a skill—for instance, toilet training—before he is ready.

Surprising as it is to our materialistically trained minds, when we are teaching about such down-to-earth human things as toilet training, we're talking about the formation of soul and spirit. Faith and religion are not divorced from life. Spirituality is expressed not merely in worship but also

in the little, common, daily acts of life. The way and time a thing is done train the soul and affect its growing character.

Some mothers have been taught that a child *must* learn potty training at age one. Filled with all their tension about being good mothers, they force their children, ready or not, onto the pot to perform. That is blind insensitivity. While the child is learning to control his bladder, he is receiving something far more important. He is learning to fear the heavy hand of instruction, and anxiety sets in. He develops fears of inadequacy, inordinate desire to please, compulsory performance orientation, feelings of unworthiness, and a rigid definition of what he is as a person. He may later learn with his mind that grace is a free gift, but for years thereafter, his spirit will struggle to overcome a message from the early training in his soul: “If I don’t do right, God won’t love me.” Most likely he will be unable to relate to God in a different manner from the early responses he learned to give to maternal authority. Many truly believing, born-again Christians are still locked into performance orientation with God, not realizing that that “trip” was built into them before age two!

The best kind of training comes from sensitivity to the child, to his timetable. When the child is ready, the mother can assist in helping him to remember to go to the potty, and that without forcing. If a child is forced into toilet training too soon, he becomes, in most cases, censorious, judgmental, fastidious, stingy, uptight, nervous, a high-strung person (such a person is called an “anal personality”). Unfortunately many mothers are not trained about such things.

All this about potty training is just one example among many hundreds to show the way children develop within their own timetables. Myriad lessons we have to learn as infants demand loving parental sensitivity. That sensitivity is nothing else but constant momentary death of self in the power of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, so that the love of Christ may cause us to respond to what the child actually needs in any given moment. Without that self-death, we impose our own inappropriate demands, misshaping the child’s soul.

The basic lesson for a two-year-old is independence. This does not mean the fullness of mature independence, but the beginning of the process of individuation. A two-year-old reveals who he is by saying no. Our Tim loved ice cream, and so we would ask him, “Tim, do you want an ice cream cone?”

“No!”

He wanted one; he was only practicing his individuation. It is important for a child to say no. When he says no, he is defining his own person, saying, “You stop there; I stop here.” It is imperative to individuality to learn how to say no, to the other person and to one’s self. Many fathers and mothers have not understood this. What happens then is that when the child begins to say no, such parents feel threatened and squelch the “negativity,” thinking they are doing what they should to correct such behavior. Already, seeds of rebellion are sown, and the “demon” begins to rise.

There is a fine distinction concerning freedom that parents need to know. A child must be free to say his no but not thereby free to escape consequences. Discipline is necessary but should come as a simple and natural consequence concerning his actions, not as an attempt to coerce the child into a mold that prevents him from saying no. Our son Loren used to stand and look at a particular no-no he wanted to do. We could see him measuring the fun of the crime versus the punishment he knew he would get. But he knew he was free to make his choice—and free to take the consequences.

The saying of no, this independence, is dependent upon basic trust. Picture a two-year-old. He stands about how high? Two feet? Not much taller. He looks up, and what does he see? Noses, hands, kneecaps, and rear ends. To those giants from whom comes everything he needs—love, affection, food, clothing, shelter—he must say no. That takes trust! A lot of it! So you see, unless the child learns the first lesson, he cannot learn the second; and it is crucial to learn the second.

There was a generation of children who were raised during World War II, when both parents were gone from the home. Mothers were working in the factories, and fathers were at war. The children were not given adequate parental expressions of love and affection. Many did not learn basic trust. As a result, they did not learn independence. And so for the first time in America, we reaped a generation of teenagers who *had* to be with the gang. If the gang wanted to go to a “beer bust” and get drunk, they *had* to. If the gang said, “Let’s wear this kind of clothing,” they wouldn’t be caught dead without it. The reason for the compulsiveness was that so many of that generation had not learned independence as toddlers. They could not “differentiate” or “individuate.” They had never learned to make a

distinction between themselves and others. They could not stand alone because they had not learned basic trust.

Applying this to the Christian family, we see it is important for a mother and father to understand their two-year-old, to give him plenty of warm human affection, and to let him say his no when it is necessary. Again, that calls for momentary self-denial and life in Christ. If parent has not given the Holy Spirit sufficient control, he will wind up in never-ending, self-defeating frustration, trying to make the child become what he wants him to be.

We want to clarify that what we have said about teenagers is not true of all. Some teenagers can adhere to the fashions of the day without compulsion. Some can freely seek the belonging of the gang without loss of freedom. The difference seems to lie in the nature of the family. In the First World War, grandparents still were a part of the home. To a lesser extent, the same was true of World War II, and since then it has occurred less and less. Inability to individuate has increased in ratio to the loss of the close interconnectedness of the nuclear family and all other blood relatives. Mobility has isolated parents from the support and supply of relatives and close friends, so that when some parents became incapable, their children were left in a vacuum.

Humans raised without affection cling to their peers, afraid to differentiate. We detest the horrendous concept once popular among some sociologists who say we should have common nurseries in which all mothers and fathers should place their children. They said in essence that since some are better equipped to care for children, others should be released to work by committing their children to their care. Here is another evidence that the materialistic mind-set totally misses the uniqueness of each parent to his own child. Such blind counselors would eventually lead to doing away with the family altogether.

IN THE WOMB

When the Bible was written, family structure was much more cohesive, and the sense of the spiritual in daily living had not been lost. In the Bible, therefore, little was said directly concerning the life of the spirit within the

family; it was taken for granted. But much is implied. Do you remember when Mary left her place and came to visit with Elizabeth?

Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it came about that when Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. And she cried out with a loud voice, and said, "Blessed among women are you, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And how has it happened to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the *baby leaped in my womb for joy*. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

—LUKE 1:39–45, EMPHASIS ADDED

How did John the Baptist, encased in Elizabeth's womb, know that anything at all had happened outside? That Mary had entered the room? And was pregnant? Even to adults, Mary's pregnancy would barely have been showing—if at all. How did John the Baptist know? And that it was Jesus in her womb? The Holy Spirit revealed these things to John. We can testify that in countless cases we have dealt with people who have been influenced some months before their birth.

Our teaching here is based upon fifty years of experience in prayer ministry. In those years, by revelation of the Holy Spirit, we have been led to pray for people who experienced many traumas *in utero*, treating these as factual. Dramatic results in mental, emotional, and physical healings and transformed behavior testify to the reality of such in utero traumas. In the beginning of our ministry, we were only willing to postulate the possibility that our spirit has a mind with which to comprehend. Now, not to believe such subjective revelation would require denial of extensive observable results. We do not see how those results could have been obtained by any other means than the simple inviting of the Lord Jesus to touch and heal the wounds and fractures so described.

In recent decades, an explosion of medical discoveries has confirmed what the Holy Spirit had already been showing us. For instance, it is now known that parents who quarrel during womb time produce fearful, jumpy, undersized, timid, inordinately emotionally dependent children.² Mothers who smoke often produce chronically uncertain, anxious newborns. While in the womb, such a child will react even if his mother thinks of smoking a cigarette!³ It is also known that a baby in the womb learns to recognize his

father's voice and is comforted and reassured by it. Within an hour of delivery, he can pick out his father's voice and can respond to it emotionally.⁴ Children who were exposed to good music in the womb reap accelerated developmental skills and acquire reading and musical skills more quickly.⁵ We could go on and on. (For more about this, read chapters 1 and 2 in our book *Growing Pains*.)

Common manifestations of in utero traumas are, for instance, (1) unreasoning fears of death traced to the threat of abortion or identification with the mother's fears that she might miscarry because of previous miscarriages; and, (2) deep-seated feelings of rejection and unworthiness traced to illegitimate conception, unwanted pregnancy, strong desire for a girl when a boy was being formed, or vice versa.

Some practices of hatred and violence remain unconquerable in a person who suffered from in utero traumas even when all known causes have been dealt with later in life. But when the Holy Spirit has revealed to us incidences of violence that have occurred between the parents while the person was still in the womb, and appropriate healing prayers have been said, these have been immediately overcome. Likewise, some lusts and fears of sex have remained entrenched in some persons until sinful reactions to influences of their parents' sexual confusions and traumas were revealed and taken to the cross in prayer. To teach how to heal such things is not our purpose in this book (for a thorough teaching on that, read our book *Growing Pains*), but we share these understandings so that Christian parents may become aware that their lives greatly affect their children in the womb and beyond.

Because questions so often have been asked of us, we ought not to leave this subject without mentioning that it is for this reason that adopted children need healing prayer. Adopted children know in their spirits the loss of their own mother and father, whether their minds know it or not. Prayer effects healing, but infants and small children are not prepared to talk directly about such things; it is not necessary to pray aloud for them in their presence. But if the Holy Spirit moves us to pray in their presence, though their minds may not understand, their spirits will feel our loving intent and the Holy Spirit's anointing and be blessed by it. How we talk with and pray for older children depends upon their maturity and openness and the wisdom of the moment.

Many fathers have come to us, saying, “I’m sure that if we separated, my wife would find someone she would be happier with, and the children would have a much better home life. I think it would be best for the children if we were divorced.” Better a struggling home than one without you! You cannot be replaced. God sent your child to *you*. If you die, that cannot be helped, but no separation ought to be allowed that can be prevented. There is a living Lord who can change quarreling to blessing.

PRESCHOOL AND EARLY SCHOOL YEARS

From about two to six, a child learns initiative and the ability to live among the peer group. A child at first plays *alongside* others. For a child to commence playing *with* other children, he must have independence and basic trust. He must be able to say yes and no to the group. Sometimes a child gives away his toys. We praise that child, thinking he is being unselfish. That may be, but in many cases, it may mean that the child has failed to learn independence. Parents were busy earning things. They knew nothing of the Christian function of physical affection, talking, and sharing. They seldom bounced the baby on their laps, played with him, or even presented themselves to him. What they did give were things. The child has developed a market-oriented personality. In his heart the child thinks, “My parents bought me; I must buy people.” He gives things to win friends. He may never understand that he is himself already a friend, merely by existing.

On the other hand, sometimes we see a child of that age who won’t share anything. We tend to think the child is selfish. We may even spank and demand, “You share...” Our own picture as parents is threatened so that the child must be made to be unselfish. But it may only be that our child was learning independence. He is practicing being his own person, not at all ready to move into initiative. If we stand by him and help him to share without a tremendous “ought” behind it, he may soon learn initiative and start sharing. The familiar refrain for parents is again self-denial and life in Christ. Only Jesus gives the strength to let ourselves be embarrassed by a “selfish child” and not to overly praise the seemingly unselfish. “And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, and He will not judge by what His eyes

see, nor make a decision by what His ears hear” (Isa. 11:3). This must be true of us as parents as well.

In all of the foregoing, we were demonstrating how important the first six years are, but that may leave some of us with heavy burdens of guilt. We often see the results of what we did with our children in those first six years and pray in repentance. If we remember what our parents did with us, and theirs with them, and so on, we can see how sin is passed on from generation to generation. We can understand how the incapacity to function rises with us, how indeed the “demon” rises within us. What we are talking about is original sin in real terms. We are incapable of giving our child a perfect character because we are not perfect parents, and we are not because ours were not, and theirs weren’t, and theirs weren’t, all the way back to Adam and Eve. Only the cross stops this pattern, and that only by conscious *daily* invitation. Until our children are old enough to guide their own lives, we, as parents, must make that invitation. This calls for much death of self on our part. “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt. 16:24).

Suppose we had all been perfect parents. The “demon” would yet have risen. Junior is in bed hungry. In the beginning a baby is more honest. He cries because he is hungry. We hear and go running to him. We give him the breast or the bottle, comfort and hold him. Oh, that feels good to the baby! Another time he is hungry, so he cries again, and we go and feed him. Now he has the idea, “If I cry, Mama comes and I am comforted.” He isn’t hungry. He isn’t wet. He doesn’t need anything, but he has learned, “If I scream, Mama comes!” Already we have a liar. We may laugh at that, but it’s actually a serious matter. Children before six months already have learned to be manipulators and exploiters. We were born with sinful inclinations. “The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth” (Ps. 58:3). Jesus was the only perfect human.

For this reason we cannot blame parents for our sinfulness. If we did, we would do away with the cross by denying individual responsibility. Each is responsible to repent for the wrong directions his life has taken, no matter how early those directions began.

On the other hand, there are some who have insisted that no one can be called a sinner until the “age of accountability.” But this doctrine does not declare that children are incapable of sinning before a certain age; it merely holds that until the conscious mind is mature, they are not yet *held*

accountable. But the scripture we just quoted makes clear that children do, in fact, sin from the earliest moments of life. There is no exact scriptural ground for setting the age of accountability at a certain year, but common sense would put it at eleven or twelve.

We believe the entire church should awaken to the fact of the sins of our own personal spirits in the earliest moments of existence. For although children's minds may not be able to consciously choose to sin, they possess a fully functioning personal spirit. The Scriptures contain continual references to sinfulness and deeds of sin within our own personal spirits. "How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, *and in whose spirit* there is no deceit!" (Ps. 32:2, emphasis added). "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a *right spirit* within me" (Ps. 51:10, KJV, emphasis added). There is no need to put a right spirit in us if there is nothing wrong with the first one. Ezekiel 36:26 says, "A new heart also will I give you, and *a new spirit* will I put within you" (KJV). Again, no need for a new spirit if there is nothing wrong with the first. St. Paul writes to bornagain Christians, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh *and spirit*" (2 Cor. 7:1, emphasis added). Scripture is clear that we can and do sin in our spirits.

Some also insist that small children cannot sin because their minds are incapable of doing this knowingly. But a sin remains a sin even if it is done unknowingly. For instance, Numbers 35:22–25 states that even for an unintentional sin as severe as killing, there is no civil penalty. But Leviticus 4:27–28 clearly states that such sin still needs to be repented for: "Now if anyone of the common people sins unintentionally in doing any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, and becomes guilty, if his sin, which he has committed is made known to him, [he must atone]." Until they are old enough to guide their own lives, we as parents are accountable for our children. Therefore, on their behalf, we pray to place their sinful structures on the cross.

For too long we have arrogated the process of decision making to the conscious mind. We need to realize that our decision making is influenced, indeed may even be controlled, by deeper hidden areas of our beings. If this weren't true, Jesus would not say, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the

man” (Mark 7:21–23). Note that the first influence from within is “thoughts.” We are called responsible by the Lord Himself for what proceeds from within. Therefore, let it be axiomatic and never forgotten, that though we describe dramatically and forcefully the sins of parents in child raising, we must never allow that to obliterate individual responsibility. We are not *tabulae rasae* (blank slates) on which life is written, as Descartes claimed. We are individual free spirits in God’s kingdom, responsible for the way we choose to react to whatever we find here, however horrendous the circumstances. With the Lord, we can never get away with saying, “My parents made me do it,” or, “My circumstances forced me.”

The fallacy that we are only responsible for what our conscious mind knows has even become part of our court procedures. If a man can be proven insane, he is no longer held accountable by our society. Perhaps that is as it ought to be for the expression of mercy among men. But in our relationship with the Lord, Jesus simply says, “That slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few” (Luke 12:47–48). Note that in the Lord’s fairness, the unaware are not treated so harshly as the aware, but the unaware do receive a beating. Jesus sternly rebuked the Pharisees, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also” (Matt. 23:25–26). This, then, is our plea to Christian parents: first cleanse the inner cup of your own hearts daily. The great arena of battle is inner space, not outer. Christian parents are called to see beyond the surface of what their children do to bless and discipline for the nurture and admonition of the heart. For this reason Elijah is sent to “restore the *hearts* of the fathers to their children” (Mal. 4:6, emphasis added).

My father used to say, “No, Jack, that is not what you really thought. Here is what you really thought. Here is what you actually were saying by what you did...” Almost invariably he was right. I was furious at the moment, but later I would have to agree and be grateful. My father held me accountable for where my heart was and disciplined me accordingly, and so did my mother. Paula was equally fortunate. Neither of our folks were about

to excuse a guilty heart from correction. “Foolishness is bound up in the *heart* of a child; the rod of discipline will remove it far from him” (Prov. 22:15, emphasis added).

On the other hand, we Christian parents must learn to look upon our children and ourselves with the dispassionate judgment of the Lord. There should be an absence of condemnation in Christian parents who understand our formation in sin. We need not fear our imperfection. God loves us as we are. His lordship means that He will perfect us in His own good time. Blame attaches appropriately only to those who, already having been set free, again choose enslavement and crucify the Son anew on their own account (Heb. 6:4–6).

We have all too often transferred into our discipline and upon ourselves condemnation that is inappropriate. The habit of connecting criticism and blame, praise and approval, to our sense of belonging is a destructive habit carried forth from our infancy and foisted upon the present. It is not discipline that needs to cease: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently” (Prov. 13:24). It is the false motives attached to the way we discipline that need to be purged out of us. We ought never to discipline by saying, “Where did my child go? This isn’t my little _____.” Nor by “I can’t love you when you act that way.” Children need to know they belong and are loved no matter what they do. Discipline should have its base in love. “Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but *He disciplines us for our good*, that we may share His holiness” (Heb. 12:9–10, emphasis added).

Identical twins raised in the same environment evolve differently in character and personality. Because every child decides uniquely how he will react, discipline must be tailored to each individual. If we rest in the Lord Jesus Christ, His love will naturally cause us to discipline each child “for his good.”

From the beginning, God knew exactly how, when, and where you and I would fall. He knew in His wisdom that should He step in to prevent our falling, none of us would become sons of God. He knew then just how we would bless our children—and louse them up—and He sent them anyway! Though some parents fail by not trying hard enough to nurture their

children rightly, we see that devoutly Christian parents more often fail by trying too hard. Seeing those scriptures that call us to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4, KJV), taking that as our mandate to control their behavior, we often fuss and overprotect, squelching the child’s own life. As God paid the price for free will, so must we.

Lately many Christians have become aware of the scripture that says of an overseer, “He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Tim. 3:4–5). Too many of us, especially fathers, have fallen into fear, misunderstanding that text and plunging into desperate attempts to corral normally rebellious teenagers, lest we be deemed unworthy of office. But that scripture is not a call to dominance and control. The call is to know “*how to rule.*” Father God lost every son to profligacy save one only. Does that disqualify Him for rule? Did He not know how? Every disciple of Jesus deserted Him, and one betrayed Him. Is Jesus thereby unfit to rule the household of God? The Father rules by humble service. He pays the cost of hurt for us; love “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). Jesus is the Master by being as the least, laying down His life for our freedom. The parent who learns to lay down his life in loving service for his family, repenting before God for his children, will rule as Jesus did. Jesus still rules today by love, not demand. Children who are secure in love will return from profligacy, stronger and wiser.

If a parent could raise a perfect child, what need would our children have of a Savior? Our children will mature imperfectly no matter how perfectly we try. It’s the way of fallen mankind. As we said earlier, we have misread the scripture, “Train up a child in the way he should go.” We take it as a command to shape our children the way we think they should go. That is not what it says. “Train up a child in the way *he* should go” is a call to us to die to our own pictures of what we want our children to be so that through us the Father may call forth what He created them to become. Our task is to stop our attempt to make them fulfill something we failed in or always wanted to be. As Michelangelo saw in the stone the sculpture that begged to be set free under his chisel, so we are ordained to find and set free what God has created in our children. “For we are His workmanship, created in

Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

Muslim families love their children. So do Buddhists. Even atheists love their children. We are not different in that. Other families discipline their children. Hebrew families are noted for good discipline. So are the Chinese. Many families discipline their children better than we. But the Christian family knows one thing that no other organization, family, group, race, or creed knows. We know, through Jesus Christ, death of self on the cross and rebirth. Our task, then, is to die to self so that we become sensitive to what God is unfolding within each child’s plan of development. We are to so love that the child may grow in *his own way*.

What is a Christian family? It is simply a unit of warm, human love where God raises His imperfect sons and daughters. Truly we *are* called to give affection, pray with our children, attend church with them, discipline, and live before them an exemplary life, but it is God who will do the rest. In whatever ways we fail to do these simple things, it is God who will redeem. The Christian family is distinctive, then, in its ability to rest in the middle of all its difficulties. By faith in Christ it is also distinguished by joy and celebration. It is unafraid to make mistakes and live life. We rest in the knowledge that God has all the “mess” in hand.

To Christian parents we say, then: Be present to your children; give *you* to them. Touch often. Hold them. Read stories. Play. Pray with them. But relax. Don’t try so hard. Rest in your mess. God has it. He always has. Praise God for the mess. He will turn it to glory.

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters of Life’s longing for itself.
They come through you but not from you,
And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.
You may give them your love but not your thoughts.
For they have their own thoughts.
You may house their bodies but not their souls,
For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you
Cannot visit, not even in your dreams.
You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them
Like you.
For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.⁶

—KAHLIL GIBRAN

2



A NEW HEART

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

—EZEKIEL 36:26

WHAT WE HAVE SAID ABOUT BECOMING EMOTIONALLY crippled as we are formed may sound deterministic. Therefore, we want to make it clear that our parents' actions do not determine our choices. They may tempt us to react, but ultimately, we make the choice. However, insofar as we all react sinfully, to one extent or another such results are inescapable. Perhaps the most cogent law in all the Bible is the fifth commandment: "Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:2–3). The Ten Commandments and all the other laws in the Bible are not merely a collection of rules we ought to live up to but often don't. They are God's description of the way reality works. If we drop a pencil, it falls because of gravity. If the pencil had a mind of its own and chose to hang in the air, that would have no effect whatsoever on its falling. By the same operation of law, we are recompensed in spiritual matters. If we lie, we must reap painful results. It makes no difference what our minds think or our emotions feel.

So long as we have not repented, in the same way a pencil must fall according to the law of gravity, so by spiritual law we must and will reap. Likewise, no matter how understanding God and we may be that a child did not want to be angry or judge his parents, if forgiveness and the cross do not intervene, that act of judgment must be reaped. We have heard countless complaints from people, saying, "I swore I would never treat my children

the way my parents did—and I am doing the very same things!” Why? Because law is law. Roman 2:1 says, “Therefore you are without excuse, every man of you who passes judgment, for in that you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” Every one of us is a lawbreaker; in one way or another we have all broken every one of the Ten Commandments. We have all lied; if not with words, then with actions. We have all committed adultery in our hearts. We have all set up idols in our hearts. Jesus said, “If you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Matt. 6:15). Therefore, as long as we have bitterness in our hearts toward parents, we who sin likewise will remain locked into the same sins that we resent them for. And we will become progressively more and more like them, for Hosea 8:7 says, “For they sow the wind, and they reap the whirlwind.”

On the other hand, this operation of law also works to bring increasing blessings. We have seen cases where a husband and wife loved and took care of their parents and found themselves blessed by the Lord with everything they needed—happiness, good health, and a wonderful place for their own retirement. That is the simple, irrevocable, impersonal law of sowing and reaping. Our first book, *The Elijah Task*, speaks of this more fully.

Jesus quoted the law, “He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die” (Mark 7:10, RSV, quoting from Exod. 21:17). Loving and merciful as He is, Jesus knew that dishonoring the parents brings death. That death may not be physical, but it can destroy the abundant life. Even if a child is unaware of this law and represses his anger, the law still pertains. It will not be well with him to the degree of his rebellion. This is a problem prayer ministers must address again and again.

It is easier to bring healing to those who have had recognizably wicked parents. For in such cases it is easier to see that there is a need to forgive. But the hurts of the children of good parents who failed to give affection are extremely difficult to see. How can a child know what is wrong? As a sunflower turns its head to follow the sun for life, so a child, by the inner promptings of his spirit, turns to his parents for life-giving affection. That easy trust, looking for loving nurture, is most likely what Jesus meant when He said, “Unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). God’s kingdom people, like

little children, have died to pride and can look humbly to others for love and sharing.

Going back to our analogy, if we cover the sunflower so that it cannot find the sun, it searches for light. When it finds none, it wilts. Children whose parents fail to give affection become like the sunflower; they wilt and die inside. Normally the child's mind does not comprehend this loss. It loyally protects the parents. The inner spirit does know and usually rebels in anger. Resentment and bitterness then set into the soul and eventually infect the very life of the person.

Lest some cry "unfair!" let us explain it is not as though the victim has no chance. Even as little children we make choices. When we repress our hurts, we are choosing to lie to ourselves. "O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!"¹ When we fail to admit to our consciousness what our spirit faithfully sends up, we build a web of dishonesty. Eventually the inner spirit tires of letting us know where we really are and quits sending messages. Trouble does not set in until and unless we have too long said "peace" to ourselves where there is no peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). It is then that the inner heart can no longer find access to our mind for healing. Bitterness resulting from judgments made by us runs like an underground river, unchecked, and springs up in full floods somewhere later in life. That is why children bereft of affection are apt then or later to start doing mean things. Somehow, somewhere, sins of judgment sown will draw retribution upon such children unless the cross of Christ intervenes. The law is inexorable. "Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you" (Matt. 7:1-2). The worst facet of the problem is its invisibility. Whenever someone comes to us confessing marital trouble, we immediately ask, "What was it like with your parents?" If the trouble is not identical, we can easily recognize similar roots. Every time we choose wrongly, even as tiny children, the law is inescapable; it is deterministic. That is God's Word. But consider how many hundreds of blessings are reaped by the operation of that same law.

Seeing that the laws of God are that real and effective, people have often said to us, "Well, good grief. I'm filled with guilt. What can I do? What have I done to my poor children already?" Praise God and hallelujah! That is why we have Jesus. That is what He came to do—to forgive our sins, to heal our broken places, to carry our sorrows, and to bear our grief (Isa.

53:4). We can invite Him to come into our lives and those of our children to transform all our errors into glory. Whoever is downcast, let him take heart; Jesus is real. His forgiveness is available to all.

HEART OF STONE

Now let us turn to the subject of the heart of stone. Ezekiel 36:26 says the Lord will take out of us the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh. What is the heart of stone? Let us remember that the growing child who comes with an imperfect, rebellious spirit to imperfect parents usually does not receive enough affection or understanding. Therefore, he begins to build defensive walls. While earlier we spoke of the sinful reactions of the child and how he became a liar, now we speak of his hurts. How purely defenseless a baby is. How often we pick up a baby and say, "Oh, I hope I don't crush him," because he melts our heart. We feel how open and vulnerable he is. But then the baby gives and Papa doesn't respond, or wants to be held and Mama puts him down and goes off somewhere else, and there is hurt. That happens in the best of homes again and again. Each time, the baby has to handle that hurt somehow. The baby has no knowledge of confession, the cross, and forgiveness. What can he do with constantly repeated frustrations? The baby wants the breast, but Mama changes the diaper, or baby has a diaper rash, but Mama sticks the breast in his mouth. How can a baby say what he really wants? He doesn't know how to forgive and be cleansed. His spirit becomes more and more loaded, as hundreds of little hurts are stored in him. Each instance adds to the building of checks into his nervous system until eventually he has built a way of turning off his feelings. Emotions begin to be no longer out in the open. He has built a hiding place within himself. In the beginning his walls are flexible. As he grows, if his parents talk to him about his frustrations and apologize and make amends when necessary, the child will more easily soften his heart and let his walls down. But if his heart continues to be missed, and more importantly, if he reacts by closing his heart, his walls will become increasingly strong and rigid as the pressures of repressed emotions increase.

In families in which there is much love and affection, the heart of stone is warmed and eased. In unaffectionate families, the heart of stone often

chooses to close, and it ossifies in time. Such people may find themselves able to *give* love, but they do not dare to receive. The person with a heart of stone subconsciously is incapable of divulging his inner being to another. The act of receiving is a far greater risk than giving. Defensive practices are soon forgotten but remain effective throughout life because the inner heart has become a petrified forest of automatic hidden patterns.

This is true not only of defensive practices but also of healthy ones. In the beginning as we learned how to walk, for instance, we had to concentrate on making our feet go. We learned to control wayward muscles while keeping precarious balances. Now that we have learned to walk, we do not have to think “walk” again. We just simply go without thinking about the process. If we were raised in Texas, we might walk with a loping step. In Japan we might learn to walk with short steps. By the same token, we speak with inflections, drawls, slang phrases, and colloquialisms. We do not try to have an Ozark twang; it happens because of our automatic reflex system. Without the economy of automatic reflexes, we would wear ourselves out trying to do the simplest things like walking, talking, and eating. Once built, such patterns are forgotten. They operate without our thinking. In exactly the same way, we learn how to open the heart and give, how to *receive* affection, how to sense underlying meanings in conversations, how to read what is in the heart of another, and how to hold the heart open to the other.

The fact of the automatic, hidden operation of our ways gives us the context of the Christian struggle for sanctification. “But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self *with its evil practices*, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (Col. 3:8–10, emphasis added). A born-again Christian has not ended the problem with self; he has only begun the work of sanctification, the daily bringing to death of the practices of the old character structure. “Autonomous complex” is the psychological term for what the Bible calls a “practice” or we might call a “habit.” Jesus died to set us free from these.

Praying families tend to keep the heart more melted. Bible reading and attending church where the Word of God is preached continually expose the heart to the sword of truth. In such families, if the milieu of love enables,

the heart is less hardened than in families in the world. But we are all locked up to some degree.

Often we are unaware that we have a heart of stone because the outer personality remains so obviously loving. For example, a wife who embraces her husband, prepares nice meals, dresses well for him, and gives her body to him whenever he asks may yet be encased in a heart of stone. The telling mark is that she can't let down and cry on his shoulder. She is unable to claim his lap when she needs comfort for herself. Often such a woman fails to climax sexually and thinks that's all right because she is giving herself to her husband, and to her that is all that matters. She cannot see she actually defeats him by denying him the fullness of giving himself to her. More commonly it is the man rather than the wife who cannot admit his spouse behind his defensive walls to melt and fill his heart.

We must learn both to help and to be helped. We have observed that elderly people who have been independent and strong, who have insisted on helping others all their lives, frequently have debilitating illnesses for numbers of years before they pass on. Though it is not His first will, God, in His mercy, sometimes places the elderly in a vulnerable position in which they have to learn to receive. Faithful members of the gospel commonly suffer from a heart of stone, for the minister's concept of his office seduces him to value giving but not receiving.

The heart of stone is not always something hidden. When it becomes so hardened that we don't want to do things for others, everyone recognizes it. We say, "He's such a selfish man, so self-centered." In such a case, sin has proceeded to its fullness. The heart of stone has imprisoned the man.

The scriptural promise is that God will take out the heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh, but that word *flesh* gives us trouble. "Flesh" has a tremendously bad press in the Bible. "For the mind set on the flesh is death" (Rom. 8:6). Or, "The mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (v. 7). Or Galatians 5:16: "You will not carry out the desire of the flesh." Or, "The one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8). However, the flesh is not always something negative, as in Ephesians 5:29: "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." The word *flesh* is used in many varying contexts in the Bible, and there is theological confusion about it. We often think wrongly about the flesh; wrong ways of thinking about life are built into us just as Southern drawls or Northern accents are.

St. Paul says, “I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh” (Rom. 7:18). Knowing the flesh is bad, we set out to crucify it, but we sometimes think erroneously that that means we should block off all desires of the body. So when we read that God will give us a heart of flesh, we think, “What kind of promise is that? That sounds like He’s going to take away our nice peaceable dead thing and give us a living serpent. Who needs flesh? I thought we were to get rid of it!”

There is, however, another use of the word *flesh*:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh.

—EPHESIANS 5:25–31

So the flesh in this case is not something bad.

The Scriptures do give revelation as to what the flesh actually is:

For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh, although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

—PHILIPPIANS 3:3–6

Because Paul has said not to put any confidence in our flesh, we have acquired confused feelings and thoughts about our bodies. That is not what he was talking about; he was speaking of heritage and belonging. These things were not inherently evil. It was not evil to have zeal for his Jewish heritage, but it was evil to use that zeal to persecute the church. It was not evil to be circumcised, but it was evil to take pride in it.

For John Sandford, confidence in the flesh could be expressed as follows: American; part Osage Indian; half English; born a Congregationalist of Congregationalists; raised a liberal; in his pride taunting believers as naïve and radical; a Pharisee trained to conform himself to the image of goodness

he supposed was set forth for him to be. As Paul was trained under Gamaliel, John was taught in Congregational schools, both college and seminary.

For Paula, confidence in the flesh would be pride and confidence in her Baptist background; her upbringing in a solid churchgoing, Biblebelieving family; proper training from the age of two weeks in a church that preached the gospel, a church that upheld the moral laws of God and taught tithing. A Pharisee, she rested in doing things the right way.

There are times when we use the word *flesh* to refer specifically and solely to the body, as in Shakespeare's "a pound of flesh" (Shylock). In such usages, there should be no overtones of evil. For Jesus has died to cleanse the earth (Acts 10:15). The flesh is never apart from the body, except when we die. This is a good creation of God. But when used in the negative sense, the word *flesh*, another way of saying "the old man," is trained into our bodily responses.

For example, if I feel an urge to embrace my wife, the Holy Spirit may be prompting that. But I also embrace her *through* my flesh, for the flesh is what I think and feel, including all the unconscious hidden character, about what it is to be a husband and to have a wife. The Holy Spirit flowing through my body and spirit comes through clean and free, but through my unredeemed flesh, love becomes corrupted by all my carnal character. Body desires need to be corralled by moral discipline, but insofar as they flow morally, they are good and clean and holy passions. That is an aspect of the good flesh spoken of in Ephesians 5 ("no man ever hates his own flesh"). Such passions do not need to be mortified and stopped. Too many families have dried up by trying to stop them. It is the built-in, wrongly motivated ways that have to be mortified. Purification changes bad flesh to good flesh as we in fact incarnate the Lord Jesus anew in us. "Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come *in the flesh* is from God" (1 John 4:2, emphasis added). We see this as more than a doctrinal test; it is not enough to merely give mental assent to true doctrine. As James says, "Even the demons believe" (James 2:19, NIV). Only when we put our flesh (in the negative sense of the word) on the cross through repentance and resulting change is our belief different from that of the demons. Jesus has come in the flesh when a man hugs his wife, or a mother and father truly love their children.

In the world our flesh has become corrupted as our acquiescence to inheritance and culture have structured wrong ways into us. St. Paul said, “The gospel...is the power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16). Salvation refers to more than redemption. It includes the entire sanctification process. The gospel is the primary tool of God to weed the garden of our character. It is His instrument to purify our flesh. “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Thy word” (Ps. 119:9). “The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul” (Ps. 19:7). Our task as a family is to devour the Word so that, sharper than any two-edged sword, it may pierce to the dividing asunder of spirit and soul, joint and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb. 4:12). As the flesh cannot be fully transformed apart from the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, neither can it be unless we become workmen who need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15).

The Ezekiel 36 prophecy that Jesus would give us a heart of flesh means, of course, a redeemed heart. He became that malformed flesh and died for it, so deeply ingrained in us. He puts onto us His own character. Consequently, what our flesh expresses is the glory of Christ. Jesus was resurrected in the flesh. That means both in body and flesh. He alone has perfected flesh. All His nature—motivations, instincts, and understandings—are perfect and perfectly expressed through every mechanism of His resurrected body. His promise to raise us means that both in body and flesh we are to be made like Him, to mature into the likeness of Christ. That is what the term *salvation* means, to be given fully redeemed flesh, a new heart of flesh.

LIVING IN THE SPIRIT... IN THE FLESH

Many Christians, confused about the flesh, find it difficult to imagine being resurrected in the body. Such confusion also affects our present living. For that reason, St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15. And we write the following, for nothing is more destructive to the family today than our unscriptural conditioned responses to the reality of living as a spirit in a body.

There are two ways of viewing what we are as spirit and body. These ways form patterns of behavior built by our culture into our character and affect all our life, whether we know it or not. The first way is the Hebraic-

Christian. Present confusion causes many Christians to reject the Hebraic-Christian way as being unchristian. The second way is that of antichrist. Unfortunately, that way pervades our Western culture and is accepted by many as being Christian.

The Hebraic-Christian way of thinking says that both spirit and body exist and flow together in oneness. Oneness is not a monism. Monism coalesces spirit and body so that one or the other ceases to exist. True faith sees no basic antagonism between spirit and body. All parts of being, however separate in nature or function, flow together in unity. Through Jesus Christ all of nature and the physical body of mankind are clean, and the Spirit of God flows in and through all. Both matter and spirit are to be respected. Both are to have full life together. Fulfillment comes as spirit is expressed most fully in body and matter.

In the antichrist way, spirit is seen as good, matter as bad; therefore, the human body is defiled. There is a dichotomy so that anything of spirit is thought of as separate and antagonistic to matter. The Gnostic Marcion taught that a lesser god or “demi-urge” had created the earth; therefore, it was defiled. Against such Gnostics John stated resoundingly that the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and everything was created through Him (John 1:1–3). In antichrist thought, since matter and body are unclean, the struggle is to mortify the body, to kill its passions, and to return to being a pure spirit. The passions of the body defile the spirit. Such thought is totally opposite to the Christian desire to be fulfilled within the body.

During the centuries in which the Bible was written, geographically all around Palestine almost everyone held that split way of thinking. Still today Hindus believe mankind has become trapped in the body, in the wheels of dharma and karma. Each person regretfully must continue to be reincarnated until the spirit can be purified of its fleshly attachments and returned to being a pure spirit, away from the body. The Hindu hope is to escape the body, not to be fulfilled within it. For this reason, Christians should have nothing to do with mystics who teach Eastern meditation. Their way is to block out all feelings and thoughts. That splits life apart. The Christian is never more alive in every faculty of his entire being than when in prayer. The Christian way is unity and fulfillment. That means life abundant, not resignation.

Let us expose the historical base by which the antichrist way of thinking has become so dominant in our culture. It began in the mythological stories

of creation apart from the Word of God.

The Babylonian story of creation holds that Marduk, a god, fought with Tiamat, his mother. He stuffed the four winds into Tiamat's mouth, whereupon her belly distended and she died. Taking out his knife, he slit her belly and lifted the top half, which became the heavens. The remaining blood and intestines became the earth. That's creation. Would anyone be inclined to respect material life with that story? Could one honor his own body?

In Egyptian mythology, there is a slimy mud flood. In the midst of the muck there arises a mud hillock. On that miry mound arises a man who spits. The spit is creation. With that belief, who could respect the earth or love his own body?

Contrast those with the Hebraic concept. In the beginning, God, a holy and loving Father, created the heavens and the earth through His Son. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and God said, "Let there be light." And behold there was light. *And God saw that it was good.* What a blessed contrast! Six days He created, and each day He saw that it was good. On the sixth, He took that good, clean dust of the earth and molded it into the form of a man and breathed His own holy and loving breath into that form. And man became a living soul. "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, *behold, it was very good*" (Gen. 1:31, KJV, emphasis added). How beautiful that story of Creation is! In the Hebraic-Christian belief, all of Earth with all of its creatures is redolent with the beauty and breath of a good and loving, holy God. It is no accident that wherever true Hebraic-Christian faith has appeared, reverence for life has followed.

It was into the Hebraic way of life that Jesus came as God incarnate in the flesh. The Eastern mind could not receive that fact. Easterners were scandalized by the concept of the Incarnation. From that conflict sprang many heresies. To them it was scurrilous to think that God Himself would come in a human body, that the Prince of Peace would be born through a woman's womb. That the promised Counselor would have to be suckled at the breast? Horrors! Therefore, such men as Cerinthus, Elipandus, and Felix came up with adoptionism. This held that Jesus was not in fact born of a woman; God found a grown man and adopted him. To them Jesus was a man possessed by God, not truly the Word *become* flesh. Then came Docetism, from the Greek word *dokein*, "to appear." It was too repugnant to

think God came naturally and fully into a human body. Docestists said that He only appeared to have a body, as a theophany (an appearance of God in human form), and returned to heaven. Resistance to the body created resistance to belief in the Resurrection. St. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15 to disabuse Greek believers' minds from the false notions of the Mithraic cults, to whom the blessing of death was to rid oneself of the body. The body is not a moral coil to be shuffled off. It was never meant to be temporary. It is not a disposable can from which God removes the spirit for use in heaven. The body is itself a part of the new creation. We are to be resurrected within our natural bodies. If we die and lose the body, we will be given new bodies in heaven.

Confusion came into Christian thought through the Greek mentality, mainly through Aristotle. Aristotle attempted to elude the mystic but nevertheless perpetuated and elaborated the split way of thinking that was its base. Through Thomas Aquinas and others, that framework of thought, rather than the biblical approach, pervaded the life of the church. The Aristotelian wrong way of thinking consequently infected all of Western mentality—our science, philosophy, economics, politics, and sex. Since all our thinking is corrupted by it, so are all the common, daily actions by which we relate to each other in the family.

If we attend the theater, all too often we see denigration of life. At the movies we are frequently exposed to pornography even in PG-13 movies, to say nothing of R- and X-rated films. What we seldom see portrayed is a true and honorable attitude toward sex. We do not see the Hebraic-Christian concept of sex, but the opposite is expressed. "Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; they did not even know how to blush" (Jer. 6:15). Because of antichrist confusion, men think the body is only a body, so why not display it and exploit it sexually? Truly God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). They do not reverence the whole person, body and spirit, as one wondrous and holy being. People have actually said to us, "Truly spiritual people would not have sexual feelings, would they?" What tommyrot! In Christ we believe the glory of God shines *through* every man and every woman. A Christian who understands this does not want to defile the goodness of the body and the wholesomeness of sex by using it wrongly. Sex for the Christian is a gift of God, a most hallowed and exciting fulfillment of spirit and body.

Antichrist confusion causes men to think that being spiritual is something distinct from the practical issues of living. For them, if spirit exists, it is something foreign, strange, over there somewhere, and what we do in church is something mystical, obscure, kooky—“religious.” A “real man” would, of course, be physical and practical, sexually an animal. This sets up total confusion for the Christian layman at work. He thinks his Christianity must be something he can “do.” He fails to understand that the Spirit of Christ naturally flows through everything he is and does. Casting about and finding nothing specifically Christian he can “do,” he wonders what is missing, feels shamefaced and guilty, somehow less than he ought to be. Whereas if his mentality were steeped in the truly biblical, he would know that the Lord blesses everything he touches, that he is a blessing purely because he is. He would clean up his language, stop his dirty jokes, carry the burdens of his fellow laborers in his heart, and find ways to be kind to those all around him. Honesty and integrity would gird his loins. He would work beyond his pay. But these common things hardly seem dramatic and different enough. He cannot see the common as Christian because his mind, trained in antichrist before his conversion, calls that secular, not religious. The word *secular* cannot be found in the Bible. It is a fiction of the devil. Nothing is secular.

There is no separation of body and spirit. No man can touch a woman without touching her spirit. St. Paul wrote: “Do you not know when you lie with a woman you become one with her?” (1 Cor. 6:16, author’s paraphrase). Only Paula has been consecrated or tuned by God to fulfill my body and spirit. Because we know that, we do not *want* any other. No one else can have it for us, however beautiful in personality or body. The full glory of sex can happen only between married couples. Absolutely nowhere else. Not understanding that, men think to gain, and only lose. A man thinks that sex is only something body to body, so “I might as well find a better body and enjoy it.” Even if he never commits adultery, that wrong way of thinking causes him to miss the glory with his wife. He never becomes aware that he has a spirit that can meet and be thrilled in the embrace of his wife’s spirit. A holy glory surrounds a man and wife making love. But because of the antichrist way, most of our grandparents thought sex was nasty. “Sex is only for procreation.” “You shouldn’t do it unless you want to have children.” “If you enjoy it, confess it. You are being sinful.” Contrast that with the beauty of, “The man had relations with his wife Eve, and she

conceived” (Gen. 4:1). And, “Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it” (Eph. 5:28).

Our entire scientific technological mind-set is based on the Aristotelian split of life. We see matter as being dead and inert. We fail to relate to matter. We impose our will, willy-nilly, on the things around us. We push, pull, use, manipulate, and destroy. All things are mere “its” to us. We are totally insensitive to anything less than human or inanimate. We are about to deplete and destroy fair earth, partially because we can think in no other terms than these. Such thinking carries over into family living. Martin Buber points out that we also tend to relate to each other as objects, as “its.”² Mothers dutifully feed bodies food, three square meals a day, but let their children starve emotionally and spiritually. Fathers relate all day to objects at work as “its,” unfortunately also to other men likewise as “its,” and come home to treat their families the same way—and wonder why it doesn’t work. Politicians count votes and miss people as persons. Sociologists count statistical noses, oblivious to the primacy of each man’s spirit. Programs are fomented both in the world and church that further tear apart the fabric of the spirit’s and soul’s life in the family. Antichrist thinking is not merely a dead and inert philosophy, as we tend to think of all objects. It is a corporate mental stronghold, having a life of its own, a demonic thing wielded by the principalities of evil, a mesmeric construct by which Satan blinds the eyes of men to keep them from seeing the light of life in all things and in all people (2 Cor. 4:4).

It is crucially important for families to comprehend that this antichrist way of thinking affects the way we relate to each other every single moment of our lives. Only by such knowledge can we come to true and joyous repentance and let Him change all our thinking. (See Romans 12:2.) We need to be aware that when we touch one another, whomever we touch, we do so as one whole being to another whole being. Jesus wants to give us a heart of flesh so that we may refresh one another, so that each soul may be formed and reformed daily in Him.

Our spirit and soul must have touch, laughter, light and joy, work and sweat, tears and games, boredom and excitement, rest and exertion. Spirit and soul are not a machine, or a thing apart from the body. As we touch one another in family, the soul is being formed. It is that formation, constant death and reformation, that is the primary product of life in Christ in the

family. A child's spirit must have its own mother and father whenever possible—not substitutes. Human passion is not opposite to spirit life; it is the very milieu in which our spirits grow to be fully human, fully Godlike. It is in the melee of life that our spirits learn to choose between the wrong passions of the flesh and the pure passions of the spirit in the body. That is what life is all about.

3



MAN AND WOMAN BECOMING ONE FLESH

A man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

—GENESIS 2:24–25

MAN AND WOMAN BECOMING ONE FLESH MEANS THAT WE enter into a commonality of feelings, one way of thinking, and one set of goals. We do not become each other. We do not lose our identities in each other. We enjoy a unity of love in which each person can become all that he or she is meant to be. We also become one body, in the sense that the physical body of one does not seem complete without the other. Being with each other in spirit unites and completes each individual.

“Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, RSV). In the Greek, to be subject means “to be cast under,” *hupotasso*, but “out of reverence for Christ.” The only way we can subject our prideful flesh to one another is through reverence for Christ. We will not accomplish it any other way. Note that the command is not merely to women, but that we all should be subject to one another.

Consider the little word *as* throughout the following: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, *as* to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife *as* Christ is the head of the church” (vv. 22–23, RSV). How are we subject to the Lord? Freely, through love for Him. Submission is voluntary; we want to submit out of our desire to give to Him. So is the wife submitted to the husband. Christ is head of the church purely because He is who He is. In love He invites us to let Him rule, and His rule sets us free to be our own

persons. He never domineers or forces. His lordship means He makes Himself servant to all mankind. A husband's headship makes him servant to all his family. It does not make him a controller or give him a right to dominate. A father's life in the family should set the wife and children free to develop.

For the husband is the head of the wife, *as* Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But *as* the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just *as* Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives *as* their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just *as* Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body.

—EPHESIANS 5:23–30, EMPHASIS ADDED

The husband is called to love *as* Jesus loves us. His task is to lay down his life for the benefit of his family, day in and day out.

“For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh” (Eph. 5:31, quoting from Gen. 2:24). That is a three-stage process, for if we do not leave our father and mother emotionally as well as physically, we cannot be joined to each other, and the process of becoming one cannot begin. Hundreds of times we have ministered to couples who could not mature into oneness because one or both failed to leave home. Perhaps it is significant that the command to leave home is given to men. Far more often we find men rather than women unable to do so. But the Lord also speaks to women: “Hear, O daughter, consider, and incline your ear; forget your people and your father's house; and the king will desire your beauty” (Ps. 45:10–11, RSV).

When I watch young people marching down the aisle at a high school or college baccalaureate, my spirit is crushed with grief. I weep because I see that in this commercial, materialistic culture we have taught our young people everything external and nearly nothing internal. We give them mechanics—reading and writing and arithmetic. We may have taught them some government, history, sociology, and a little psychology. But they know almost nothing about the art of hearing each other in true communication. They comprehend even less of the skills of sensitivity. About themselves as spirit and soul, they are tragically destitute, and what

they do know confuses them. Worse, they are nearly completely unequipped to upbuild and nurture each other. I cannot help but hang my head in shame at our failure to fulfill the commandment of God: “And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and *you shall teach them diligently to your sons* and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up” (Deut. 6:6–7, emphasis added). I know that when those young people marry, most of them will make a shambles of their lives. Their ingrained selfishness will destroy their marriages and their parenthood. We desperately need to know how to become one in Christ.

In diagram one, the two sets of concentric circles represent two people. We live on both the outside and the inside. The word *personality* comes from the Latin *persona*, which means “mask” or in our modern slang “front.” It is not necessarily phony that we have a front. We can’t go around “letting it all hang out” all the time. We have to put forth a best face. We are working at being a person to other people. That is our exterior, known, overt personality.

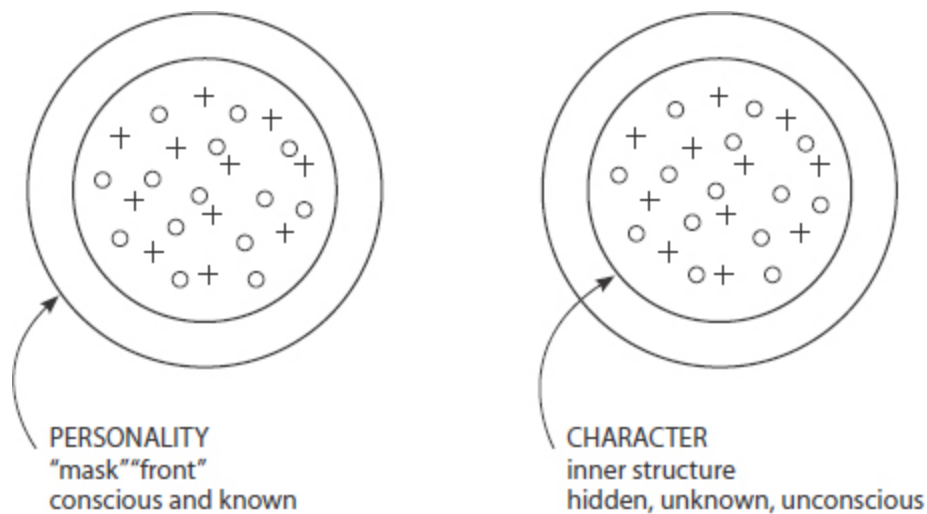


Diagram One

On the inside is our character. Character comes from the Greek word *charakter*, meaning “engraving tool.” Character means our “inner” structure, which should be engraved or written into us by the hand of God (Jer. 31:33; Rom. 5:1–5). Our inner structure is largely hidden. It is mostly unknown and unconscious. *Unconscious* does not mean “knocked out”; nor

does it mean asleep. *Unconscious* refers to anything in us of which we are usually unaware, which may be a construct, complex, instinct, habit, or any automatic thing that acts in and through our reflexes. Unconscious behavior is active and motivational behind everything we do. David was well aware of how little he knew the contents of his own heart: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (Ps. 139:23–24). The unconscious has hundreds of devices and traits within it. The closest term in the Bible for it is *the heart*. We use the word *unconscious* rather than *heart* or *subconscious* because so many people habitually connect heart too much with feelings and think of any word with the prefix “sub” as having less value. What is inside of us is as valuable, perhaps more so, than what is conscious and known.

We put into our diagram little circles for pearls of wisdom and gems of truth, as well as the crosses that represent trouble spots. A great deal of what is inside of us is hidden diamonds and pearls. Much of what we bring to marriage is the positive within us. And the most glorious mystery of God’s mercy is that every one of our sore spots is to be transformed by the Lord Jesus Christ into pearls of wisdom and diamonds of truth.

We all have hidden within us vast unknown incapacities. As we have said in chapter 2, we may be unaware that we may be unable to give or receive affection. Until parenthood reveals this to us, we may not know how critical of our children we will be. It may be a shock to find ourselves disciplining entirely differently than we thought we would. Sudden fears and angers may crop up. And so on it goes, *ad infinitum*.

It is amazing how the little things get to us. Where does he drop his socks? Does he leave a ring in the bathtub? Is he forgetful? Does she set the table like Mama did? Or burn the bacon? Are the sheets always wrinkled? Is the house too messy or too clean? These are also represented by the x’s in the circles.

When a man and woman enter marriage, one question faces them. It makes no difference whether they are sixteen, twenty-one, or fifty, nor whether this is their first, second, third, or fourth marriage. All face the same question. Will they learn to drink from each other’s weaknesses and overcome each other’s strength, or will they find those hidden gems and pearls and polish them? Will they uncover their broken places and let the Lord heal them and turn them into gems? Or will they reveal, nurture, and

build up their incapacibilities until they have made themselves into inhuman demons dwelling in self-made hells? Will they learn to upbuild and nurture each other, or tear each other apart? We all take the same test: will we overcome for each other or succumb to mutual destruction?

In our culture we have grown up entertaining a foolish romantic idea: “If I love somebody, I have only good, romantic love feelings. I always want to be kind to my spouse. If I begin to have bad feelings, or no feelings, I must be ‘falling out of love.’ If I hate somebody, surely I can’t be in love.” All of that is delusory. The truth is that since human love is corrupted by the inhumanity of sin, we inevitably entertain feelings of hate for whomever we love. David, Saul, and Jonathan were involved in real love. Saul wound up hating David, and David struggled not to return it. Jacob and Esau were brothers who loved and therefore also hated. Rachel and Leah, two sisters who loved the same man, were also filled with jealous competition, hating each other. Wherever unredeemed love is, there is hate. Love and hate are not opposites; they go hand in hand. Because the flesh is corrupted, we cannot love without hating, and we cannot hate without loving.

Love is a risk relationship. Major differences exist between secondary and primary relationships. At work or with friends, we have secondary relationships. We brush shoulders. If they insult us, we get over it. We may hate for a moment, but we soon forget. A primary relationship involves much more vital risk. Primary relationships are with father or mother, brother or sister, husband or wife, and children. If people primary to us say the same words in the same way as secondary people do, we are either blessed out of our socks or torn to shreds. Primary people have access to us. What they are and what they do define us to ourselves. These are the people on whom we are emotionally dependent. If they don’t express love, we are undone. If a person in a secondary relationship fails us, so what? We can get over it. The same is true if one insults us. But a primary person can cut us to the quick. If a stranger says to me, “I don’t like you”—OK, I’ll get over it. But let Paula say that to me, and without copious help from Jesus, I am not going to get over it. So, to the degree of our involvement, we experience risk and are often hurt. The response to hurt is anger. Anger becomes resentment, then bitterness. The name of that game is hate.

The first thing we need to understand is that without Jesus Christ and His skills of forgiveness, we are not going to stay together. Life is too painful without Him because we enter into too many risks without opportunity for

redress. The second is that old saw, “Marriage is not a bed of roses”— unless we remember that roses have thorns. We need to drop our romantic notions and realize that the beginning of trouble does not signify the end of love.

As married couples are time-exposed to one another, individual masks cannot be kept in place. We begin, whether we want to or not, to penetrate behind each other’s fronts. In diagram two below, the expanding, interpenetrating spiral indicates ever-deeper involvement in one another. Eventually we commence to tap into hidden sore spots. We are land mines waiting to be stepped on. When a hidden habit or wound flares up, we most often strike into a counterbalancing grievance in the other—and the battle is on! The jagged lines between circles represent our arguments.

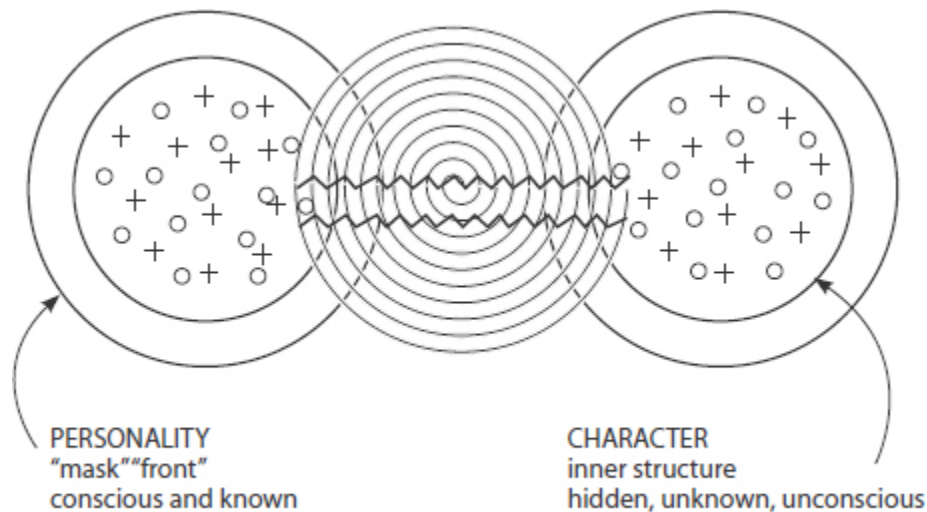


Diagram Two

Married people are bound to disagree. If they are not arguing occasionally, something is wrong. Either they are not facing things, fooling themselves, putting on false faces of peace, being superspook martyr Christians, or they are wrestling things out. Healthy marriages necessitate hassles.

A husband has been at work, putting forth his best to be responsible, kind, and attentive to all. He is poured out and weary. Now he wants to come home to “recollect,” which means to gather his energies, rest himself awhile, and regain his composure. In the vernacular, he needs “to get it all together.” So he sits down in isolation before the TV or buries himself in

the newspaper. That is not really what he needs, but it is what he has chosen. His wife has been at home all day, or among women friends, talking to women and children. A part of her feels unfulfilled, waiting for her husband to come home so they can talk. But he comes home all closed up in himself. All her approaches seem to him to be chitter-chatter, chip, chip, chip, and the war is on.

“Talk to me!”

“I will, but I don’t want to right now.”

“You used to talk to me, but now you never do.”

“Leave me alone a little while, will you?”

“You never wanted to be alone before, and you never yelled at me either. You don’t love me anymore!”

“I do to. And I wasn’t yelling. I just want to be alone.”

“You don’t ever listen to me anymore!” Buckets of tears, and around they go.

The following is a fictitious example we have seen in truth many times. Suppose two people engaged to be married grew up in similar homes. In both, the fathers were drunkards and wife-beaters, and the mothers were naggers. It was always a question whether the fathers were drunkards because the wives were naggers or whether the wives were naggers because the men were drunkards. Whichever, that was the style of life. Now the children of those couples marry. One night the new husband comes home a little tipsy. Suddenly there is exaggerated anger in her, larger than the occasion warrants, and she blows up at him. Equally, there is a surprising fury in him, also more than the occasion warrants. What’s going on?

Most people see the first level. She is afraid he will become a drunkard like her father. He fears she will become a nagger like his mother.

But something far more involved is happening. Each has judged his parents and determined not to live like that. But, “Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; *and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you*” (Matt. 7:1–2, emphasis added). It is an inescapable law that what we have judged *will* come upon us. Without Jesus, the law is unstoppable.

Yet there is another trouble. When these two were children, say only seven, and each father was drunk and each mother nagging, and the mothers were being hit and screaming in anger and terror, both children became angry, terrified, and disillusioned. How does a seven-year-old tell off Papa

or Mama? Or how does he, not yet mature in faith, release a thing to the cross by prayer? What can the children do but push it down? Because the unconscious, like a good computer, never forgets anything, that anger becomes like festering pus. If we multiply this one example by the countless thousands of hurts and frustrations, large and small, that happen to us all even in the best of homes, we can understand why Scripture speaks of our storing up violence (Amos 3:10). We can see why God said that the heart is more “deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9). The heart has become the storage place and festering area of all of our emotional sores. What happens between couples is that the anger, resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness of our youth, actually directed at our parents, siblings, and others, come out against our mates and family—regularly.

Do we see that no marriage has a chance for complete fulfillment and true happiness without the Lord Jesus Christ? Most of us can recollect having seen some seemingly successful marriages outside of Him, but what lies unresolved in the hearts of such couples? And what might they have been *with* Him? Someone has said that marriage is a twenty-four-hour-a-day, 365-days-a-year exercise in the art of forgiveness. How true!

Because of what is in us, we are continually a fight looking for someplace to happen. Seldom are fights “clean,” (i.e., actually concerning what they seem to be about). Most marital battles involve “projection”—problems with parents or others foisted onto the spouse. We fight unseen shadows and work out long forgotten things at each other’s expense.

A young man was raised with a hypochondriac mother. It took a strong woman to get that sick. The boy detested it and resented having to take up the slack and do whatever chores the mother’s supposed illnesses prevented. When he married, if his wife became ill, even running a 103-degree fever, his mind said, “She’s ill. Help her.” But no way could he in fact perform what his mind said. His heart said, “She’s faking it.” Powerful confusing feelings welled up. He found “valid” excuses to be elsewhere, helping someone else.

“The Lord GOD is my strength, and He has made my feet like hinds’ feet, and makes me walk on my high places” (Hab. 3:19). A mountain deer or hind is able to go safely in high places because its rear feet track exactly where the front feet lead. Mountain guides know not to use some horses because they have been around humans too long. Their rear feet, like a puppy running sideways down the street, do not track as they should. Some

mountain trails are so precarious that if the hind feet do not step exactly in the track of the forefeet, horse and rider could plummet to death. Our front feet are our will to be married and the conscious mind's determination to live in Christ with one another. But if the Lord has not brought us to sufficient purification in Him, if He has not ferreted out those sore places in sanctification by His Spirit, our rear feet, the heart and feelings, will not track. Our marriage and family relationships plummet.

It will not do to find another with whom we might supposedly be more compatible. What is in us will soon come out. Therefore, we cannot ascend the high places of successful marriage. Whoever marries takes a "pig in a poke." We have no idea what we are stepping into, either in the other or in ourselves. Until marriage brings it out, we shall not know what is locked up inside. That is the risk we take! Marriage is fraught with surprises.

Our culture has taught us to think we ought to marry someone with whom we are compatible. While some compatibility may help, usually we discover ourselves to be so different we could almost agree with the quipster who said, "About the only truth behind compatibility is that if the husband keeps on bringing home the income, the wife will keep on being 'pattable.'" We attract to us people who are opposite to us, because we need that opposition precisely in order to wrestle with it. Our romantic dream is of a couple walking off into the sunset, living happily ever after. But God designs us so that because of our encounters we will be unable to congratulate ourselves that we are all right, and have to face what is in us. We are lazy and unwilling to see truth. Therefore, God gives us a "beloved enemy." Peace is not always God's design. "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51, KJV).

In all this we are teaching concerning normal people in normal marriages, not the aberrational or psychotic. We write exclusively concerning Christian marriages, not the worldly. Many who are not Christian *seem* to have peaceful, happy marriages. Both the Christian and non-Christian wonder at that. But the wise will understand (Dan. 12:10). God is not afraid to embarrass His own: "He hastens and chastens His will to make known."¹ Because they are His and have given their wills to Him, He can bring His sword to pierce and stir until they have to confess the sin-filled character that none of us otherwise want to admit is there. An old proverb says, "If others about you are losing their heads and you are keeping yours, perhaps you just don't understand the problem."

The existence of problems and fusses is not itself evil. What is worse is to go through life half-dead, never having dealt with the iniquity of the heart. “And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). Both outsiders and insiders often fail to comprehend that Christians’ wrestling leads to a peace that passes understanding. “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11).

This says something unequivocal about the modern delusion that we can live with someone awhile before marriage in order to find out if it will work. If a couple is truly married, they begin to work out their hassles in Christ. The modern confusion is hedonism: “If it’s still pleasurable, it’s still working. If pain starts, it isn’t working, so we must not be in love anymore.” To a Christian, that’s sheer rot. True marriage is not all battles, but at the onset, there is a healthy kind of foment that is unavoidable. Therefore, to think that the beginning of struggle signifies the end is exactly backward. It actually signifies entrance into the effort to truly become one.

What marriage does give is the security needed in order to face what is in our hearts. Suppose that everyone in the church and in society could see our flaws, standing out like splotches of blood on a white wall. What if all our fractures made themselves evident on the job in front of the boss? How long would we keep our job? How many friends would stick it out with us? How many would turn out to be fair-weather friends? But in Christ our spouse is the one person who will see what is in us and still choose to love us! Marriage is a covenant relationship, “for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.” “The *heart* of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain” (Prov. 31:11, emphasis added). All the rest of the church may see my faults—they may gossip, get disgruntled, flee, persecute, whatever—but Paula will be there, scolding maybe, but choosing me, staying right there, giving herself to me by the grace of God in Christ. That is security. Security comes first from the Lord who will never abandon, but secondarily and humanly in the spouse whom He causes to continue to choose us.

Psychologically that security produces strength of spirit. If we obtain real strength inwardly, we are empowered. We can say no. Somebody says, “Let’s go have a drink,” and we know that would mean staying out late. The pressure of the gang is there, but we can say no. Lacking strength of spirit,

we can't resist the temptation. A teenage gang says, "Let's go smoke pot." A youth with strength of spirit can say no. Whether he says yes or no, he makes his decision out of his own center. Without strength of spirit, behavior is compulsive. There is no freedom; the person is controlled exteriorly, and every temptation pulls him down. A husband who has strength of spirit can say, "Forgive me" (another way to say it is that he has "the grace of God flowing in his life"). A spouse who does not have the grace that strength of spirit provides cannot sincerely apologize. All too often, women say to us, "My husband can never say he is sorry."

We give each other strength to be, through the nurture of love. The Bible calls it "power." "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12, KJV). Grace, self-control, the ability to deny self, to be unselfish, that power to live our faith, that "something" is what we are to nurture in each other. That power comes from God Himself but also through each other. We give to one another not only the strength to overcome but also the strength to receive change. God provides that strength as we forgive and cherish, touch and love, share and talk. God's itinerary for marriage is that as we hurtle into x after x of trouble pictured in diagram three below, His grace will overcome and transform.

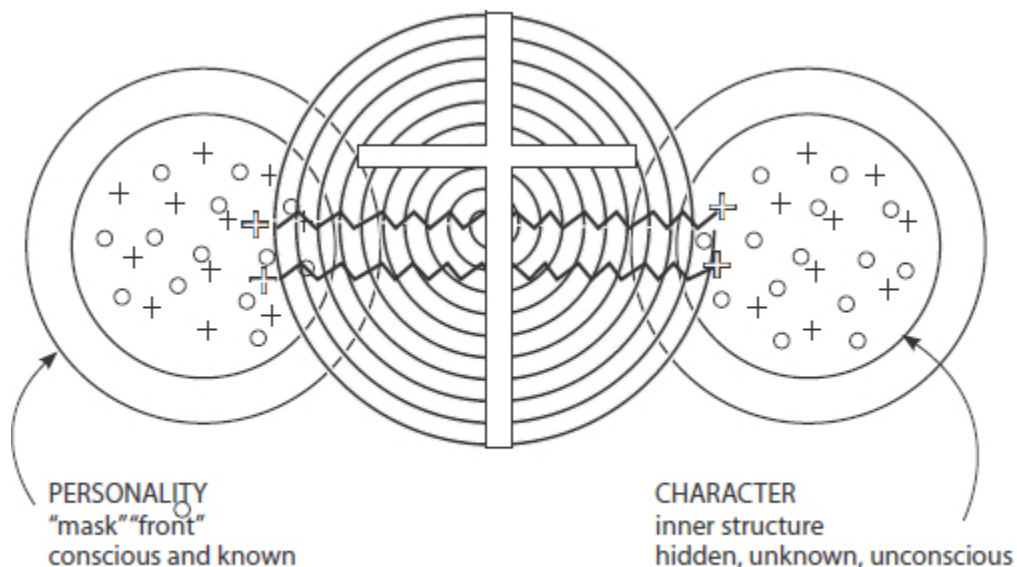


Diagram Three

SILENT DIVORCE

Changing is painful. Staying open to each other is both blessing and trauma. If we would remain alive and enjoy life, we need to keep growing and changing. The final product of life in Christ in marriage should be that each of our sore spots is transformed into a cross of glory. (One can see that what we say of marriage ought also to be seen in lesser degree in all relationships —pastor and church, teacher and class, foreman and workers, friendships, etc.) But because of immature reactions to hurt, many couples stop the process. They erect barriers. Consciously or unconsciously they agree to know each other only to a point. Now they will have a secret life apart from each other. In so doing, they have unknowingly opted for silent divorce. Many seemingly successful couples are actually entrenched in silent divorce. Sometimes couples who are too perceptive to hide and too fiery in their natures conclude their relationship in legal divorce.

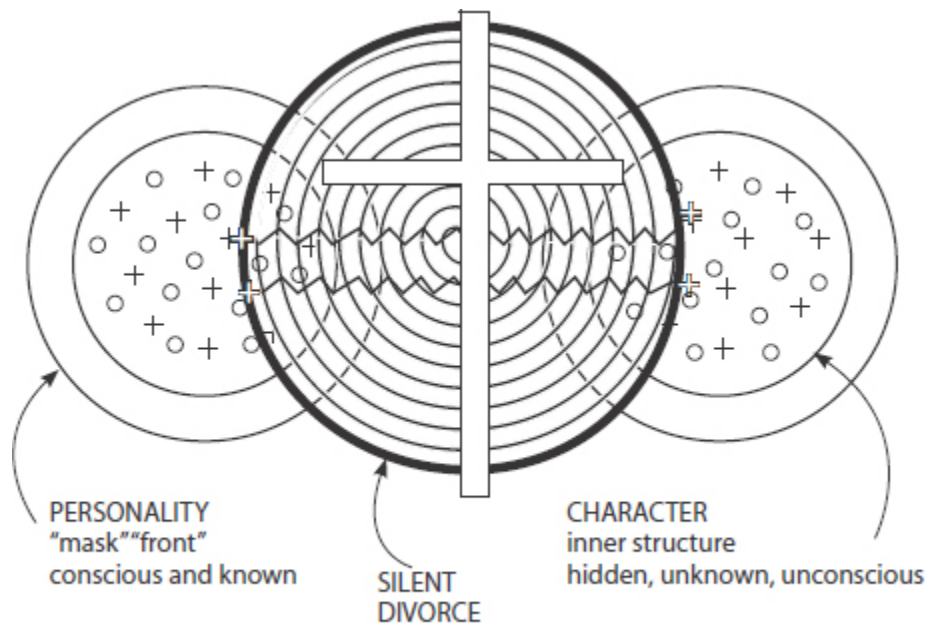


Diagram Four

Couples normally fall in and out of silent divorce. Silent divorce can be recognized easily. Before barriers come up (represented by the heavy line in the diagram), a husband may have poker buddies or golf or business friends, but he does not look for excuses to spend too much time with them. He

wants to be with his wife. He tells her, but not his buddies, all his hurts and sorrows as well as his successes. The same for his wife with her friends. The couple finds nourishment in each other. They have no secrets. Bridges of sharing are in place, and they find joy in meeting. Life is a mutually shared banquet, whether of grief or happiness. Unity has enabled an interflow of spirit to spirit in heart to heart and mind to mind.

After silent divorce barriers come up, the husband and wife find excuses to spend more time with their own individual friends. Communication bridges are down. The spouse now becomes the last person the other would tell what really counts in his or her life. That is like handing the devil a sword and saying, "Here is where you shove it in to the hilt and twist." If anyone can cut to the quick, a spouse can. Therefore, each one sits in pockets of loneliness, making up speeches.

Silent divorce is deadly. Not only does it stop God's process of making us whole, but it also makes our children feel the chill. They ache for us. Tranquility is not always a sign of happiness or God's favor. It may only mean that the marriage is making an outward show while inwardly dying. We know a couple who never had a fight for thirty-two years, and without a fight, they divorced. They had settled nothing. Their marriage was dead. Their peace had been only an armed truce.

FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT

Each time we discern silent divorce, we need to break out. Normally we cannot do this unless we talk things out. Most likely we will have to quarrel, and we need to know how to have a good fight. There are good fights and bad fights. A bad fight leaves us sitting in a cave of hurt, gnawing old bones. After a good fight, we may find ourselves tired, worn out, and hurt, but sweetly so, and more in appreciation of our spouse. Maybe for the first time we have understood the other *from within*. We understand how and what the other feels, and what makes the spouse tick. We respect the other more. We feel good about the other one, and we want to make love.

Therefore, let us present some guidelines for good fights:

1. Be honest.

We do *not* mean be perfectly honest about the other guy's faults. We mean be self-honest. Be willing to admit that you may be at fault. Have the humility to listen. The striking thing is that the other will often point out some flaw in what we thought was our strength. Where we least expect it the knife comes—and most often rightly so. Where we thought we were doing so well and were proud of ourselves and wanted a compliment is likely to be where we are attacked. Why? Because normally behind our strong areas there lie hidden weaknesses. Pride has crept in, covering hidden false motivations.

So a wife may set a beautiful table, prepare a delicious meal, dress well, and want a compliment, but the husband may be turned off by some kind of wrong, covert motivation. She may not understand that some clues in her manner make it difficult for him to respond.

A man may be a good driver and want a compliment for it. But some kind of arrogance, an inner demand upon the other, pride, or insensitivity may tempt his wife to attack him right at the point of his being a good driver.

We could all list hundreds of examples. We need to pray for the kind of humility that can hear the true content behind the surface context.

Couples need to know the difference between context and content. Context is the freight train that carries the cargo of content, the true meaning. The words of a discussion may be all about the children, business, dress, manners, or anything at all. But the real meaning may be something else. It is quite revealing sometimes when counselors or prayer ministers bring a quarreling couple together and stop them now and then to say, "Do you hear what he is really saying?" Frequently, for example, a wife responds, "Yes, he was complaining about the way I look!" Whereas in reality the husband was trying to give a compliment to encourage her to spend some money for herself because she has been too self-effacing. Her insecurity caused her to miss the real content, which was an attempt to help her find and express her own sense of beauty. It takes practice, skill, and humility in the Holy Spirit not to become too distracted by context to hear real content. It is for this reason that couples many times need to talk in the presence of detached friends or wise counselors or prayer ministers who can help them to hear the true content behind what they are saying.

We need to take it on faith that the spouse may be quite accurate in assessing us, even if we can't see one iota of truth in the charge against us.

Probably we are merely blind. We have found that unless protectionism clouds the view, couples usually tell each other off fairly accurately. So listen! “He who hates reproof will die” (Prov. 15:10). Defensiveness reveals a striking, religious spirit rather than Christian grace. “He who corrects a scoffer gets dishonor for himself.... Reprove a wise man, and he will love you” (Prov. 9:7–8). There is nothing so valuable as the scolding of a spouse. One of the greatest tragedies behind the recent overemphasis on submission was the silencing of the counterbalancing words of wisdom that could have come from women of the Lord. “She does him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:12). A husband who has learned to trust the truth of the Lord’s Word will also learn to trust God through his wife and will treasure her ability to scold him appropriately. How greatly we need to hear and value what we say to each other, even when the words seem wide of the mark. If we will say to the Lord, “Show me where and how this really applies,” and listen again, the Lord can help us to speak truth to one another. “But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15).

If we will look behind our strengths, we will find our weaknesses. And if we will look into our weaknesses, we may find some strengths. I remember how John was courageously foolhardy. He would always attack a problem head-on, jump into everything with both feet, and take every dare. It took awhile for him to realize, at my insistence, that that wasn’t really courage but overcompensation for fear. To be attacked at the point of courage seemed ridiculous. It required the grace of the Lord for John to hear behind the context the true calling of the Lord’s words through me. The same was true of John’s admonitions toward me. I was set to perform and needed to be affirmed. It took many hassles and the grace of the Lord for me to hear behind criticism the affirmations that were really there.

Often rich truth arrives in beggars’ clothing. A confused thought many times masks a gem of truth. Christians should pray for a teachable spirit to recognize truth behind what is said. Real listening is the most difficult art in the world precisely because it calls for the most complete and constant death of self. However, some people take home guilt when they should not. They are too willing to hear criticism even when it is inappropriate. The same admonition applies nevertheless; taking home too much criticism is just as much a flaw in the self as refusing to hear. True listening is the art of discerning by the Holy Spirit what is true for us and what the other truly

intends. “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb. 5:14). Practicing to hear humbly with those closest to us develops faculties of discernment that enable us to meet life for Christ in the world.

2. Never try to hurt.

You will do enough without trying. If you try to hurt, if you enjoy that malicious art of the squelch, you sorely tempt your spouse to put up walls. No one can take constant insult. We are too vulnerable in marriage to withstand continual, purposeful wounding. Never try to get even. Respect, admiration, and trust must abide in a marriage. Insults destroy the capacity to cherish and keep respect alive. Be willing to quit while you’re *behind*. Let the other have the last word. Find ways to admire and respect the other even while disagreeing. Scripture never anywhere says, “Unbridle your tongue.” It does say, “If your brother sins, rebuke him” (Luke 17:3), but the counterbalancing words are, “and if he repents, forgive him,” and “Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one *in a spirit of gentleness*; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted” (Gal. 6:1, emphasis added). Moses, when challenged, fell on his face in prayer (Num. 16:4); he had become the meekest of men on Earth (Num. 12:3). Meekness is not weakness; it is such personal awareness of sin as to make one unwilling to attempt whatever could hurt another or override another’s free will. The best way to destroy a marriage is to be sure to win every argument. “The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out” (Prov. 17:14). Even if you are absolutely sure that what you want to say is right and true, say it only if the Holy Spirit prompts it in love for the other’s welfare.

Both of our parents carefully trained us as children never to try to insult. How grateful we are for such instruction (accomplished as much by their lives as by words). By the grace of God, in fifty-seven years of marriage, neither of us has ever hurled a word with malicious intent to wound. I remember vividly my mother’s words: “No man who ever hits a woman is a man at all.” Nothing is so wounding to me while ministering as to hear of a husband beating a wife. I say this both for her sake and for his. Violence should have no place whatsoever in a Christian home.

Hurt and the desire to hurt are more easily overcome if we remember at all times that we are loved in the Lord Jesus Christ, by Him and by each other.

We are tripartite creatures—body, soul, and spirit. In the level of our spirits the Lord Jesus Christ resides in each of us. In heart and mind and therefore also in body we may become confused and blocked, but not in spirit. Couples need to maintain faith that no matter how confused or incapable they become in heart and mind, they never cease to love one another. We need to believe always that in the other's spirit, no matter what actions seem to say otherwise, the other one loves us. It is on that basis that we trust and admire and respect the other. We put no trust in the flesh. We honor the life of Christ in the other.

3. When desire to hurt rises up, stop awhile.

Go apart if necessary. Give yourself and the other a chance to regain balance and perspective. You may say, "I need to take a breather." We do not mean to give anyone a license to cop out. You must be willing to come back to finish it. We mean, "Don't fire off half-cocked." Take time to put yourself together and regain your perspective. If listening to music does it, turn on the stereo. If chopping wood releases the anger, chop wood. You may live in a desert, but at least you're going to have marital victory. Whatever it takes, do it. The best recourse is prayer. Let Jesus restore your self-control and help you see each other clearly again. For it is as though we have put on colored glasses. Everything the other does or says is now seen in that coloration. Little children lose sight of all the world and can only experience the hunger or pain that grips them in the present moment. The tensions from arguments can throw us into a regression to childishness. In such cases the problems or flaws or sins we think we see in our spouse are like a drop of dye, discoloring the whole vessel. We need to regain our perspective, and that is why we need to retreat from the melee. So let Jesus Christ cleanse the heart of bitterness and poison so that we can see again the blessed totality of our spouse and life together.

We need to walk in the other person's moccasins awhile. We should turn the argument around, seeing it from the other person's point of view to try to see what the other was thinking and feeling, given the best plausible motives, not the worst. If we can truly get inside the other, we can return

and say, “Honey, I can see my fault in the matter now.” By doing so, we free our spouse to more easily do the same.

4. Always say those three important little words: “I forgive you.”

Suppose the husband does something wrong. He comes to his wife and says, “Honey, I am sorry.” One of the greatest tragedies is that most couples do not know how to respond. Most say, “Oh, that’s OK.” Or, “Oh, that’s all right.” It is *not* OK! It is *not* all right! To say that it is OK is both a lie and an insult. Until the cross of Christ cleanses, there is no OK-ness, no matter what we think or feel. If John does something to hurt me and comes to say, “I’m sorry,” and I say, “No matter,” that tells John he is unimportant, that he couldn’t hurt me if he tried. John needs to be important enough to me that what he does *can* hurt me.

For the sake of being “nice,” many couples wreck their marriages. Not wanting to inflict hurt, they fear to speak truth. But truth is never destructive when the heart is right. “Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy” (Prov. 27:5–6, RSV). Only if couples recognize their guilt can their grievances arrive at the cross. They must learn the art of speaking the truth in kindness. It is one art to hear, but a more important one is to learn how to say hard words so compassionately that the other welcomes it and thanks you. “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11, NIV). Such apples were actually a fruit used to refresh welcome travelers. Truth aptly spoken refreshes. Potential arguments become embraces when kind words find their way to the heart. “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable, but the mouth of fools spouts folly.... A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit” (Prov. 15:1–2, 4). Sometimes we must say the truth, knowing it will hurt, but our intent should be to comfort and heal. “Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts” (Prov. 20:30, RSV).

Though we should and sometimes do say those all-important words, “I forgive you,” it is not easy to accomplish forgiveness. We cannot make the heart perform what the lips say. Only the Lord Jesus Christ can reach and transform the heart. We may say we forgive, but a week later when our spouse repeats the offense, we shout, “You’ve done it *again!* You *always...*!” One way or another we discover that what we said hasn’t

happened. “Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). A couple who is not practiced in prayer have little chance to apply the power of the cross to the depths of their hearts. We will teach more fully about forgiveness in chapter 19. Suffice it to say here that the ability to completely forgive is perhaps the most needful skill requiring restoration in family life today.

THE THREE-LEGGED STOOL

There are three legs to the stool of marriage: one, communication; two, prayer; three, sex. I used to milk a cow, sitting on a three-legged stool on soft earth. I can tell you by sad experience that if one leg goes down, the others will also, no matter how good they may be. I’ve been in the milk under the cow more times than I could say! It matters little whether communication, prayer, or sex fails first; the others will soon follow. As a man can use his own legs for the third leg of the stool, so he can strain to keep the marriage going. But sooner or later the other two will have become so eroded that the whole marriage sits hard in the dust. Some find it difficult to think of prayer or sex as interrelated. But Christians find that the more their spirits are refreshed in prayer and informed by sharing, the more glorious the act of sex becomes.

Communication does not mean talk *at* each other. People can talk at each other a mile a minute while erecting walls between them, with never a moment of true communication. Real communication happens when empathy from spirit to spirit and heart to heart enables mind-to-mind comprehension.

Prayer is not talking *at* God but meeting *with* Him. Much of prayer is not talk at all. Prayer happens by the same kind of empathic exchange that enables communication between humans. We need to meet God spirit to Spirit, and then to speak with Him in real ways. What we need is honesty with God. Here is dishonest prayer: “Lord, You know that I love the wife You gave me. You know that she is the most beautiful and most wonderful of women. But why don’t You just make her do this thing or that?” Honest prayer is, “Lord, I’m mad at her. I’d like to belt her. Please come in and take this corruption out of my soul, that I may be able to forgive her. And please forgive me.”

Husband and wife may have copious quantities of sex and miss true quality. True sex is meeting, union, sharing, embracing, nurturing—complete being to complete being. Obviously such cannot happen where prayer and talk have not prepared the lovers.

These three—communication, prayer, and sex—influence each other. The better our interpersonal communication, the better our prayer and sex life. The converse is true as well. The better our sex life, the more easily and effectively we pray and communicate. Prayer, aloud and together, humbles and opens our hearts to each other, improving freedom of communication and uniting our spirits for sex. Lack of communication shuts down sex. The wife feels used, not met and cherished. The husband feels isolated and unfed. Both end up in self-martyring pity parties.

Marriage is a pilgrimage from individual self-centeredness to everfuller corporate life. The essence of marriage is laying down one's life for the other, not in self-martyring but in the joy of service. Fifty-fifty is a formula for divorce. One hundred percent given for the other is an equation for blessedness. A man who still thinks it's *his* job and *his* money is not yet married, no matter how long ago the wedding service. It's *our* job, whoever does it; it's *our* money, whoever brings it home. Not my children but *ours*. Not *my* house but *ours*. Corporate life is the sign of maturity. A child is sweet but totally self-centered. An infant interrupts for his own needs in the midst of any party or worship service. He has no awareness of the needs of others and therefore no consideration for them. As Paul says, this is appropriate for an infant: "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child..." But marriage is for grown-ups: "When I became a man, I did away with childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). Maturity demands death of self in service to others and therefore brings real life. "Whoever seeks to keep his life shall lose it, and whoever loses his life shall preserve it" (Luke 17:33). We can measure our distance from real life in Jesus by the degree of our regression into selfish thoughts and demands. Conversely, proximity to Jesus is revealed by its fruit in the ease of our giving and sharing.

If a couple desires not to become delimited to the confusions of the moment, they will need a goal that transcends the years. Jesus warned not to take thought or be anxious for the morrow (Matt. 6:31–34), but He Himself met on the mountaintop with Elijah and Moses to speak of how He was to accomplish the cross (Matt. 17:2–3; Mark 9:2–4). He did not inveigh

against planning the future but against succumbing to the anxieties that are born of fear and distrust. Couples who do not have goals cannot escape self-centeredness. Paradoxically, only those who have a plan for the future are free to live in the moment.

Some couples confuse ambitions with goals. An ambition is a selfish desire for gain or glory. We use the word *calling* to describe God's purposes for a couple other than selfish matters. A calling draws and empowers sharing; an ambition creates selfish striving.

In seminary I studied group dynamics. There we discovered that if a number of individuals sat down and said, "Let's become a group," we were soon at each other's throats. We never became a group. But if we were given an important task to do, we soon found ourselves becoming a group, losing our selfish desires in the joy of doing something together. Unity was a by-product of the struggle for the task.

Many couples have shattered their marriages simply by trying to be married without discovering their common calling. We know a couple who said, "We will raise good children." They were successful at it; they raised good children. But when the last child left the home, they discovered they didn't like each other anymore, and so they divorced. They had never discovered a common calling, only an ambition. A calling outlasts life, is larger than can be accomplished by the couple alone, and calls forth all the latent energies of both partners. We knew a couple who wanted to create a successful business. They were enthused to sacrifice and work hand in hand until the moment of success. Now they are divorced. That dream was incapable of overcoming selfish glory seeking.

If a man sees that his wife's desires never really get beyond the confines of her own struggle for fulfillment, even in the noble aspirations of raising children, after a while he can no longer pour all he is into that. It is like pouring the glory of the Jordan into the Dead Sea. If a wife sees that her husband's energies, however seemly spent for others, are really only to enhance his own self-image, after a while she can no longer give all she is into that. We need to be Seas of Galilee, refreshed by cool waters from the mountains of prayer, sustaining the life of our family, and poured out for the life of the valley below.

I have a tendency to be engrossed in my work, insensitive to my family, and sometimes cross and tired. Before we were given to the Lord so completely as a team for the common goal of serving, Paula's ability to

forgive and embrace was hampered by the fact that my tiredness was born of striving for my own personal vainglory. But now that we are in harness together, and continue to die to vainglory by counting even our common goal as loss for Christ (Phil. 3:7), forgiveness is borne upon wings of mutual respect and admiration. Our goal enables us to see the life of Christ at work in each other and increasingly prevents us from becoming confined to this moment.

The only goal that truly outlasts life is to be given to the Lord Jesus Christ for service. A couple who still goes to church to *get* something has not yet discovered the secret of life. "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (Rom. 12:1). True worship and the secret of life are one and the same, to be given upon the altar of life for others. A couple so given is founded upon the rock who is Jesus, and the floods of great waters shall not reach them (Ps. 32:6). It is not enough to have a Savior. That alone does not take away self-centeredness. A family needs to be given into His lordship, in which His headship is not words only but also facts, lived moment by moment, day after day.

4



UNDERSTANDING MALE AND FEMALE

And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

—GENESIS 1:27

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT PREREQUISITE TO RESTORING the Christian family is communication. People talk but cannot hear, and sometimes they hear somewhere deep in the heart but fail to find words that adequately convey the heart's meaning. As a prophet cannot speak for God unless he truly hears, neither can a couple meaningfully serve each other's needs unless they can accurately hear one another. Perhaps the most difficult task we have in marriage is to learn how to decipher the three levels of meaning in what we say. We speak with the mind, with the heart, and with the spirit. The spirit speaks from embrace, desire, or loneliness, but it must express itself outwardly through the body, through our feelings and the conscious mind. The heart often warps and twists what comes from the spirit, and the mind is servant to both. The mind thinks it is objective, but any counselor can testify to countless instances in which counselees have come to discover that their conscious minds had all along been serving hidden motives. A spouse must learn to read the other's spirit, hear the heart, and weigh what the mind says accordingly. Continual prayer aloud together makes possible a flow of spirit to spirit that enables each spouse to read the heart and comprehend the mind of the other.

It can be extremely difficult to really hear what another says. For example, suppose a husband walks across a floor his wife has recently scrubbed. She exclaims, "Just look! Mud all over my clean floor!"

Usually a husband will say, “Sorry, I didn’t notice.”

The wife becomes even more upset because he didn’t notice and says something like, “What’s the matter—are you blind?” She really means, “That’s the trouble; you didn’t notice.”

The typical husband answers, “Well, you married me, and if you don’t like it, you can just lump it!”

Neither heard the other. What her entire being actually broadcasts is, “Everything I do is tedious! I do the scrubbing all the time and people don’t notice me. I need attention. I need you to see that I’m worth something. I need a compliment.” If she were to say, “Give me a compliment,” that would defeat the virtue if he did respond. She could say, “I need to be hugged,” but while that is sometimes helpful, there are also times when if it is asked for, it is spoiled because she needs to feel chosen and sought after without asking. The man in our example missed the content and answered only the context. If he says as some do, “Why is it so important?” or “I’ll scrub it up again” or even if he says, “I am sorry; I will clean it up,” he has still missed the point. He failed to read and respond to her heart.

Our Lord has given us in the Word of God what is necessary to our faith and salvation, but He did not attempt to cover every exigency of life. The Word of God is applicable to every area of life, but some things must be seen by inference. Except for a few verses in Proverbs, the Bible exhorts us to speak to each other but contains little instruction concerning how to do so. A strong inference can be drawn, however, from Colossians 3:4–11:

When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him—a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all.

Necessary to communication is putting aside all the things of our carnal character, the self-centered traits and “practices” that keep us from hearing each other. Indeed it is necessary to put aside those things because they cause us to “lie to one another.” As children, as we grew in body we also

developed a mental screen, a way of interpreting whatever approaches us. That screen is a part of the carnal character with its practices. If we do not put it off, we will see everything around us through those dark glasses.

Most people think the first function of the mind is to regulate, reason, or decipher. That is not so. The first function of the mind is to block out! Even as you read this page, multitudinous signals approach your brain simultaneously. The ears catch other sounds inside and outside the room. The seat sends messages of comfort or distress. The feet say, "I'm cold," or "Jiggle me; the leg's nerves are going dead." Light streams from a bulb or the sun. Clothes may bind or pinch or feel good somewhere on the body. From deep inside, the inner being may be sending worry signals about some relative you heard about yesterday. Silence may nag at your mind until you suddenly think, "Oh, now what are the children into?" The ringing of the phone may break into your consciousness.

If the mind does not screen the hundreds of simultaneous stimuli, acting upon some of them without conscious awareness, blocking out some totally, and deciding from some predetermined priority which stimuli to admit to the conscious mind, we would become overstimulated into chaos! We would hop onto our horses and ride off in all directions at once! Unfortunately, the programming of our minds as to which signals to admit and how to interpret them was built before our conversion. But as soon as we have received our redemption in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the mind of Christ in our spirits (1 Cor. 2:16). That mind must wrestle against the stubborn mind of our yet unmortified flesh.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so.

—ROMANS 8:5–7

The work of the Holy Spirit throughout our life in Christ is to haul down every proud imagination and take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). Until that reformation, our mind retains its programming to screen and decipher according to our selfish and self-centered ways. Therefore, we do not see the reality of the other or hear what is truly being said. Again and again Jesus said to the disciples, "Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? Having eyes, do you not see?"

And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember..." (Mark 8:17–18). The trouble is that we *do* remember—the old way rather than the new.

This does not mean we need be discouraged. Our ability to hear grows in direct ratio to our sanctification. As it took Paul fourteen years before he was ready to be the Lord's apostle (Gal. 2:1), so it normally will take years of daily death and rebirth before our eyes and ears see and hear what is real between us. As there are not instant saints, neither is there instant constancy in communications. But we need to perceive that communication is a vital area demanding study and work. To take communication for granted is to invite disaster. Hearts want to remain in loving embrace, but continual misunderstanding destroys. "A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit" (Prov. 15:4, RSV).

The answer is not only to bring death to the old programming, but also to "put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ *rule in* your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly *dwell within* you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do *in word* or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:12–17, emphasis added). No better advice could be given concerning communication, because there must be death in Jesus Christ to our impetuous, unconscious demands, but more importantly imputation of His life, if we would not judge by what our eyes see or decide by what our ears hear (Isa. 11:3).

UNDERSTANDING MALE AND FEMALE IN MARRIAGE

How does this all apply to marriage? To understand that, we need to understand how we are made as men and women. Genesis 1:27 says, "And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." Since both men and women are created

in His image, God must have attributes that are analogous to both genders. “All the fulness of the Deity” dwells in Jesus (Col. 2:9), and He is the “exact representation of [God’s] nature” (Heb. 1:3). Therefore, it follows that Jesus likewise has attributes of both genders. And that we, whose humanity Jesus shares and who are created in God’s image, must therefore have attributes of both genders in each of us. That is not to say that men and women have the attributes of both genders in equal measure, but they do reflect both aspects of His person.

From many scriptures and from simple observation, it is clear that men and women share aspects of their respective natures. Maleness entails headship, for the husband is head of the wife, not vice versa (Eph. 5:23). Thus, in order to express their maleness, men must take initiative. Yet women are also called to take initiative, and many are called to be leaders, as we see in the Bible with Miriam and Deborah. Maleness entails the imparting of identity, for it was Adam, not Eve, who named all the animals (Gen. 2:19), and Adam named Eve as well (Gen. 3:20). And it was Jacob, not Rachel, Leah, or any of his other wives, who blessed his sons and told them who they were: “You are a lion’s cub, O Judah... Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns. Joseph is a fruitful vine” (Gen. 49:9, 21–22, NIV). Yet women are also capable of telling others who they are, as when Elizabeth named her son John (Luke 1:60). Lest he lose his grip on leadership, a man in headship must keep perspective when everyone else falls apart emotionally. Even while enduring the agony of the cross, Jesus was able to maintain composure and see to it that His mother would have a home with His disciple John (John 19:26–27). Yet women as well are capable of remaining calm in the face of turmoil, such as Esther who put her own life in peril, daring to approach King Xerxes to plead for the lives of her people, the Israelites (Esther 7:2–4).

Femaleness entails the ability to call into intimacy, for Eve was made from Adam’s rib (Gen. 2:21); a wife surrounds and protects her husband’s heart. Yet men also call others into intimacy, as did John in 1 John: “Beloved, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7). A wife is her husband’s helpmate (Gen. 2:18), and as such comes alongside her husband and helps him keep alive the emotions he must momentarily put on hold while guiding his family through the storms of life. Yet many men as well can remind others to keep their feelings alive, as David did by leaving so many deeply emotional psalms that men can pray. Women are under their

husbands' headship, which entails the ability to receive and respond to another's initiative. Yet every man is also under someone's leadership and is called to be likewise responsive.

Male and female each have a God-given role in marriage. Yet in their common humanity, they share traits and resultant impulses that enable them to fulfill their common calling. That sets up contradictory tensions that are sometimes hard to reconcile. For instance, suppose a man at work becomes furious at his boss and wants to tell him off. That impulse originates in a female desire to keep the heart in touch with its own feelings. But the male desire to keep perspective says, "Cool it, buddy. You want to keep your job." Or suppose the wife wants to give her husband a hug and a kiss, or the opposite, a scolding, but they are in public. Christian principles say, "Don't embarrass him in public." Often our maleness must restrain female impulses. A husband may come home desiring to romp with the children. He wants to hug and bounce them on his lap, tease and play with them. The wife greets him with, "The kids have been mean all day. You need to discipline them." By principle he must back her up, but his feelings don't want to. One definition of maturity is that we learn how to express both sides of our nature without falling off into imbalance.

We have all observed the type of man who occasionally loses control, yells at people, shouts obscenities, and makes accusations he doesn't mean in his right mind. He has for the moment lost the virtue of his maleness and fallen into the worst elements of the female side. One can become captive to the extreme of either pole.

MALE/FEMALE IMBALANCES

A number of years ago, I (John) worked at Midway Airport, Chicago, in charge of loading and unloading all Delta C and S planes at night. In those days, radar procedures were not as highly developed as they are now. When fog and clouds prevented landing, planes were held in pattern, and when the skies lifted, there would be eight to ten planes landing on the ramp one after another. As foreman, seeing what was coming, I would call my boss for authority to call in more men. He would answer, "You've got ten bodies. Ain't that enough?" or "You've got ten units. Can't you do your job?" I never had ten *men* or ten *people*. The boss couldn't think in those terms. He

was off balance, inhuman, trapped in the worst side of maleness in his being.

Remember *Bonanza*? Hoss was the type of guy who could express his feelings as easily as a woman. But he was so big—who was going to bother him? Little Joe had all the same feelings but had to fight like a bantam rooster, defending his manhood. Many of us saw the movie *Doctor Zhivago*, in which the Russian nation was crushing the masses forward. Maleness, off balance, had created the idea of communism, the total corporate man. The masses were to be type-stamped into perfection, thus into the boredom of sameness. Dr. Zhivago was a doctor who lived his feelings, had a romance, and wrote poetry. The message of the movie was that he became the people's hero because he kept their hearts alive for them.

In the Second World War, the Nazis became obsessed by the vision of the Third Reich. They came to think that all feeling was weakness. They would build the disciplined, structured, authoritative superman. Part of the training of an SS officer was that he was given a puppy and told to train the dog while he was himself being instructed. The graduation test was the command, "Strangle your dog instantly." If the trainee could not choke his dog to death without showing feeling, he had flunked the course, for he had failed to kill his feelings. When the Nazis suppressed the female side, they slew the conscience. Having silenced conscience, they became as prophesied, "...unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good" (2 Tim. 3:3). Without compunction they could cut women open and experiment with their organs, practice eugenics without regard to marital vows, and murder six million Jews while seemingly feeling nothing. Fortunately, that condition was not true of all the German people, but only of those Nazis who had succeeded in the process of entrapping themselves in their off-balance male side. St. Paul says of such people, "Some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith" (1 Tim. 1:19). The Nazis made shipwreck not only of their faith but also of an entire generation.

As maleness without femaleness becomes brutal and brittle, so femaleness without maleness becomes flowery and frilly. We have all observed women who wear elaborately feminine clothing and excessive cosmetics, who exhibit extreme sensitivity and sweetness over concerned manners. To a request they may answer, "Oh, I couldn't do that," accompanied by fluttering eyelids and a hand over the chest. Such a woman

has fled into off-balance femaleness. She needs more structure, logic, principle, and authority. On the other hand, there is the woman who bosses the woman's aid society, the church, the minister, her husband, and anybody else within range. She needs to come into balance.

Understanding imbalances may help us to become more compassionate toward effeminate males. The man who walks with a woman's swing to his hips, extends his fingers daintily, and speaks with all the inflections of a woman may simply be captive to the female side of his being. He may have possessed good sensitivities as a child. Perhaps he was raised by women, or the father and the world of men appeared too brutal for his gentle nature. Or perhaps he was gifted with the fine intuitiveness of an artist. For one reason or another, he finds male expressions of our culture inappropriate and grinding to his nature. Finding no way to express the male side, he becomes confined to the female side of his nature. Effeminacy is an imbalance that can be overcome by counseling, prayer, and training in the understanding that no trait God has placed in a man is inherently at odds with manhood. Deep sensitivity can be used to enhance initiative and headship. Effeminacy is *not* coterminous with homosexuality. The effeminate may be passionate lovers, in no way homosexual.

Imbalance prevents abundant life. Those who are bound in off-balance maleness have little freedom to enjoy life. Paula and I attended a hilarious play with an imprisoned friend. Our friend's wife and the two of us laughed so uproariously we were holding our sides in pain while trying to keep from falling off our chairs. Our friend occasionally emitted a half chuckle, much like a man who fails to suppress a burp. He would have suppressed even that if he could. A man may become a total cool head and miss everything! There is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance" (Eccles. 3:4). Our Western society has become aggressive, thrusting, dominating, and materialistic. It will not tolerate the development of both sides of our being as we mature.¹ We are pushed off balance.

SOCIETY PUSHES US OFF BALANCE

A boy may be able to let feelings live; he may have a strong and active female side. But if he lets his feelings show in the midst of the gang, his peers scoff and taunt as though he has done something wrong: "Sissy! Boys

don't cry!" Or if a lad happens to be a submissive student, likes his teacher, and enjoys doing well in school, frequently he is subjected to, "Teacher's pet! Goodygoody!" He is not allowed to manifest normal feelings or submissiveness because "guys aren't like that." What does a boy do? He must learn to run counter to his nature to get in with the gang. Feelings, which should be a blessing to him, become his enemy. He learns to choke them down and prevent them until he can and does often become so out of touch with himself he can no longer decipher what he truly does feel. Teenagers often still entertain genuine childlike emotions of delight, but if they discover for example a gloriously beautiful flower, a girl can exclaim effusively, "Oh, isn't that lovely?" But can you imagine a football jock on his knees above a flower saying, "Oh, isn't that lovely?" Society will not let him do that. Perhaps it was totally unconscious, but we believe male hippies chose to wear long flowing hair, headbands, beads, and bright colors because they felt our culture denied them half of their being. They were saying in effect, "I *am* going to express the female side of my nature."

On the other hand, society doesn't permit a woman to become a whole person either. Two fellows can stand shoulder to shoulder, tell each other off, slap each other on the back, and go have a beer. Did you ever see two women who could do that? They are not as protected by the dispassionateness of logic and authority. Being too much in off-balance femaleness, what happens most often is that they begin to chip at each other emotionally, and soon they are in a catfight. Men can take out their aggression in a football or basketball game or some other sport. The harder they hit, the better they like it, and come home all roughed up, laughing, bruised, and happy. Usually, women are not allowed to do that. Physically, they might injure delicate organs. Our definitions of what is "ladylike" not only prevent open expressions, but often they also prevent needful and appropriate, frank and loving verbal confrontations. So, where do women take out their aggressions? On their husbands! Society permits too few ways for a growing girl to develop the male side of her being. Therefore, when she as a mother tries to exercise authority, occasionally her voice goes up and out come the tears. Femaleness overcomes her. Sometimes the wife's tears are the more profuse because of her frustration that her husband's female side is so dormant he has failed to sense what was going on with the children. She feels a desperate necessity to overcome his abdication and is carried beyond her capabilities in a task too big for her.

When we marry, we consciously and unconsciously grant to our spouse the right to express the other half of our beings. I express John's femaleness. He expresses my maleness. Not altogether or each would fail to be a whole person, but unconsciously an identification goes on. Consequently, there is a most powerful pull upon each other. I used to say to John, "You have a box you want to get me into! You're trying to program me."

"I am not. Be your own person."

"But you want me to be my own person the way *you* want me to be my own person!" It was an unconscious box; John's flesh was determined that I fulfill half of his being as he wanted it to be fulfilled. I had better be sensitive, gracious, and kind; express beauty; and walk in a woman's walk. Husbands like to watch their wives move about the house, hear them singing or playing the piano. They enjoy watching them undress. Most wives don't understand that. They think men are simply being dirty old men. But that isn't always so. The husband may be watching and listening to that kind of grace and supple femininity that expresses half of him. More than being stimulated sexually, he is fulfilled. Women like to have the man around the house. A wife says, "I just like for you to be here." She feels at rest watching him and listening to him because it fulfills her being. Do you see that this means there is a mighty magnetism that draws us to each other, but unfortunately there is an equally forcible demanding that takes place? We are tremendously anxious that the other one fulfill us. That also means that unless we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we will demand too much. Again, death of self in Jesus Christ on the cross is the key to life.

FINDING BALANCE IN CHRIST

Here we want to point out one of the most basic things we see when we minister to married couples. If a husband does not continuously cultivate his own direct relationship with Jesus, so that the Lord fulfills and satisfies him, in some ways he will end up playing God. But in other ways he will subconsciously ask his wife to do for him what only God can do. That is too much for the wife to bear. He expects his wife to extend to him the comfort, solace, and fullness only the Holy Spirit can give. It works the other way too. If she doesn't draw her sustenance from the Lord, the wife expects that

her husband will act as God to her. The paradox, then, is that if we inordinately need something from our spouse, that is the last thing we will receive! If we don't "desperately need it," if we have found abundant life in Jesus Christ, then the husband or wife may be able to give what we do need humanly. Jesus said, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33). Conversely, if we don't seek God first, all these things will be taken away from us. The law is inexorable. We have too much fire in us for each other, too much desperation for our incomplete being to be completed. Until we allow the Lord Jesus Christ to fill that God-shaped space in us, we will demand that our spouse fill it. The Lord is the only whole One who can complete both sides of our being. He is the only One who has fully expressed both sides of His being in balance, who could allow Himself to weep for Lazarus in His femaleness (John 11:35) and in the same minute command in the power of male authority, "Lazarus, come forth" (v. 43). Our Lord is the only One who perfectly expresses authority and tenderness, judgment and mercy, discipline and forgiveness, principle and flexibility, philosophy and spontaneity, common sense and high mysticism, logic and creativity. He only is balance and wholeness. If we do not find our balance in Him, we will not achieve it in our relationship with our spouse—or anyone else. If we fail to obtain wholeness from Him, we will try to "use" our spouse. But if we find abundant life in Him, He blesses us with a sweet fullness through our spouse's presence. "For whoever has, to him shall more be given" (Matt. 13:12). *Has* what? Fullness of life in Jesus Christ! They also have trust in Him that enables them to take risks in relationships without demanding or controlling.

Now let us speak more directly concerning communication. A man lives in the workaday world that is dominated by maleness. Business is controlled by principle, logic, structure, and authority. In that realm a man must not say the obvious thing or speak repetitiously. If he repeats or says the obvious thing too often, he will soon earn disrespect. Others will make jokes about "that dumb guy." A man must sense the economy of what is needed and say that and only that. Now he comes home, having been in that kind of world all day. His wife has prepared a delicious meal and has dressed especially for him. She knows already with logic that it's a nice meal, and she knows she looks good. Concerning those facts, she couldn't care less about logic or repetition. It doesn't matter at all to her that he

complimented her or liked the meal last week or yesterday. This moment is all-important, and she needs to hear, “Gee, it’s nice. This is a good meal. And I think you’re pretty, honey.” Something, anything—a word is needed.

The husband notices that she looks nice. Usually he appreciates her appearance and is grateful that it’s a well-prepared meal. But he sits down and just grunts. The longer he sits in silence and eats, the angrier she becomes. Maybe he remembers he should have given her a compliment. But he said that yesterday. He doesn’t want to repeat himself, and men don’t say the obvious things. He thinks, “I like the meal, but she knows that, and I’m eating it, aren’t I?” He cannot bring himself to make small talk.

I used to come home and be amazed after a while that Paula was angry. Totally bemused, I would think, “What does this lovely creature want now?” Pulling my hair out in mystery, I would finally say to her, “This isn’t fair. You have to tell me. What *do* you want?”

“Well, if I tell you, that’ll spoil it. You should know.” It took all the virtue out of it for her if she had to say, “Tell me you appreciate me.” So I learned to compliment her—twice a week—whether she needed it or not, because logic and duty said to, which, of course, still missed her. I didn’t really feel it until the Lord opened my heart. In this way, men miss women.

Men often live by logic. In logic, one puts everything in a box and gets it running efficiently so as to leave it alone and do something else. Unconsciously, a man wants to program his wife that way. He wants to establish their life together as a smoothly running machine, keep the house running efficiently, and thus be free to leave her alone and do whatever else comes to mind. Which is, of course, the very antithesis of what woman is. Woman says, “Don’t put me in a box.” Spontaneity not only keeps romance alive, but it is also the spice that flavors all of life. By it a wife says, “Need me. Meet me. Be real.” We have even had women present to us what would seem to be the opposite. “The trouble with my husband is he compliments me for *every* meal.” Though that seems right, the problem is that he caught the idea, the principle that he should compliment; now he does it out of duty, and she perceives that it is only that. The complimenting has lost its spontaneity, it has no real emotional base, and she feels somehow only polished, like a thing. She wishes that sometimes he would say, “Throw that hash away!” Anything—if only it were real. Some women would rather their husbands explode than live behind such a wall of philosophy. Often a

wife purposefully starts a fight just to break out of the boxes of boredom and into her husband's heart.

Another more vitiating example of the breakdown of communication caused by not understanding the difference between maleness and femaleness is what happens to women whose husbands never show any emotion. Both because of sinful reactions to childhood trauma and continual conditioning at work, a husband often becomes an Alan Ladd, the face that never shows any true feelings. Whether he knows it or not, the husband's heart has been hurting again and again all day. Either he suffers empathetically for others, and/or others are not affirmative to him, or work becomes tedious and tense, or deadly boring and impersonal, and so on. So, he comes home drained. The moment he steps in the house, the wife senses it. She can feel it because she is identified with his heart.

"Something the matter, honey?"

"Nothin'."

"No, I know there's something wrong."

"Get off my back. There's nothin' wrong with me." Now she feels entirely rejected, and he is unaware that she could have refreshed his heart by simple touch and affection without enlisting the mental defenses of off-balance maleness. So many, many times we fail to hear or understand each other.

Quite often what happens in the family of an Alan Ladd type is that the wife suffers all manner of physical disorders. One after another, or sometimes all at once, she has ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, female dysfunctions, diverticulitis, etc. Bills accumulate. She has had so many things taken out surgically there's nothing left she can do without! Her husband never has any physical ailments. He is the cool, philosophical type. He always remains calm and collected. Because she has become continually more high-strung, nervous, and overemotional, he thinks he has an immature wife. Lacking awareness of the interrelationships of the maleness and femaleness, there is no way he could see the actual fact in a thousand years of pondering. The truth is that because he is so philosophical, he has suppressed his feelings and is unaware of his inner turmoil. Because he does not face any of his emotions, they boil inside him like a house internally afire with all the doors and windows sealed. But he is married to a warm, loving, affectionate wife. Whenever he is present she empathically bears everything he has not faced. All his tensions, anxieties,

and hurts become hers, and they roil like storm clouds and lightning inside her. He will never talk to her about it because there is never anything wrong with him. So, now, what she feels has no name. It boils up psychosomatically. She thinks something is wrong with her, and so does he. All the doctor's tests seem to prove it. No way can she understand that the real physical fact of her problems has its base in his character. It is amazing how often we have seen instances in which such a husband died or for one reason or another was gone from home, and his wife's health returned. She was no longer forced to bear his unfaced tensions.

Before the Lord taught us these things, I (John) used to become overburdened and uptight, studying in a liberal seminary what my spirit did not want to receive. I would return home emotionally disturbed but unable to cry or even admit my unsettledness, picking on Paula with unintended insults, slights, and demands until finally she would cry. The moment her tears appeared, I was released. Her crying accomplished what I couldn't. That is one reason men become inebriated and beat on their wives. Consciously they are unaware that they need their wives' emotions. Women should never be ashamed of their tears. Men sometimes say to their wives, "Aw, dry up!" But they don't really mean it. Tears actually bless and release men. But since that also begins to crack open the feeling center a man has fought to suppress, part of him desperately wants her to weep, whereas the other part is frightened by it. If she continues, and he allows her heart to warm his, he will become sensitive, vulnerable, and appropriately emotional. That is the very blessing he is most afraid to receive. His reactions are therefore totally ambivalent and equally confusing to his wife. A wife needs to have so much security and freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ that she can continue to be herself until her man can become himself.

A woman returns to self-control mainly by relating to the man of her life. For example, when I (Paula) would struggle with the children all day, becoming more and more distraught, what I wanted when John came home was for him to share my frustrations. If John would just listen, empathize, hug me, and say very little, his strength would restore my own male side, enabling me to do my own thinking with more detachment, restoring my self-control. I wanted to return to balance by relating to John. But John did not know that then. Men attempt to establish self-control by thinking a thing through. The more a man thinks, the angrier he may become, or the calmer. Primarily, he reasons his way into an emotion or turns it off. Having fought

as a child to control his emotions, he has a built-in automatic capacity. Unfortunately, that practice can become not so much something he controls as something that controls him and denies him access to himself and his wife.

Normally, a woman apprehends life through the more intuitive faculties of her inner being. She feels or senses rather than analyzes first. A man talks himself into something, usually unaware that his supposedly objective rationales actually justify decisions he also has arrived at subliminally. Women have been allowed in our culture to be more naturally free to sense and feel as a base for decisions. When I would pour out my frustrations to John, he would feel the burden of them, but then he would immediately translate the task into a demand for logical responses. He would feel betrayed because he had wanted to come home to rest, to avoid making more decisions, and he would take my need as another demand for decisions. Actually my emotions could have refreshed him and brought him back to balance, but he thought my behavior meant I was immature. “She can’t control her emotions like I can, poor creature.” So he would say, “Well now, look, Paula, if you would just organize your day: step one, step two, step three...”—and then he would become befuddled when I would go through the roof! When John missed me so completely I thought, “You dummy, why can’t you hear me?” All I needed was for John merely to be there for me, but instead he gave advice. He tried to settle things logically because that’s where he was, but that’s not where I was. His logic did not appear logical to me at all. To me it would have been logical for him to have recognized the need and given appropriate sympathetic comfort.

Husbands must learn to shift gears. A man has two worlds, whereas the wife confines her priorities mainly to one. By that I do not mean that women do not have jobs and careers. I am speaking of where her heart is. However many activities occupy a woman’s time, her life centers in her home, her man, and her children. Her feelings revolve around that basic position and task. It blows her mind and fills her with jealousy that her husband loses his simple, basic roots and becomes pulled by two worlds. His world at work establishes priorities that often conflict with those of the home. She thinks it ought to be simple to keep the true priority of the home at the center. But for the man it is not that simple. His need to contribute to society (which he identifies as the creative urge of his life), his ambitions, and his loyalties at work override his family priorities and create for him a

second world that he thinks of as being apart from his family. A wife thinks the family should not only nurture him to do his job, but that his experiences at work should also enrich the life of the family. He so tends to separate home and work that in effect he uses the family to energize him and so to further his ambitions. It surprises and wounds him that she cannot see and readily agree that he should be allowed to have a separate world at work. He usually perceives her need for him to put his family first as a compelling demand, and that robs him of his freedom to choose her and the children. He begins to feel like a “kept” man if he submits, whereas she feels that he just doesn’t love her and the children.

A man feels confident at work; he knows how to handle things. His logic is appropriate and honored there. But when he comes home, none of those ways work. A wife and children can’t be pushed, pulled, organized, and manipulated. They refuse to be run like machines. Therefore, he feels ill at ease, awkward, and out of his element. The familiarity and manageableness of his work become seductive to him, a place to flee to where he knows how to be himself and how to make things happen.

Sometimes a man thinks, “I ought to keep the romance going.” “Honey,” he says, “let’s go out to dinner and a show.”

She says, “We can’t afford it,” but since our lips seldom manage to say what the heart means, that usually translates, “Now that you mention it, I’d better be worth more than money.” But men are trained in the business world to “say what you mean and mean what you say”—logic!

“OK, honey, we’ll stay home.” Now the wife is disappointed and more hurt than if he had said nothing. He has failed to understand the female world again.

Or he brings home a gift.

“Oh, honey, you shouldn’t have.” Translation: “I am thrilled. You’re affirming me, telling me again I’m worth more than money.” But Christian logic tells him to be humble, so he responds, “Oh, it wasn’t anything,” which was exactly the wrong thing to say! It was everything. Again, his principled mind failed to read her heart language. But she misses him just as often because she listens to his words and fails to read his heart’s intent. The gift was the intent; never mind that his mind blew it! How we wish that every couple would learn by the grace of Jesus to believe the best behind every spouse’s worst. We ought not to listen to each other’s words but listen to each other’s hearts. We don’t say what we mean if it seems delusive to

trust that our spouse means well when actions and words appear to say the opposite. But it's the happiest "delusion" going, and we will soon learn that what we choose to believe becomes reality.

Language seldom carries the meaning of what actually is transpiring. Let's imagine a man on his knees, replacing a flat tire as you are walking along the road. You say, "Hi, mister. Whatcha doin'? Fixin' a tire?"

"No, I'm milking a cow."

But "Fixin' a tire?" wasn't what you really were saying. Translated it means, "I see you are in trouble; show me you're a nice guy and I might offer to help you, or I might at least visit with you." Or you come up to somebody and say, "How are you?" and he makes the mistake of telling you! That was what you said, but that wasn't what you asked. In marriage we most desperately need to learn how to hear what is really being said. Understanding the difference between context and content, and between maleness and femaleness, can grant us protection from failure. We may then not be so apt to charge *at* each other. "Wisdom is a fountain of life to him who has it, but folly is the chastisement of fools" (Prov. 16:22, RSV).

What are we saying about communication? Learn to understand how your spouse feels and thinks. You don't have to think alike to agree. All you have to do is be willing to grant the other the right to live from a different base.

What usually happens when a man and wife argue is that the wife has an idea she has probably sensed and felt but could not tell where it came from. She just knows that she knows that she knows—from deep inside. So the husband says, "Where did you get *that* idea? You know you gotta have things figured out. You oughta know where you started from and how you got there. So what's your first principle?"

"Well, I don't know that."

"Why don't you? You ought to."

"I don't have to know."

"Yes, you do." And around they go. All that is needed is, "All right. I understand what you feel." Or, "I don't understand. But I don't have to. I trust you." Let the other one be free to be what he is. You might have a different opinion. OK, you can agree to disagree. Unity is not uniformity, but forbearance and forgiveness. Forbearing is based on acceptance and trust of the Lord in others, not condescension, compromise, or toleration of the other guy, whom you are sure is quite wrong. Forbearing is willingness

to wait humbly for time to validate opinion, without grudge holding or grievances and “I told you sos.” If you can’t understand, you can’t understand. It is absolutely essential to learn to grant to the other the right to be what he is.

SELF-DENIAL IS KEY TO A BALANCED MARRIAGE

The single root cause of failure in every marriage is selfishness. People commonly think selfishness means stinginess, but the most generous man in the world may be completely selfish. Selfish means “self-ish,” to be wrapped up in your own self-images and definitions, requiring that everyone else see life as you do. Seemingly altruistic, self-sacrificing servants of the Lord may be totally selfish by being self-centered, compelling everyone around to fit into their scheme of things. In just this way, our very strengths may hide our deepest weaknesses.

Jesus said, “If any man would come after me, let him deny *himself* and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24, RSV, emphasis added). We think that means to “deny his stingy desires and give to others,” or “deny his ambitions and become a missionary,” or “deny his pleasures and go to work,” and so on. It won’t hurt to make such applications, but that is not what He said. The call is to deny our *self*. The self is all our practices, habits, philosophies, and images by which we control our own life and others. That is why “deny himself” is followed by “take up *his* cross.” “Oh, what a cross I have to bear” is the exact antithesis of “take up *his* cross.” By the former we exalt our picture of ourselves as martyrs—and usually insist that all around join us in our idolatry. Only those truly dead to self can allow the other to be free.

Only by the grace of Jesus Christ can we give the other one the right to think and feel and be what he is. We don’t have to push each other into our own molds to be happy—quite the opposite. But we are basically insecure and lonely in our differentness. Because we are afraid, we want to make everybody be just like us, “...who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage” (Heb. 2:15, RSV). In addition to fear of physical death, we also fear the death of our self-control. The way we think may be a prison, but at least we are familiar with it. Those families succeed where individual members develop such a life of worship and prayer that God’s grace can

grant them courage to die to the self-centered “I” and develop an ability to become corporate in their outlook. In Christ our differentness is the spice of life, but without Him it becomes the fright of it.

Perhaps a part of God’s purpose in creating mankind in the flesh on Earth was to create beings who, unlike the angels, are male and female, to bring forth a new order of sons of God who, whether male or female, hold both poles in one being. Woman is not a temporary creation, nor is the “womanness” in “manness” something temporary, nor “manness” in “womanness” a passing thing; we are to become an eternal wholeness. If we don’t have Jesus Christ, we can’t hold together the many opposites of our being, let alone the male and female aspects. And so we fall off into one side or the other. We are either tyrannized by feelings run amok, or we become unfeeling philosophers.

When they have heard this teaching, men have said to us, “Good grief, how am I ever going to know what my wife really thinks or feels? She’s a mystery.” Of course! You are not supposed to understand a woman fully! If you did, that would rob woman of a basic part of her essence; part of her grace is mystery. To completely understand would reduce woman’s life to logic and thus become the very loss of what she is. But whereas women don’t want to be explained away logically, men do want to know, “How can I understand that woman more?” Jesus Christ imparts courage to men to live with mystery. If a man will relate to Jesus not religiously or as an idea, but person-to-person, Jesus will establish in him His balanced, loving nature. Only then can a man truly revere his wife.

Man’s logic without woman’s sensitivity is like a flying carpet that has no place to touch down upon reality, not anchored to the true facts of the body and heart. So the woman is suspect of the man’s logical world, whereas the man thinks, “You have the right feeling, I’m sure, but you missed the whole principle of the thing.” So we make the blessings of our strengths into the dividing walls of our competitions, and only in Jesus is resolution: “For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall” (Eph. 2:14)—spoken of Jew and Gentile, but applicable to men and women as well.

The best counsel for communication is therefore to pray together aloud, honestly, practically, and factually about what you truly feel and actually think, asking God to continually keep you open to each other. You may then begin to identify with each other sympathetically and hear from within each

other's points of view. Then your differences will become complementary and complimentary. That is real communication, real sharing, and real marriage.



FATHERS, SONS, AND DAUGHTER

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

—1 THESSALONIANS 2:11, NIV

And a woman who held a babe against her bosom said, “Speak to us of children” and he said: “Your children are not your children. They are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself. They come through you but not from you. And though they are with you, yet they belong not to you. You may give them your love but not your thoughts, for they have their own thoughts. You may house their bodies but not their souls. For their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, which you cannot visit; not even in your dreams. You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you. For life goes not backward nor carries with yesterday. You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth. The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and he bends you with his might that his arrows may go swift and far. Let your bending in the archer’s hand be for gladness; for even as he loves the arrow that flies, so he loves the bow that is stable.”¹

—KAHLIL GIBRAN

GOD HOLDS US RESPONSIBLE TO PRESENT TO OUR CHILDREN an environment in which He can cause their souls to thrive. Therefore our basic text for fathers is: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:1–4).

I (John) rejoice that we have Sunday schools and public schools to which fathers can delegate authority for the teaching of their children. But we have surrendered too much. Fathers have almost abdicated the pilgrim concept

given throughout Deuteronomy and Proverbs that it is their task to teach their own children. Sharing in Bible times was done in the cool of evenings as the family fell asleep, talking of the things of God. During the children's first six years, much of the job was assigned to the mothers, who taught them prayers, songs, and scriptures. From six on, it became the father's task to nurture and instruct the boys till manhood. Fathers and mothers were therefore literally in bed with the children and considered that time as inviolate, not to be interfered with, as we read, "Do not bother me; the door has already been shut and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything" (Luke 11:7).

How often do we sacrifice our children's time with us for more "worthy" causes? Is it not a commentary on our common abdication that we do not now say, "I cannot give you my children's time!" In Proverbs again and again we hear the counsel of fathers:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you.

—PROVERBS 3:1–2

My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD, or loathe His reproof, for whom the LORD loves He reproves, even as a father, the son in whom he delights.

—PROVERBS 3:11–12

Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, for I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction. When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live."

—PROVERBS 4:1–4

Such are only a few of the many passages a good concordance will reveal.

We began this book by saying that in our culture families have been corrupted by materialism. Fathers' minds and hearts have been robbed by Satan until all too many think of themselves only as bacon bringers. The culture causes the society to value only what is concrete and visible. The predominant group model of education that forms our mentality tends to confine teaching solely to mental exercises performed by trained teachers in Sunday and public schools. Consequently, fathers see little parental value in

what they believe and what their hearts feel. We do retain in our spirits the nagging hunch that we ought to be doing something more than just providing financially for our families. We know we ought to be teaching about the Lord, but we are too much satisfied that the Bible is taught in Sunday and parochial schools. And besides, even for most dedicated Christian fathers, the Bible has become a book of mystery, gathering dust on the shelves. Antichrist culture has stolen from fathers their daily attentiveness to the life of their own spirits and souls, and therefore fathers' awareness of their task of nurturing their families has also been stolen. Fathers nurture children by and in everything they do—embraces, discussions at the table, the way they relate to their wives, how they settle problems, how they forgive and cherish, how they discipline, the way they play games, what language they use, and so on. Everything a father does in the presence of a son or daughter is an implantation of what the father is to the children. A child does not become what the father says; he becomes what the father is.

I watched my father discipline when I was a child. Actually, his was a good way. But I didn't like it. So I created in my mind a picture of myself disciplining my children quite differently. But how *do* I discipline? Just like my father! What he is was written into me. Again and again we minister to people who were raised in broken homes in which the way the father treated the family became what was written on the heart of the child. Those children thought, and were determined, "I'll never treat my wife and children like that!" They constructed a glorious fantasy of themselves being ideal husbands and fathers but became humiliated and brokenhearted and sat down to cry with Elijah, "O LORD, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers" (1 King 19:4). We do what has been written on our hearts as a result of honoring or dishonoring our parents. A corollary of the Golden Rule is (if you hold judgment in your heart toward your parents), "You will do to others what has been done to you." Real teaching is accomplished by what we are every moment of our lives with our children. The medium is the message. *We are* the teaching.

When Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), He meant that He embodies truth. He has lived truth for us. He Himself is the teaching and the life. By living with Him we become what He is. We may search the Scriptures as He warned that the Pharisees do, thinking to find something mentally, but "you are unwilling to come to Me, that you

may have life” (John 5:40). Sincerely coming to Jesus requires moment-by-moment walking and talking with Him as our constant companion and best friend. All our lives need to be lived hand in hand with Christ. By doing so, we become what He is. And that is exactly God’s plan for sons and their fathers. If the father has truly lived the way in Christ, it is easy for a son to do the same; if the father has not, our Lord may first have to overcome and bring to death in the son what the father did not bring to death in himself.

A FATHER’S ROLE DURING PREGNANCY AND THE FIRST YEAR

Regrettably, in our nonspiritual culture, a father tends to think that once he has begotten a child, he has nothing more to do and is of no importance to it until the baby comes out of the womb. He feels disenfranchised, as though in some solely feminine mystery a baby is formed quite apart from him irrelevant of what he thinks and feels. But that is not so. Some primitive societies possess more of a sense of reality than ours. In some primitive cultures, when a wife discovers her pregnancy, she continues to work in the fields, but the father retires to a hut in seclusion. There he believes he is to build his child’s temperament through meditation and prayer. Our society scoffs at that comical and superstitious practice. But now psychologists, some psychiatrists, and many Christian counselors concur that an unborn child is really very affected by the absence or presence of its father.

A father’s voice near the mother, his cruelty or kindness, sexual advances, insensitivity, or tenderness already affect the baby’s spirit. It has often been the case that the women coming to us for ministry concerning fear of sex were little helped until the Holy Spirit revealed that not only was their fear buttressed by molestations and remembrances of the father’s actions, but that those fears began when the father was violent and insensitive to the mother in sex while the child was in the womb. When we have prayed aloud with these women, asking the Lord to find and minister to trauma in their hearts, comforting their spirits and enabling them to forgive their fathers (and thus all men), sexual ease and freedom have been the result.

The reference quoted earlier about John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth's womb demonstrates, according to the Word of God, that our spirits understand what transpires outside the womb and react with intelligence and emotion. Thus, the father's presence with the mother is already basic to the formation of a child's character before birth. Let each father meditate concerning what he should be doing to help form his child in his wife's womb—such as expressions of gentleness, appreciation, tenderness toward the mother, and the life of prayer. Our son Loren, having learned from us, placed his hand each night upon his wife, Beth, and said a prayer of blessing for his unborn child.

As we have said before, when a child is born, he has already been wounded. He has been encased in the darkness of the womb for nine months, accustomed to the warmth and rocking motion of the mother's body. Then the child is cast out into the trauma of pain and blood, into shocking light and cold. All too many fathers still think their child is the mother's business. We are grateful that now obstetricians not only allow but also encourage fathers to be present in the delivery room, urging them to receive training in natural childbirth methods so that birth can become a cooperative effort on the part of both parents. One Christian father related to us with a glow on his face how he had been allowed to catch the baby in his own hands and place his child on his wife's abdomen. Imagine what a blessing of love to that child's spirit to be greeted with delight in the spirit and hands of his own father! Praise God that today even "secular" medicine is discovering that fathers should not be excluded!

Many fathers feel embarrassed and awkward in the presence of a baby. Afraid of the tininess and fragility of the child, feeling clumsy and terrified of dropping the baby, they have been glad to relegate child care exclusively to their wives. That is a tragedy. A baby needs its father's arms. In its first few weeks, a baby learns to come to rest in the nurturing strength of the father's presence. Even in the first weeks, a baby girl is learning to nestle in and come to rest, trusting herself to let go in what a man is.

Paula was born with an enlarged thymus that the doctors in those days mistakenly treated with X-ray. Her dad was a traveling salesman out on the road for two weeks at a time, and her frequent crying was a constant source of concern to her anxious and inexperienced mother. It seemed the more her mother would try to comfort, the louder she would cry. Paula's Uncle Henry used to tell laughingly, and with some residue of painful memory, of his

attempts to quiet the tiny, squalling redhead. His efforts yielded little more result than exercised self-control in checking the impulse to throw her out the window. But the moment Paula's father would return home and pick her up, her crying would cease. She was fortunate, for what many learn is the terror of a huge face looming in anger over the crib shouting obscenities.

Trust beyond reason and unreasoning fear seat themselves by experience in the first few weeks with a father. A baby boy begins to learn in deep levels what it is to be a man by the way his father walks with him, pats his back, and sings to him in the dark hours of the night. As a father sacrifices his sleep in love for his child, or fails to, a father's compassion and patience, or lack of it, already create either freedom for the child to be himself and trust that he will be received, or fear to venture. Every baby *needs* its own father's presence. Babies need their fathers to feed them, change their diapers, and hold them for long hours in their laps.

Likewise, the first twelve months are as much a father's concern as a mother's. It is not that she will teach him to walk and talk and then hand daddy a son to play with. Except for breast-feeding, there is no function of child care that is not as much the father's as the mother's. Infants sometimes need to sit on their daddy's lap at the table and be fed by him. Since they take a lot of falls in their first year, the way the daddy patiently picks them up prepares them to expect Father God to restore them when they venture later. They learn more than can be told as they are enfolded in the hug a father and mother share with each other. Likewise, they feel and act out tensions between their parents. Fathers who are inordinately proud of precocious children and make them perform for the guests sometimes create a sense of fear and striving in the child that remain throughout life. A son senses his father's pride and feels the fear of performing. A father who is caught up in his own self-centered pride may sacrifice his child to his own image, becoming embarrassed and angry, creating fears in his son that may ricochet through many areas—fear of insensitive authority, nervousness in public, feelings of inadequacy, and so on. On the other hand, fathers who overcomfort their children for each bruise may teach their children how to use their wounds to control others. Since the countless daily events of life are what form children rather than what we teach, one can see that only a life lived continuously in Jesus is a proper formation for a child. How important it is for the father to be the head of the house by giving his life in surrender to Jesus Christ.

Anyone can see by inference how a father's life influences his children, not only in infancy but also throughout life. As a child begins to encounter painful experiences with his brothers or among his peer group, if his father is there to comfort, educate, and discipline, the son is made strong. But if the father is harsh and insensitive, brutal and undisciplined emotionally and mentally, he shatters his son's capacities. It is vital to children for the father to exhibit gentleness and strength in the Lord Jesus Christ.

FATHER AND CHILD: AGES SIX TO TWELVE

Let us now speak of the next age. The ages between six and twelve are the "gang" age, especially for boys. Boys undergo a "pilgrimage." They commence to move out from the home, to test themselves against other people. Their gang or peer group becomes important. For the first time, a son is gripped by pressing, sometimes compelling belongings and loyalties that often contrast or conflict with his home. For the first time, he suffers great tensions, the gang on one side and the father on the other. A boy's loyalties and concepts of who he is will be tested. What his father and mother have said is right will be challenged. He will have to make decisions. Sometimes he will go along with the gang, filled with fear and guilt, and sometimes he will decide to stand by his parents' principles. If he does decide to do as the father and mother have said, sometimes that is merely conformity out of fear. But sometimes it means he has achieved real strength from his life with his father. But if he says no to the parents and does wrong, that child will come home needing a father who has the understanding to know that his son must experiment, differentiate, and become his own person, as well as who will discipline firmly and strongly so that the son knows both that he is free to make his own mistakes and not free to escape their consequences. At this time especially, sons need to have seen loyalties and principles operating *in* their fathers, not merely shouted *at* them. Fathers who spend hours after work at beer halls or elsewhere have no forum to require their sons to come home and do chores. Not only is it necessary for sons to see their fathers living what is noble, but they also need understanding. They need fathers who remember their own childhood, who can give them freedom to stumble long enough to learn on their own, coupled with necessary discipline, forgiveness, and affection.

Suppose a father is stopped by a policeman and says, “Yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir,” in the presence of his son. But as they drive on, that father curses and says, “Man, I told him where to get off. He had no right to pull me over.” That father has shot down his own authority with his son. Now his verbal teaching will come across as something different than what he portrays. Multiply this instance by a thousand experiences in the home, and one comprehends the necessity for the life of Jesus Christ to be the father’s life every moment.

Suppose a boy goes out with his friends and throws a rock through Mr. Jones’s grocery store window. He comes running home filled with apprehension and blurts out, “Daddy, Daddy, I did something awful.”

A wise father says, “Oh, what did you do?”

“I did something awful. I did something awful.”

The father persists in asking for details: “*What* did you do?”

Finally the boy says, “I threw a rock through Jones’s grocery window.”

Now a decision is upon the father. If he reacts to the wounding of his own image as a father and blows up at him, he demonstrates his self-centered inability to be concerned for his son’s sake. His son’s inner spirit will know it, and perhaps his mind as well. That is not Christian discipline. It tells the son, “My concern for you is really only my own concern for myself; you are only an extension of me, not a person in your own right, and how could you have dared to act as though you were your own person?”

But the father can make other choices that demonstrate Christian discipline and understanding. He can talk *with* his son and by his manner and inflections convey to him both that he knows that he is guilty and that he understands and forgives. Then he can say, “All right now, let’s go and talk with the man.” Together they go and talk with Mr. Jones and arrange for restitution to be made. When they return, he may have to apply further discipline if he deems it necessary, but his son knows his father has faced something *with* him. A bridge has been built. It is sad how often we hear from those we minister to, “Oh, I would never tell my father anything. He just never understood.” Understanding comes naturally when a father’s heart is set right for his children.

PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE

We want to plead the case for physical discipline. Some psychologists have said that if a father spansks a child, he will give him a complex. Nonsense. Christian fathers need to be guided by the Word of God and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, not by man's mistaken notions. The Word of God is as psychologically up-to-date as tomorrow's newspaper. When a child comes home having done something wrong, he suffers anxiety, fear, and guilt. If his father is determined to be only sweetly reasonable, he is actually suppressing his feelings. He is not being honest with his son. When the son comes into his father's presence, he senses and feels the hurt and anger in his father, no matter what he says. Children react to what they sense behind our words rather than our logic. A guilty son hears the big abstract words of a sweetly reasonable father and thinks, "I don't get it. But, boy, he sure is angry!" Anxiety now smolders in him; it cannot come to a resolution because it could not be objectified to his conscious mind and dealt with appropriately.

Physical discipline brings things to objective, "measurable" pain. Physical pain resolves fear and guilt through measurable justice. Unnamed and unfaced anxiety cannot be dealt with. Unresolved guilt erodes security. As sin separates God and man, so guilt prevents fellowship between fathers and sons. Physical pain tells the inner being that punishment has been accomplished. Guilt is over and done with. On the other hand, we caution against the overuse or misuse of corporal punishment. In the Bible, adults received the harshest penalties only for the worst crimes. (For instance, only the most serious crimes, like adultery, murder, and witchcraft, called for the death penalty.) Certainly children deserve the same fair treatment! Spanking should be reserved for the most serious offenses, such as lying, stealing, and deliberate, in-your-face defiance. And even then, it should not be done with too heavy a hand and should be limited to the thickly padded buttocks. Lesser infractions can be handled by removal of privileges or time-out. Or if an infraction is small enough or a first-time offense, a mere gentle reprimand will do.

Abusive parents do not spank; they beat on any surface of the body that happens to be before them. And they do this for any infraction, however slight. Parents who cannot control their anger would do well to avoid spanking altogether and resort to other strategies until their hearts have been healed and reformed enough to do no harm.

Because some parents have abused their children, there are some who believe that spanking should never be done, and some even believe that no discipline of any kind is needed, except to reason with the child. That is nonsense; the Bible expressly calls for physical and other types of discipline. The Bible is God’s handbook. On the next page, we have provided a list of scriptures concerning discipline that we suggest all parents take the time to read.

Biblical Guidelines and Instructions for Discipline
Discipline
Deuteronomy 8:5–6; Proverbs 3:11–12; 5:11–12, 23; 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13–14; 29:15, 17; Ephesians 6:1–4; Hebrews 12
How to give reproof
Proverbs 17:9–14; 26:3–5; 27:5–6; Matthew 7:1–5; 18:15–22; Luke 17:3; Galatians 6:1; Ephesians 4:25–27, 29–32; 1 Timothy 5:1, 19–20; 2 Timothy 4:1–5; Titus 1:7–13; 2:15
Concerning reproof, correction, and the results of refusing them
Proverbs 5:23; 6:23; 9:7–9; 10:17; 12:1; 13:1; 15:5, 10, 12, 31–33; 18:1; 23:9; 24:24–25; 25:28; 27:15–17; 28:23; 29:1, 9, 11, 15, 17

When our first son, Loren, was a little boy, he used to stare at what he wanted to do, knowing it was wrong, and then look at us. We could see him measuring the pain. If it was worth it, he did it and got his spanking. But it was objective. It could be dealt with. He was happy and confident and took his spankings as a matter of course.

We have found it difficult to help people in prayer ministry whose fathers never physically disciplined them. Their feelings will not come clear. Their fathers seemed so good that they never realized they had any bad feelings toward them. Confused feelings were suppressed in each instance. They cannot forgive their fathers, because they didn’t know they were angry and disappointed with them.

On the other hand, people who had severe disciplinarians for fathers are more readily able to forgive because their feelings toward their fathers are easy to identify and can be dealt with more effectively than those whose

fathers failed to discipline at all. Children of wishy-washy fathers lack real banks for the rivers of their feelings. My father was very tenderhearted, but he had a temper and hands like the side of a ham. Normally, however, he kept his anger in check. But on one isolated occasion, he crossed the line into abusiveness. I remember seeing the flash of his hand and watching my brother reeling across the living room and under the dining room table. But my dad could never keep his anger very long. My siblings and I could almost calculate how soon we would hear our father's steps coming up the stairs. He would come into the bedroom where we had been sent, take us on his lap, and say, "You know, that hurt me more than it did you."

And we would think, "Oh, yeah?" Admittedly, we still knew his heart really did care.

He would then hold and hug and say, "I love you guys, and I forgive you." And whenever he had come across a little too harshly (especially on this occasion, when he truly did), he would say, "Do you forgive me?" And it was all healed. Life was more fun for the making up.

All discipline needs to be enveloped in love. None of us can discipline perfectly. But, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8, RSV).

THROUGHOUT CHILDHOOD

Not only in the gang age but also in every year of his life, a child needs to see his father bowing his head. Fathers should say the grace or be the one to delegate to some other member of the family. Fathers should say a prayer at night over the children. They should go with them to church, not leave them there. Seeing a father humbling himself before God writes faith upon the child's heart. The exact moment frustrations, hurts, or disappointments occur is the moment of learning for a child. A father who prays often but curses and expresses resentment at people and events may, in fact, inoculate his children against ever getting true faith.

I remember seeing my father smash his thumb with a hammer or drop something on his toe and dance about holding the injured member, whistling or exclaiming, "Ooh—ooh—ooh!" But I almost never heard my father utter a curse word or express anger at what could not be helped. Paula's father always said, "Dagnabit," and quickly returned to good humor.

Since children become what their fathers are, it is nothing of pride and only gratitude that neither of us curses or flies off the handle emotionally.

As prayer ministers, we hear parents say too frequently when their children get into trouble, "I don't understand. We gave them everything." But when we check to see *what* they gave their children, we discover that they did truly give them every *thing* and nearly nothing else. The children seldom saw them in church or in prayer. They didn't hear them reading the Bible. They didn't receive real affection and discipline. They did see their parents lose their tempers, insult each other, swear, get drunk occasionally, and live for their own egos rather than for the Lord. What was needed for the soul the children didn't get at all. And the parents can't understand what went wrong with them! The truth usually comes out that the parents do know what's wrong and have been unwilling and afraid to admit it. We all would like Christian nurture to be some detached thing we can do on Sunday morning or in five minutes at the dinner table. It is frightening to learn that it needs to happen in every moment.

INTERNALIZATION

As young people enter their teenage years, they must learn to internalize. Whatever parents teach is something handed *to* children. No matter how much parental teachings have become a part of us, each of us must make whatever has been given to us our own. That requires a process of examining, testing, wrestling, and sometimes rebelling. The struggle is called internalization because until parental teaching becomes our own by our own mature conscious decisions, they remain external to us, much as an animal reacts by external conditioning rather than by personal choice. The struggle is usually more intense for boys, though girls must also internalize.

In a boy's pilgrimage, he begins life enfolded in his mother's womb, totally dependent. His first breath declares independence from the mother's organic system. One by one, bodily functions become dissociated from the parents' care as he is weaned and diaper changing stops. Emotional dependence continues, but it wanes throughout childhood. In teenage years, internalization completes the process of individuation. Now he must examine whatever knowledge, morals, and precepts have been taught to him from outside himself. He must stand up against everything that has formed

him, wrestle with it, and discover the whys of it for himself. Then it belongs to him. It has become his own. Such internalization can happen without rebellion, but when rebellion does occur, parents should learn to cherish their teen's attempts to become his own person, even if they have to discipline him for the way he goes about it.

Parents who understand teenagers know that such rebellion does not mean rejection of them even if one form of that rebellion expresses itself in rejection. The stronger the love and nurture he receives, the more it may take for a teenager to distinguish himself from his parents. Mothers and fathers whose security is in Jesus Christ rather than in their own pictures of themselves as parents can and do allow their children to stand up against them. Unfortunately, most parents do not understand, try too hard, and make matters worse.

Parents must learn to step out of the way. Wise parents will have so instructed and disciplined that their child has been assuming responsibility more and more all along. But now there comes a transfer point in which a young person must take full responsibility for himself—though he is in no way capable of maintaining himself consistently. If a father still preempts this initiative as though the child were ten years old, a teenager's own budding life is crimped. For example, suppose a young man, because he wants to, is about to pick up the water bucket to wash the car, but the father says, "Son, go wash the car!" That has now become the last thing the son wants to do; the initiative has been taken from him. We're not speaking of manners only. It may help to ask, "Son, would you please wash the car?" but courtesy is not the main point. What is important is the ability of a parent to respect a teenager's need to see and do for himself what should be done. The contrary cry of parents is, "But if I didn't tell him, he would never see it." Dutiful and sensitive children, who have been thoughtful and attentive, often do an about-face in their teenage years. The tensions of internalization and individualization often turn the most lovingly outgoing children into self-centered, selfish, and insensitive teenagers. That is as normal as apple pie, not a matter for condemnation. The problem for every parent is to learn how to remind a teenager of his duties without condemning him, putting him down, or robbing him of his own enterprise.

To some extent, it simply can't be done. No matter how sensitive, we are doomed to fail simply because we are the parents from whom he must cut free. Teenagers flip-flop. One day they are wise, free, and strong,

courteously resisting all our overdoings, and the next day they regress to wanting to be told what to do or shouting harsh words at us for trying to. There are no longer any safe predictabilities. Each day requires that we meet our teenager as a new person in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The most important lesson for parents of teenagers is to learn the capacity in Christ to set our half-mature fledglings free to fall!

True authority has never meant that a father has the right to protect his own fatherhood by controlling his family. Rather, it means that one is put in the same type of position as the Father God. Though God has all the power in the universe, in whatever degree any action would impair our learning for ourselves or deprive us of our free will, He will not do it. Though He loved and wept over us as He cast us into the earth (Matt. 13:37), He must let us fail until we have learned. Just so an earthly father is called upon to restrain himself and be embarrassed and hurt by and for his teenagers until they regain by trial and error their own balance and common sense.

Notice in the parable of the prodigal son that the father did not go after the prodigal. Nor did he send a Pinkerton detective. He sat at home and waited (Luke 15:11–20). By trusting in God to protect his son, and praying for him continually, a father says to his son, “I know you are going to stumble and burn your fingers and hurt your heart and ours; nevertheless, I trust the Lord in you, and I know you will learn what you have to and come out of it on your own. I know you are going to have to make mistakes, but you will learn by trial and error, and I set you free to do so.” The primary task of a father of teenagers is to undergird them with that kind of trust. Such trust is not naïveté. It is not blind, excusing, or permissive. It is a capacity to endure godly grief until the other has found himself.

Our son Loren, now a competent ordained minister, says, “I can now be trusted because my parents trusted me when I couldn’t be trusted.” The rule is simple. The more a father understands and sets his son free to err, the less the son has to rebel to find himself. The tighter the father holds the reins, the more he continues to demand that his son live the same as he has been taught, the more sinfully his son must rebel in order to become his own person. A young tree set under the branches of an older one can find no room to grow. Parents who have taken up all the space of moral righteousness should not be surprised when their sons find their only space by living in immorality. Again, death of self in Christ and God’s love alive in each for the other is the key to successful family living. Some people

think they have succeeded if their children always obey and do what is pleasing to them and to society. In fact, what may have been accomplished is the destruction of their children. Often we have to counsel adults who failed to find themselves because they dared not risk breaking out of the “good child” mold in their teenage years.

Many parents fall to either extreme with teenagers, either hypercontrol or permissiveness. Neither is the answer. Rules must still be maintained, but at this stage, the teenager should be invited into the process. We have sat down with our children to discuss with them what they think might be fair hours and rules around the house. Together we set penalties. These became the rules of the game. We made it clear that rules were not intended to cramp anyone’s enjoyment of life, but rather to establish a structure of mutual consideration so that each member of the family might be given a restful, secure place of experiencing and growing with a minimum of pushing and pulling.

With each child, such conferences had to be handled differently. With some it was easier than with others. Loren at fourteen wanted to talk about everything. It was much easier than with Johnny, who at that age seldom wanted to talk about anything. But once the rules had been set, our discipline became more detached in manner than it had been previously. When they were younger, our insistence and discipline had as its base our responsibility before God to build the structure of morality. Now even when the teenager stood over against us, it was time to believe that that task had, in fact, been accomplished in the deep heart. We became more like referees in a game then, who blew the whistle when the rules of the game had been broken. Our teenagers knew we still had to insist that the rules be kept, but the base was now different. They had freely chosen; now they had to pay the penalty. But it was not that we were forcing our lifestyle on them. They were choosing and learning.

Teenagers need the approval of their fathers. Approval is not backslapping or condoning falsehood. It is not really predicated upon behavior but rather a sense a teenager has that his father likes him and loves him just because he is. This sets him free to try his own wings. If he must so have his father’s approval that he must compulsively appear to do or be as his father wishes, he cannot venture to become his own person. But if he knows his father wants him to be his own person and will be proud of him that he has tried, whatever the result, he can risk failure. He does not have

to become a star football player to earn a place with his father. He can enter whatever enterprise appeals to him for his own sake whether his father would be pleased or not. The question of approval has already been settled.

Boys who have been given sensitive, loving natures find it most difficult to achieve their place in the teenage world. Loren was a good athlete, but in his teenage years he could not countenance the ways of the “jocks.” Now he faced the question, “How can I be part of my teenage culture and society?” So he left sports behind and came to us, wanting to become a rock-and-roll bandleader. At the time we were pastoring the leading church in Wallace, Idaho, when rock-and-roll was more disreputable than it is today, especially among evangelical church people. We knew that Loren would be exposed to the worst elements of society, tempted by drugs and drink and by girls who would be only too willing to throw themselves at a rock-and-roll hero. We could not believe that Loren could keep himself totally free from these influences. Yet we felt that the counsel of the Lord was not only to give permission but also to back him all the way, financially and by our presence as chaperones at some of the dances and by loaning our car and/ or driving the band all over the Northwest to perform.

Night after night we would pray into the wee hours of the morning. Twice there were wrecks on snowy roads. Some nights as chaperones we would feel the urge to run outside periodically to let all of the sound out of our ears. We eventually backed “The Long Awaited” band as countersigners until their equipment (which they paid for) amounted to over ten thousand dollars and they had become so successful that they won third place in a contest of over one hundred fifty bands. By being on stage, Loren managed not only to be accepted among his peers but also to be counted as a leader, while in fact their long practice hours kept the entire group out of the scrapes of the rest of their society. They themselves refused the worst songs of the time. Loren did tell us later that he tried “pot” a few times, and the loud singing nearly wrecked the voice he needed as a music major in college, but he came through his teenage years with valuable experiences, knowing that his parents had paid the cost to be with him, not against him.

Johnny rebelled more openly and vociferously than the others, putting us to the test in everything we teach other parents. And we failed gloriously. We got angry, demanded behavior, scolded, and shouted—and learned all over again what failures we were as parents and how only God can give the grace to allow a son freedom to learn the hard way. Twice the Lord warned

us that Johnny was about to be killed in a car wreck unless we prayed fervently. Both times he was in spectacular wrecks that totally demolished the cars in which he was riding. Both times he was unhurt except for minor scratches and a sprained ankle. Through it all Johnny matured strong and free. Parents must walk so closely to the Lord that He can call them, whether or not they have learned to hear directly, to protect their children while they venture forth. The life of prayer is essential. Teenagers are beyond our control but not beyond our responsibility. We are reduced to prayer, talks, grounding, scolding, and the help of friends and often do nothing more than add fuel to the fire.

Mark was, on the other hand, so straight we wished he *would* do something. But individuation was proceeding quietly within, in his own subtle ways. Each youth must be met as a totally different individual. What works for one will not work for another. Not one of our four sons has approached the teenage period anything like his brothers. As the Father allows each of us to become what we are, so must parents allow their children to learn to become themselves. Hard and fast rules are therefore good things to use as a springboard for doing something different! Only prayer allows the Holy Spirit so to soften our hearts as to allow us to do something unique, even spontaneous, in each instance.

FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

In the following section, Paula writes concerning daughters. Many things we have said concerning fathers and sons in the first six years apply also to girls. Particularly from her father a daughter derives her inner structure, those unconscious practices in her character that will operate throughout her life. From him come self-discipline, security, strength, and the real nature of her life with Father God.

But some fathers react to their daughters' awkwardness, afraid of their own feelings. Someone so defenseless, so beautiful, so lovely as to melt a heart, they love like a "little doll," from a safe distance. Not knowing that it is his unique privilege and responsibility to hold and comfort his daughter and that by so doing he will awaken her capacity to relate to a man as an adult, too often the father abdicates and leaves her in the crib or solely to

the mother's care. This prevents her from developing the capacity to relate rightly to a man. Her soul remains undeveloped in that area.

We have ministered to many women who had much worse experiences. Their fathers were loud, insensitive, drunken, and violent. Such daughters have been so inwardly destroyed that now they can neither give to their husbands nor open to receive from them. They are like some potatoes, round and beautiful on the outside, but blighted on the inside. But for a daughter of the King, it is never too late. Prayer for inner transformation and restoration can set such women free and empower them to live an abundant life.

Girls undergo the same kind of pilgrimage from dependence to independence but in a different way. While boys are traveling in gangs, girls are gathering in clubs and cliques. Girls' groups are usually not so obviously set to mischief, but such groups tend to become more traumatic because of their exclusiveness. Parents who have enjoyed warm, relaxed sharing with their daughter may suddenly find it difficult to accept this "stranger" who has become secretive and at times snippy. Even at this age girls tend to have a greater desire to please than boys normally do. Inability to be pleasing and acceptable to others can become far more wounding to them. They need the security of their father's love openly and consistently expressed. As boys need to view their fathers with some degree of hero worship, girls need far more to have a crush on their daddies. Such admiration is a sacred trust never to be violated.

As hormones begin to introduce a girl to puberty, she commences to practice feeling what it is to be a woman. She begins to feel differently about being dressed up for Sunday school. A comb becomes an indispensable part of the paraphernalia she carries to school. "What shall I wear?" becomes the number one decision each day.

I used to err by my continual lack of awareness. Andrea would pirouette before me in a pretty new dress and say with her heart in her throat, "Daddy, how do I look?" I would look up from my reading long enough to toss off an absent-minded, "Yeah, OK, fine." She needed to hear, "You look wonderful—beautiful!" I was unaware that my response was affecting Andrea's confidence in herself and building expectations in her heart about men and their inattentiveness. She was four then, and now that she is a grown woman she is still learning the same lessons. By the grace of God,

the Lord has now opened my heart and made me aware so that I actually am delighted with her and pleased by her appearance and can say so.

A girl has a tremendous need to feel she is a delight to her father. She needs to try out on him her ability to allure men. If she can cause his eyes to sparkle with pride, she gains confidence in her power to attract a man. She needs to flirt with her dad and snuggle up to him. Both the father and mother should be aware of this and allow it; it is innocuous and beautiful, and by it she will acquire confidence to know herself as a lovely and desirable person, and prize herself enough to save herself for marriage.

A woman came to us who was, in fact, a beauty queen. I asked her, "Are you beautiful?"

She said, "No."

"Are you lovely?"

"No."

"Pretty?"

"No, I'm ugly!"

"Desirable?"

"No!"

Then a woman came who was not particularly attractive by worldly standards. "Are you beautiful?"

"Yes."

"Are you lovely?"

"Yes."

Because she thought she was beautiful, she was; beauty radiated from her. What was the difference? The beauty queen could never feel that her father appreciated her, no matter how hard she tried to win his approval. The lady who thought she was beautiful had a father who doted on her and complimented her often. A woman needs to know her own beauty. If she does not know, she will continually ask her husband to prove it to her and be unable to receive it even if he tries. It puts a constant burden on a husband and strains the relationship. Paradoxically, if a woman so knows her beauty without conceit, she does not need her husband to tell her; he is then free to do so, and may quite often. Her inner expectancy from her life with her father may either prevent or enable.

A woman who knows her own beauty is a great blessing to her husband because out of that sense of beauty and worth she feeds his heart and spirit. A wife should know that the person she presents to her husband is not a wet

dishrag but a lovely rose. Her opinion of herself will make all the difference as to whether she pours loveliness into him or acts as a drain on his energies. It is a father's primary task to draw out that sense of beauty and value in his daughters.

Tragically, all too frequently when girls becoming women have practiced their natural allurements before the men of their family, men have acted like ignorant beasts. In one town, as we ministered, five women, one after the other, confessed that their fathers, grandfathers, brothers, or uncles molested them. Recent statistics from the U.S. Justice Department report that more than one-third of girls are molested before the age of eighteen.² The greatest tragedy created by such betrayal of trust is the message conveyed to the growing girl's heart. The fright and shame tell her that it is not all right and safe for her to be the woman she is becoming, for that will somehow get out of hand and result in nastiness. It is then as though the sepals of the bud can never open to allow the glorious bloom of the flower. Women molested as girls often have difficulty letting go in the proper fullness of sex with their husbands. Very often, molested girls become locked into secrecy for fear of destroying their mother's relationship with their father or stepfather. They develop long-lasting, confused anger and guilt toward their mothers.

A father's hugs and kisses need to be given generously to daughters in a clean, clearly defined, and understood father role with absolutely no sexual undertones and overtones. His little girl is blossoming into womanhood, and he is the gardener who must protect her as he admires and nurtures. The mother's needs to contribute to the health of that process by not reacting in fear or jealousy.

A girl in her teens goes through her own kind of revolt; it is usually more subtle than a boy's. Inside herself she dreams, thinks, ponders, fantasizes, and then expresses outwardly in little dramas that test the reality of who and what she imagines herself to be. She is a little girl one day, sweet and innocent and wanting very much to please. The next day she may relish the role of a scarlet woman to the world. At the deep feeling level, she may throw herself intensely into a variety of roles without any intention of acting upon such emotions or settling into the role as a lifestyle. She is simply experimenting in order to discover for herself who she really is. It is vital for her to have a father who can stand in gentle strength for her, understanding and affirming her until she can come to maturity and rest. If he or her mother attach too much significance to her expressions of moods

or phases, they may lock her into them by her need to defend where she is. She will feel misunderstood, judged, and rejected and may be unwilling or unable to move on until she is assured of unqualified love and acceptance.

Worse, suppose a daughter feels guilty about something she has been involved in with her peer group, or simply wants to share guilt for a feeling she has entertained. She tells her father about it, and he responds, “Now, listen. No daughter of mine is going to act like that! Now, you straighten yourself out, and I don’t want to hear of you doing a thing like that again!” Proud of himself, he thinks he has been a dutiful father. What he has done is to allow a panic dynamic to invade the relationship, and that causes an immediate and automatic slamming of the door of communication. It is not likely that he *will* hear of her doing a thing like that again. He has in effect said to her, “I am not going to be with you; I am going to be over against you. You can’t tell me anything because I’m not going to hear you. I will put you down. I am only going to hear my own need to have a perfect daughter.” He has also said to her that she must not by any means attempt to become her own person. A father must be made sensitive by the Lord Jesus Christ to *hear* the daughter, because she needs to be able to unburden herself to him and then hug him. His manner needs to tell her that he can let her experience, find out, trust her not to go too far, and then love her and forgive her when she stumbles.

We used to give a nickname to our daughter Ami. We called her the “love boat.” She would hug her dad awhile, go on her way, then as if she had run out of gas, come back for refueling. She knew he was there for her and that if she needed a hauling up short, he would do it without condemnation. Girls are different from boys in this respect. By her manner, Ami would ask that a behavioral line be drawn, and when it was, she could relax and say no to a boyfriend who was getting out of line.

Christian sensitivity rules Christian discipline. For the teen, physical discipline is no longer appropriate. Discipline needs to be in terms of, “Look, here is the line. You’re on your own, but you know if you step over the line, you’re the one who made the choice. Here are the penalties. They have to be observed, but I love you no matter what.” A girl really wants to test against her dad her ability to twist men around her finger. There are battles she must not win, for if she does, she will later operate that way with her husband in the form of conscious or unconscious manipulation. A father must be strong in the discipline of the Lord but sensitive to his daughter.

Do we see that there is no palming off the teaching ministry of a father to his children? He *will* teach them by who and what he is. Every man must make his own peace with God, or his children will feel the lack in every area of their formation. That is why the Old Testament closes with such powerful words. “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (Mal. 4:5–6).

6



MOTHERS, SONS, AND DAUGHTERS

Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she smiles at the future. She opens her mouth in wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue. She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and bless her; her husband also, and he praises her, saying: “Many daughters have done nobly, but you excel them all.”

—PROVERBS 31:25–29

OUR MATERIALISTIC CULTURE HAS ALSO DONE MUCH TO destroy what mothers should know themselves to be. Since we have already spoken concerning how the culture deprives fathers, and much of that applies to mothers, we will teach here more about what can be done to restore mothers’ roles. The premier scripture is Proverbs 31:10–31. One cannot help seeing that most of the things listed in this passage are menial, time-consuming tasks that must be done again and again, day after day—sewing, marketing, and running the household in multitudes of little details. A mother’s work is never finished.

Life seems unfair and unglamorous to many women now, and it appears to have been more so in the biblical society that had no modern appliances. But there was then a basically different way of viewing life. The Bible speaks of the kind of culture our Lord wishes to establish upon Earth when He said, “But the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:11). As we explained in chapter 2, people in the Bible believed that the Spirit of God flows through everything a woman touches. They understood that what she does with her hands is spiritual. Her work, however tedious, is not solely an earthly, physical thing. God’s Spirit flows through everything she is and does. Mothers today need to regain that sense of not being alone as they move about the house doing what seems to them routine monotony.

They need to comprehend that the Spirit of God witnesses the life of Christ to all in and around her home as she does those tasks that seem so meaningless. As with fathers, what she is forms her children. Mothers also are the medium; they are the teaching.

In the beginning, as the Lord first began to work upon men's consciences, women were regarded as little more than chattel in a maledominated culture. Throughout the Bible, one can trace a progression of respect and emancipation of women, from Sarah's embarrassed laughter (Gen. 18:9–15) to Deborah's rule (Judg. 4–5) and Jael's faithfulness (Judg. 4–5). It is no coincidence that the Word carefully records the descent of the Davidic line through Ruth the Moabitess. By the time Proverbs was written, we hear that a good wife is a gift of God (Prov. 12:4; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10) and "she does him good and not evil all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:12). By the time of the New Testament, Elizabeth and Mary are both visited by the angel of God and exalted among men forever (Luke 1, especially v. 48). Jesus honored His mother, even from the cross (John 19:26) and declared that no man could put his wife away except in cases of unchastity (Matt. 5:31–32). St. Paul made a most astounding statement for those days, that husbands and wives should be subject *to one another* (Eph. 5:21) and that a husband does not rule over his own body but the wife does (1 Cor. 7:4). Historically, it can be shown that wherever the Hebraic or Christian faith has appeared, respect for and emancipation of women from the dominance of men have followed.

Therefore, when we write concerning the menial tasks of motherhood, we are not continuing the supposed chauvinistic suppression of women to slavery. Rather, we are celebrating the fact that God has exalted women to the highest position by giving them the place of greatest service.

We do not see how any Christian mother can be satisfied and fulfilled so long as her eyes are dazzled by the seeming importance of grandiose things done outside the home, such as missionary work, evangelism, healing the sick, and so on. I myself have seen and continue to embrace the importance of such things in my life, but until I became content and saw myself fulfilled as a homemaker and mother and knew the glory of God to be in the tedium of everyday life as much as anywhere else, the Lord did not release me to the teamwork of ministry we now share. Satan comes only to rob, steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Perhaps his greatest theft from women has been their spiritual awareness of the unique glory of their position and

tasks as mothers. Right there in the constant repetitions of daily unnoticed chores, in the midst of the drudgery, sparkles the radiance of God's presence, incarnating the life of Jesus Christ among men. It is easy to identify being Christian with church attendance, prayer meetings, and various activities while failing to see that worship and prayer meetings are to refuel the spirit for the main life of Christianity, which is in the home.

Every mother's heart is the place of the Lord's visitation upon her, where the Holy Spirit breaks from the page to reality in daily living. When worship experiences, however glorious, rather than the home, become identified as the glory of our life in Christ, they have become a seduction and an idolatry. A worship service, however good, is only a small part of our life in the Spirit, a gathering and a retreat in the midst of the natural flow of human events of God and man. And that meeting occurs in words across the dinner table, or hands sharing dish towels, or games of checkers, or picnics at the park. It is there that God sparkles in reality. Rushing through housework, hurrying the children to the babysitter in order to get out to do something "important" for God demonstrates that a wife has things exactly backward. Her home is her first calling. Her family is her primary ministry, and that is not a reduction from the great things she could have done, but an elevation to the highest.

In Episcopal Bishop William Frey's home in Denver, where sometimes as many as twenty-one people used to live in community as an extended family, no one was assigned a menial job to do. But someone is given a kitchen ministry, the bishop himself has a furnace-room ministry, another the bathroom ministry. And as Bishop Frey said, "If the bathroom ministry is neglected, the ministry at the cathedral suffers." So it is in every family. If the home is not in order, there is no place of security from which to minister effectively anywhere else.

IN THE WOMB

During the nine months in which the spirit of a child dwells within the womb of a mother, the vessel that she is, her body, her emotions, her life with Christ, or her lack of it, influences the spirit and the formation of the soul of her child. In several places, the Word of God indicates the ability of our spirits to know things while we are being formed in the womb. We have

already spoken of Luke 1:39–44 in which John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary entered the room. In Jeremiah 1:5 God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Notice the words, “I formed you in the womb.” Is He speaking merely of the natural body? Or also the formation of character? The context concerns his appointment and anointing to be a prophet.

In 1977 Aidan MacFarlane, a British pediatrician, writing in his book, *The Psychology of Childbirth*, stated, “Unborn children, long before the full term of pregnancy, develop senses of taste, hearing, touch, perhaps even sight. *They respond to the emotional states of their mothers* and are probably susceptible to rudimentary learning.”¹ Since then, Dr. MacFarlane’s words have been confirmed through countless studies. So we see how important it is for a child to be held in the womb of a mother whose spirit, body, and soul are being made into a clean vessel through the Lord Jesus Christ. It is frightening to realize that old hatred and fears harbored within her soul affect her child. But we can testify to hundreds of cases in which hatred, fear, and anxiety were traceable directly to experiences in the womb.

To carry such a realization too far, fearing that everything in a mother becomes part of her child, is to reduce it to absurdity. Some of us who are older can remember the superstitious fears of some mothers who were sure they had marked their children. We need to guard against such fears, while on the other hand rediscovering the necessity to ensure good, wholesome experiences for women in pregnancy. Biblical women considered the first three to five months of pregnancy as being crucial to the formation of their child. “And after these days Elizabeth his wife became pregnant; and she kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, ‘This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men’” (Luke 1:24–25).

Some have wondered why Elizabeth hid herself, and some have erroneously concluded she was ashamed to be pregnant. Not at all. Elizabeth had been ashamed *not* to be pregnant. In that day a woman was under reproach if she could not bring forth sons. Therefore, when she became pregnant, she called the people to see: “Look what I have accomplished for my husband!” She made sure everyone who had been taunting her would see that she was bearing a child. Both Rachel and

Elizabeth exclaimed in effect, “God has taken away my reproach” (Gen. 30:23; Luke 1:25).

But why, if she was not ashamed, did Elizabeth hide herself? Luke 1:39–40 says, “Now at this time Mary arose and went with haste to the hill country, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.” We can understand her haste because Gabriel had said that Elizabeth’s pregnancy would be a sign to Mary. But observe what follows, “Mary stayed with her *about three months*” (v. 56). Why a stay of three months? Why did she not quickly return to Joseph?

In the biblical society, when a woman knew that she had conceived, she hid herself from her husband and family and from all other involvements. She would retire to the home of a dear friend or relative who could be counted on to protect her seclusion. During that time she would pray, read Scripture, sing praises, and meditate about God in order to bless her child with a beautifully formed soul. Wifely duties in all the family would beckon and tempt her to busy herself unless some distance allowed rest and privacy.

Since we have thought in our antichrist culture that our spirit is something different and apart from our body, we have considered the growth of an unborn child as merely a physical thing. And so we have allowed a pregnant woman to return to work, be exposed to all manner of noise and hassle, smoke, drink, gossip, and to think harsh thoughts—and then we wonder why the newborn baby is colicky and nervous, cries so much, and develops a personality and character full of problems. We no longer live the wisdom that is in the Bible. Having ministered to thousands of people, we firmly believe that if a pregnant mother prays and meditates, her baby will be blessed accordingly. Early on in our ministry, while we were teaching alongside a prominent Christian psychiatrist,² someone asked him, “Can what the mother thinks and feels really affect the baby in the womb?” He replied, “We know that the mother’s emotions affect the rate of blood coming to the baby, affect the supply of oxygen, and generally influence many things physically.” He went on to comment that we do not know how much the baby may be affected emotionally and spiritually because we cannot measure that scientifically, but it is certainly reasonable to infer that the same stimuli affect the child in every other part of its being.

Since then a plethora of discoveries have confirmed that a mother’s emotions and actions do, in fact, affect the unborn child emotionally. Here are just a few examples: It is now known that when a pregnant mother feels

happy, her unborn child receives endorphins that cause him to feel the same pleasure she feels. After birth, the infant can still be soothed through music or voices that soothed the mother during pregnancy.³ Parents who quarrel while the baby is in the womb tend to produce a fearful, jumpy, undersized, timid, and inordinately emotionally dependent child.⁴ A mother who smokes can inculcate a chronic state of fear, uncertainty, and deep-seated anxiety into her unborn child, who will react even if she thinks about having a cigarette!⁵ For more on this subject, see chapter 1 of our book *Growing Pains*. Better yet, go to “Google” on your computer and search the phrase “prenatal research.” You will find a continually growing list of books and articles on the subject!

I became pregnant with Andrea at the same time another member of our prayer group conceived her son Mike. We were surprised to discover later that the Holy Spirit had spoken very similarly to both of us, in our own guidance apart from each other, pulling us back from all intercessory burdens and from all works in the church. Both of us were told to retreat into our homes, to meditate and pray, and to enjoy wholesome family living. It seemed especially important that we, who were burden bearers for the Lord, carry no intercessory burdens at all during our pregnancies. Hidden wisdom within us received that word with a sigh of recognition and relief, and our pregnancies became a time of blessing and refreshment—and both children show it in their security and loving personalities.

If a negative thing has happened that could introduce fear or hurt through the mother into the child’s character, then we should simply pray for that thing to be healed and turned to blessing. That is one reason our Lord came to Earth through a mother’s womb, so that because He has experienced human life, He is able to heal those who suffer and are tempted (Heb. 2:18).

A WORD ON ABORTION

Obviously we are against the new laws that permit abortion simply because the mother doesn’t want to have a child. No unborn child is an “it” that can be discarded as an inconvenience. A baby in the womb is a living spirit, and abortion is murder. If we encourage a woman to have an abortion, we are accomplices with her in that crime. Many years ago a woman came to us whose husband was pressuring her to have an abortion. Because the new

laws seemed designed to soothe the conscience, and her husband persisted, she consented, despite her misgivings. We listened to the woman in silence while she confessed her feelings and then watched in compassion as she sat and sobbed and sobbed. She knew she had killed the life God had given to her, and she was inconsolable. How we wish that lawmakers could sit with us to experience the heartbreak of such women as they are overwhelmed with grief and a guilty conscience after the fact. Forgiveness lifts away the weight of guilt, but it is more difficult to overcome the sense of loss.

Too often men think if society passes a law, that makes a thing all right. But laws contrary to God's law never make anything all right with God. Murder remains murder no matter what men declare. We are *not* saying that there are not times when the Lord might Himself allow a life to be taken. That is out of our province. But we do know that giving carte blanche to kill all our babies we don't want is horrendous in the sight of God. Many times, in calling us to pray about this, the Lord has called to mind scriptures concerning the sacrifice of infants to false gods (Ps. 106:38; Isa. 57:5; Jer. 19:5; Ezek. 16:20). When human comfort and pleasures become more important than human life, we are verily sacrificing our children to idols and drawing upon this nation the wrath of God.

PHYSICAL AFFECTION

Some time ago, our culture reached the nadir of the split mentality that has been its philosophical base. Whatever was natural became suspect. Mothers' milk was no longer thought to be as valuable as substitutes. Then came that most destructive of all parental teachings—"four hours in the crib, awaken and feed, back in the crib four hours, awaken and feed. Don't hold the child too much; you'll spoil him."

Today women are again discovering the value of breast-feeding and of holding their children in their arms. Breast-feeding not only physically conveys antibodies needed by the infant to ward off disease, but more importantly, the mother's spirit enfolds the child and flows through her breast to sustain and bless the baby in the well-spring of its inner life. A baby drinks more than milk from its mother. No bottle can in any way copy or replace who she is.

Time Life Films produced a movie titled *Rock-a-Bye Baby—Life Around Us* in which the theme is again and again stated, through the reporting of scientific experiments and studies made of animal and human mothering, that infants require stimulation of all their senses.⁶ The need to be touched and moved is as undeniable as the need to be fed; the baby craves and needs to be rocked. If the child is denied mothering and rocking, an abnormal functioning of the cerebellum results that adversely affects social and emotional behavior and often manifests itself in serious mental retardation.

The movie reported that Dr. Mary Neil conducted experiments in several New York hospitals with incubators designed to rock. Some premature infants were placed in these and rocked for several weeks for half-hour periods three times a day. They were then tested for rate of growth and development against premature infants kept in conventional, stationary incubators. Inquiry and testing concerned such questions as strength of hand grasp. How long did it take a baby to raise his head enough to lift the nose from the mattress? What changes took place in coordination? The infants who were rocked showed higher development in all these areas, plus greater weight gain and increased responses to sight and sound stimuli.

In this same film, Dr. Harry Harlow of the University of Wisconsin discussed extensive experiments he conducted with monkeys. They were taken from their natural mothers and given two types of substitutes; one was made of wire and the other was cloth covered. The baby monkeys would spend as much as fifteen hours a day for as long as two years clinging to their cloth-covered substitutes. The wire substitutes seemed to offer no excitement or comfort even when they were equipped with a bottle. The infants would invariably run to the foodless cloth mothers, particularly when they were startled to fear.

Dr. Harlow then provided two types of fur-covered mother substitutes. They were identical except that one was stationary while the other was constantly moving and rocking. Monkeys raised with the moving mother indulged in some thumb sucking but were generally bold and friendly. Those raised with the stationary mother were extremely timid and unsociable, afraid of changes made in their environment. Moreover, they exhibited the repeated pattern of rocking back and forth that had been observed by Dr. Rene Spitz in retarded, institutionalized children who were seldom held and loved.

At Hazelton Laboratories, Dr. James Prescott observed that monkeys who were raised by their natural mothers were healthy and reacted happily to one another in play. Touch was so important to them that when attempts were made to separate them, they resisted, clinging to one another to maintain bodily contact. On the other hand, monkeys raised in isolation did not know how to play when put together. They were at best indifferent to touch, and sometimes reacted to touch as if it were something extremely unpleasant. When held, they would exhibit great stress to the point of screeching.

In prayer ministry, we have found that it is easier to bring a person to wholeness, even if he has experienced the abuse of overdisciplining from his parents, if he has also received physical affection from the parents. Affection has called to life in him the capacity to open, to forgive, to risk, to love, and to be loved. But to minister to a person who has never been hugged to life in the beginning and to bring him to the point of sharing really and lovingly in any sort of relationship requires a miracle of God through consistent, persistent offering of someone affectionately as friend and mother-father substitute. Learning and transformation cannot be accomplished only by recognition and intellectual understanding and setting of the will.

A mother's demonstrated love for her child throughout the early years is so important that we have often wondered how the course of history might have been changed had the Hitlers of the world been nurtured in the loving arms of Christian mothers.

LETTING GO

A mother, perhaps more than a father, finds her identity as a person in her role as a parent. Though she may pursue many avenues of creativity, finding success in whatever opportunities are presented to make use of her unique talents, her primary sense of fulfillment may yet come in the rewards of watching her children grow into the fullness of their own lives. It is a part of her nature to bring forth life, and she has within her a natural inclination to nurture and protect. Much of the depth of her being is poured into the helpless infant she nurses. An immeasurable amount of time and energy is spent rescuing toddlers at the point of takeoff at the top of staircases,

washing dirty hands and wiping runny noses, bandaging skinned knees, and comforting tummy aches and hurt feelings. For a number of years her schedule revolves around the needs and activities of her children.

It is difficult to let children go, then, when they need to cut free. Mother is emotionally invested and involved in a risk relationship with them, and to achieve the appropriate degree of detachment involves a deliberate choosing to die to her self-image, hopes, dreams, and fears in order to trust. Her head says (with Kahlil Gibran) that her children are not her own, that they have been entrusted to her by God, that they are as arrows shot forth from the home and that God Himself will direct them to their mark. But in her heart she may tie a rope to the end of each arrow, hang on tightly, and follow, flying through the air with her mouth going sixty miles a minute, “Don’t forget what I told you!” “Remember when...” “Watch out!” “Be careful!”

She may tell herself she has taught her children the very best she knew how, the basics of how to live, but there is always the nagging question in the face of what lies beyond the door of the home: “Is it enough?” If she believes with all her heart the promise, “Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6), then her cry from the heart level will be, “But not *too* old. Lord, please?”

It was easy for me to see that to give my teenage children too much warning and advice was to communicate mistrust to them and might often have the same effect as telling a child not to put beans up his nose. If he hadn’t thought of it before, it is now suddenly attractive. But for a time, I, like many other responsible Christian mothers, took on the terribly intense and serious task of yearning, interceding, protecting with devoted hours of standing as a prayer warrior, weeping, repenting, and hanging on to every little word and action to measure the success of my effort. Johnny gave me a firmly kind and liberating word one day when he said, “Mom, you’re trying too hard.” Had he said, “Get off my case,” I could have received it as ingratitude, rebellion, and rejection and settled into a noble martyr role. But there was only mildly irritated compassion in his tone. That made me aware that he was sensitive to me on a deep feeling level and that my lack of rest and peace and trust of him in the Lord’s hands compounded his difficulty dealing with the tension that already existed between his two worlds—the values system of home and the peer group.

There was no way I knew *how* to let go, but I repented sincerely for having put judgment and pressure on him, told him I was sorry, and asked the Lord to slay the part of me that wanted to be the savior of my son. I had been unconsciously demanding that he fill my image, live out my expectations, and save himself and me pain. The Lord heard, again slew my overmothering, and created the kind of space between us in which His own Spirit of grace could operate to release old tensions, enable real forgiveness, and establish us in freedom to communicate with one another trustingly. We no longer had to defend ourselves. That was the immediate beginning of a new level of maturity for Johnny. I knew the breakthrough was real when he lightheartedly introduced me to his buddies at work as his “girlfriend.” I continued to pray for him, but my prayers affirmed that the Lord was on the throne of our lives. And I asked Him to fill my children with their own strength and might in the inner man that they might have power from within to discern and choose wisely.

We say we believe in a God who is an all-knowing, ever-present, loving, caring Father whose faithfulness is never lacking. We may sing a lusty, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him”; but the test of our faith comes again and again in terms of the genuineness of our relinquishment of teenage children to Him. Do we really believe that if we give up our control, God will be there to protect, discipline, defend, and nurture?

Giving up control is not coterminous with permissiveness. We may still draw firm lines, but if our heart is free, our children will sense it.

Our second son, Mark, was from the beginning gifted and creative. For most of his young life he was out of step with the rest of the world. For him time stood still while he kicked leaves from one end of the block to the other and the school day wore on without him. Friends along the school route watched for him, so as to direct him to flow with the school-bound traffic. In the first grade, his practices in penmanship would proceed normally to a point of boredom, and then there would appear little hanging vines from the base of the letters, with elves swinging from the curlicues. Such creativity was viewed by others as a mixture of delightfulness and weirdness. The entire process of coming into the more inhibited disciplines of our educational system succeeded in communicating to him that somehow it was not all right to be himself and resulted in some pain of awkwardness and loneliness for him as he grew older. On a hike through the

woods he would be left far behind by those who could not comprehend what possible value there could be in pursuing friendship with a bug on the underside of a trillium leaf. His sensitive and imaginative faculties enabled him to experience life in perceptions his peers could little see and hardly understand, and he tended to interpret a great deal of their rambunctious joking and jostling as rejection of him personally. It seemed to him to be a phony sort of game they played. It remained foreign to his nature to “get with it,” and of questionable value at best. He learned to function in the world by sharing very little out of his inner guarded treasure, while growing in depth in his own spirit and yet manifesting an unnerving sort of naïveté in relation to what other people were thinking and doing. A significant interchange while he was still in grade school went something like this (out of the blue, no prelude):

“I was telling you the truth then.”

“When, Mark?”

“When I first came to you.”

End of conversation. I particularly, with all my mother-hen instincts, wanted to protect him and found it very difficult to believe that this young man, who could spend a half hour putting his socks on, could function successfully at college without our scheduling and constant practical direction. But Mark chose a university that was four hundred miles away from home, and the Lord said clearly, “Let go.” We lived in growing awe of how much better a parent our Lord God had been than we had been! Mark secured a grant and a job through the work-study program, made his own way financially with only occasional help from us (rarely solicited), and bought his own car. He made the dean’s list almost every semester through five years of college (a number of times with a perfect 4.0). Disciplining himself to a program of weight lifting, he grew into manhood looking like a young Greek god. He earnestly sought Christian fellowship and found it. The artwork he produced is magnificent. He worked through personal relationships to become compassionate, understanding, and outgoing. He came to an appreciative acceptance of himself and enrolled at a seminary to study for the ministry, which he did, and graduated with honors. We shudder to think how we might have prevented his life, thinking to preserve it, had we given in to what our anxiety-ridden senses told us.

Several years ago a woman came to John for advice. She was in great distress, complaining that her son was rebelling, beginning to go astray, and

giving way to fits of anger. She was at a loss as to how to control him. The woman was so far along in years that as she talked, John was beginning to wonder if she could be a Sarah. And then her son appeared at the door—a thirty-seven-year-old, still walking with the toddling step of a three-year-old, his middle-aged spread filling his summer shorts like baby fat. He left, following at mommy's heels.

We have talked with many wives who have found themselves married to little boys who constantly run to Mama for aid and comfort. When the wife complains that responsibilities at home are being neglected or that they as husband and wife can never talk things through, she suddenly becomes the enemy. No man likes to be told that he is still dragging his umbilical cord. His defense becomes, "You're jealous. I'm just helping out Mom. After all, think of all my parents have done for me. I don't know why you can't get along with my mother." On the other hand, there are wives who still run to Mama for approval and advice and support that should come from the husband. Their husbands feel aced out, intruders in the family, rejected, forced into a position of competing for their place.

If a mother has given enough physical affection to her child in all of the formative years and then lets go in the heart while continuing to express affection to her teenager, she will find herself with an adult child who is free to grow into his own destiny and take adult responsibility for his own life with his family. He will also be free to give his love and attention to his parents in appropriate ways and measure without being driven and drawn by unsatisfied hungers, insecurities, and demands upon his inner being. Mother is a blessing. "Smother" is a bane.

PART II



THE POSITION OF A HUSBAND

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself.

—EPHESIANS 5:23, 25–28

HUSBANDS ARE CREATED BY GOD TO MAKE FIRST SURRENDER to Jesus that all the family may choose that lifestyle by example, not coercion. Leadership means taking initiative and responsibility in presenting the family under the lordship of Jesus. The husband is head of the family (Eph. 5:23–24). We will speak later of what can be done if the husband abdicates, but for now let us see what headship really is. Headship is actually responsibility to serve: "...but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:26). Too many Christian husbands have heard the call of headship, only to translate the world's concepts of authority into the home. That has brought control, dominance, and exaltation of the flesh, not blessing.

Christian headship means responsibility to lay down the life for the other (John 15:13). In the world and in the flesh, those in authority aggrandize, direct, and control those under them, reducing others in the end to extensions of the leader's thoughts and way of life. But the Christian in authority exists to set those under him free to become their own persons. That means that whereas the world's authority uses force, threat, or manipulation to extract behavior from the other, with or without free

consent, the Christian authority never insists on his own way (1 Cor. 13:5). He must not resort to force or any device to insist that the other do what he thinks is right. He may command, but behind that command is only the covenant of the other's free will by which he honors the follower's right to choose to disobey and reap his own consequences.

Even though the husband's position may grant him the right to command, he may not protect himself from hurt and disappointment by "causing" his wife to obey. He wins agreement by pure love and willingness or not at all. As Jesus rules by "...the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:21), and that power is simple love, so the Christian husband so lays down his life in loving service for his wife that obedience is willingly given.

This does not make the Christian head a "wheedler," or manipulator, "using" love to get things done. Sometimes he must scold, rebuke, and exhort, yet all such is tempered by the necessity to invite the giving of the other's will. And his work is to execute what God has revealed as His will, not the leader's.

A husband is given to bless and fulfill his wife's life. A husband who wants to quit the marriage because he "can't find happiness with that woman" reveals that he never understood the first concept of husbandship. His intent was never to give but to get. Failure came, therefore, not as the result of his unhappiness but at the very inception of the marriage. On the other hand, the attempt to fulfill her life does not make him a martyr who never receives anything from her. Part of fulfilling her is learning how to let her love him, which can be more humbling than giving all the time.

Husbands are given to take leadership in prayer—not to do all of it or to control it. In day-to-day life, that means the husband should take the responsibility to say table graces or delegate this privilege to a family member. He should pray aloud for his wife if she is ill or say a blessing if she is to take a trip, speak before a group, or minister somewhere. He should establish and maintain family prayer times. His reading of the Word and meditating upon the law of God provide the context and style of the family's life.

As the children experience their father's openness and humility as he carries the family problems and concerns to the Father in prayer, as they hear him praise the Lord for His faithfulness in all things, as they sit beside him in church in shared devotion, they will receive the structure of his

godliness as a natural part of the fabric of their lives. If the head of the household is in tune with the joys and the sorrows of those in his charge, and meets them where they are, he will call forth from them an ability to respond to authority throughout their lives without fear and guile.

The husband should be the first comforter of a child, not the laggard, nagged-at one who finally sees and does so because his wife gave him no peace—“Jim, can’t you see how your daughter is hurting and needs you?”

A Christian head of a household is one who knows his position is a God-given privilege, an opportunity to express and experience the creative nurturing grace of the Father, not a burden to be endured in the spaces between the times he calls his own. He is refreshed on the golf course and by national championship ball games far less than he is by finding quiet joy in shared thoughts and adventures with his wife and children.

The mantle of protection that a Christian husband extends over his family is made of the substance of his belonging and trusting in God. A wife is bone of her husband’s bones and flesh of his flesh (Gen. 2:23). As he is rooted and grounded in love (Eph. 3:17) and as he walks obediently in God’s wisdom, his house is built upon a rock, and his wife and children dwell restfully within that house. A man is not God to his wife. The Lord will shelter her, defend her, guide her, correct her, and refresh her directly as she stands in her own relationship with Him. But there is a special quality of security and restfulness that God provides through her husband who knows who he is in the Lord.

Some, learning that cover should come through the husband, have rushed into religious practices that fail to sanctify the nature of God (Num. 20:12) and result in subjecting wives and children to bondage. One husband we know would not let his wife go anywhere without first obtaining his permission and informing him of exactly where she would be, when, and with whom. Such practices reduce wives to the status of a ten-year-old. The Lord would never so disrespect the commonsense judgment of any adult.

Some time ago I visited in the home of a couple in California. They showed me their new home with delight. When we arrived in the master bedroom, the husband said, “You know, John, it’s strange; this is the one room I have never liked.”

I said, “Who decorated this room?”

“I did,” he responded.

“That’s the problem. The wife is the nest builder. Give her whatever money is required and let her decorate it, and then see how you like it.” They did. And several months later when I returned, they reported that the room was now a delight.

Subsequently, this lovely couple entered into a prevalent teaching in the area that attempted to restore husbands to headship and cover. In this teaching, husbands were to make all the decisions, filling out the husband’s picture of what life should be. For a wife to express her opinion was considered rebellious. She was to be docile, sweet, and a perfect expression of her husband’s wishes. The teaching went so far as to say that when the couple went out to eat, he should sense what his wife might like and order without consulting her.

About a year later, Paula and I came again to California, and that young wife, hearing we had come, called me in tears. “My husband has just gone to spend a week with another woman and tells me that being a submissive wife means that I should let him do this so he can find out if he really wants to choose me or her!” I was furious at that delusion so wounding to my friends and prayed, binding spirits of delusion and loosing my friend to return to his home. That night he came to his senses and drove home. The next morning they came to see me for counsel.

His complaint was, “There is nothing to her. I don’t like her anymore.” What had happened was that she had tried to do everything that teaching required. She asked his permission for everything—the result being that he no longer wanted to make love to a child. He wanted a woman beside him. She tried to become everything he wanted her to be—and now, just like the bedroom, he didn’t like what he had created. She was no longer God’s gift to him, a unique person, a counterfoil over against him; she was only an extension of him—and he was lonely.

Cover and protection are not a matter of empty, rigid religious practices. True cover never causes a man to usurp God’s place with his wife.

When I am home, Paula feels more secure. When my heart is right with God, her own devotions are not invaded by demonic powers or distractions. Paula is one with me, but at the same time she is distinct from me. We do not meet as complete husband to incomplete wife, nor do we come together as two halves to become one whole. We two are identified with one another so He can bless and reform us through the other while He brings each of us to wholeness individually by the Lord Jesus Christ. He perfects each of us

according to our need to grow up into salvation. At the same time, He nurtures those qualities in each of us that He in His wisdom knows will add just the right depth and dimension to the team He has called us to be.

HUSBANDS' INCAPABILITIES

Many husbands cannot present themselves vulnerably in the marriage relationship so that individual death and rebirth into corporate life can happen. They are still too bound up in fear of the mother's critical tongue or controlling spirit to let the wife into their hearts. Unconsciously they want to *have* a wife, but they do not want true corporate life *with* a wife. This prevents real sexual union, for nowhere is the man more vulnerable than in the marriage bed. Not uncommon is the husband who, succeeding in arousing his wife sexually, is deathly afraid of any responsive, aggressive action she might take, for fear of being controlled, or dominated, or less than a man. More frequently, however, the husband has been taught by society that he must perform aggressively and competently in sex, and his sense of manhood is too closely knit with this. His wife's responses to his advances tell him how well he has "succeeded" or how miserably he has "failed." He has no understanding of sexual union as giving, meeting, and sharing physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Consequently, he fails to "meet her," to cherish her as a person for her sake, and so uses her that she eventually flees into frigidity.

Too often he proceeds ignorant of basic male-female differences. He may not know (1) that her natural desire for him (even if she is free from inhibitions) is subject to her menstrual cycle; (2) that her desire for him is enhanced or limited by what has gone on during the day, particularly in relation to his choosing to appreciate and share positively with her; (3) that her passions are more slowly aroused and often require some tender, sensitive stimulation; and (4) that she sometimes needs a long period of quiet embrace and sharing of life in simple chit-chat before her inner being finds its place of belonging in him so that her triggering mechanism is ready to stimulate sexual organs and feelings.

Accustomed to treating objects as "its," unaware of the sensitive life of the human spirit, he comes on like a freight train and soon finds himself with no more track to run on, derailed, frustrated, rejected, and angry.

Inwardly he feels guilty and insecure, but men are supposed to be strong and controlled. So he accuses her of being frigid, uncaring, not wanting to be a wife to him, or playing games. He may then begin to look elsewhere for relationships that, however shallow or temporary, build his ego. He may exchange natural conjugal sex for girly magazines and masturbation. He may even go to such extremes as to completely sublimate his sexual drive out of fear of risking. Or, on the other hand, he may force the issue to the point of raping his own wife for self-gratification.

A Christian husband participates in the sexual relationship as his wife's Christian lover. A lover is one who cherishes the life of the other, to give joy to the other. Men who think to "get" in marital sex have never entered the arena of true love. True marital happiness in sex is found when a husband lays down his life to bring joy and fulfillment to his wife. The more he can restrain his own desire for immediate fulfillment to cherish her into a sense of blessedness and happiness, the greater his own joy will be.

"Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails..." (1 Cor. 13:4-8). If a Christian husband finds it difficult to enter into true corporate life and fulfillment of his partner in sex because of past wounds, disappointments, and fears, he should read further in 1 Corinthians 13. "When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things" (v. 11).

Giving up the attitudes that were formed in him from his childhood may mean he will have to sit down with a friend or prayer minister to lift out the root causes of his negative expectations, fear, resentment, and self-centeredness so that they may be confessed as sin and brought to death on the cross. It may mean a deep humbling that counters what his culture has taught him about the real man handling everything himself, taking care of his own problems. But he will then be free to learn to relate to his wife as a mature husband and lover. He will then be able to bring her to life, which in turn will enable her to meet and nurture him.

Trained in our shallow, materialistic culture, few husbands discover the true glory of the marriage bed. "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts

satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love” (Prov. 5:18–19). A man who finds the true reality of meeting his wife spirit to spirit through the embrace of their bodies will be “exhilarated always with her love.” He will know intuitively that no other woman, however beautiful of face, figure, or personality, can have for him what his wife has. No other woman’s spirit has been attuned by God through the wedding ceremony, and by their daily life, to complete him and fulfill him in his spirit. What ravishes him is the glory of her being, singing into the very cells of his body who and what he is as a man. If sex becomes delimited to physical release, a husband has failed, however long or adequately he may perform physically. Through a woman’s body, and especially through her breasts, an energy of love flows like a river into a man. Blessed is the man whose spirit is so alive by prayer that he can feel the song of his wife’s spirit rising through him.

In ministry, we have found that too few husbands know the virtue of nudity with their wives. Our spirits pour forth to one another much like electricity. We need the current of each other. Clothes tend to insulate. A husband needs the power of his wife’s body against him, quite apart from sexual union.

All too few husbands and wives understand that verse, “Let her breasts satisfy you at all times” (Prov. 5:19). During the day, husbands need to hug their wives long enough to let the current that flows from her pierce the heart to refresh and strengthen. Woman was taken from the rib of man. Man protects woman by his strength and logic, but woman protects the heart area of man. Her breasts satisfy him when held against his chest. Her energy fills and warms all his thinking with wisdom and gentleness. In sexual embrace, husbands most often fail to touch, hold, and kiss the breasts enough. Men need to feed, sensitively and quietly, a long time upon their wives’ breasts. The command is to “*let* her breasts satisfy you at *all* times.” It is fulfilling and satisfying to both partners. A man who is fully satisfied in his wife’s embrace, who truly feeds upon her love, is not easily tempted by another. Who would take a bologna sandwich to a banquet? Only his own wife is a fully satisfying banquet to his heart, soul, spirit, and body. Let husbands pray that God will reveal to them the true gift and power of their wives’ love for them. It is not that we are too sexual, but not sexual enough, because we do not discover how to meet and nourish, cherish, embrace, and feed upon one another’s love as we ought.

Although we have been speaking mainly of husbands' sexual confusions and ignorance, many marital difficulties arise from a lie taught to both partners by our nineteenth-century Victorian culture. Still today, movies, TV, novels, and romance literature tend to perpetuate in our minds that men are the sexual chasers and women the reluctant givers. Nothing could be further from fact or biblical precedent! The fact is that it is women who want far more than men will give. "Your desire shall be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). For one man who complains to Paula or me that his wife will not give enough sex, fifty women complain that their husbands will not. "Let the husband fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband" (1 Cor. 7:3). Leah bargained with Rachel, and having bought Jacob's services for the night, ran gleefully to meet him crying, "I get you tonight" (Gen. 30:14–16, authors' paraphrase). The command had to be given to men again and again to "love your wives" (Eph. 5:25, 28; Col. 3:19) but only once to wives (Titus 2:4), though wives had to be told again and again to be submissive and to respect (Eph. 5:22, 24, 33; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5).

As a result of that confusion, husbands feel burdened as the pursuers, as an imposition to whom a wife grants favors. And wives have thought it unladylike to be aggressive. Both are frustrated by such attitudes. The desire of either for the other should be an opportunity to bless. "Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season" (1 Cor. 7:5, RSV). We have rightly understood that to mean that whichever wants, the other should give, but notice the inference. St. Paul did not say, "Do not refuse the husband..." as though only husbands asked for sex. Obviously wives in Bible times were free to ask their husbands to make love with them. Husbands need to feel sought after and claimed, even as Leah bargained precious mandrakes for a chance to lie with Jacob. How healthy it is that in more recent trends women are being given more freedom to be expressive and aggressive sexually and to seduce their husbands wholesomely. Husbands need to be chased by their wives.

COMMUNICATION AS PRELUDE AND BASIS

Though a wife has a mind of her own, her desire is to find, complement, and nurture that structure of life that is his philosophy, understanding, and

picture of what life is all about. Though a couple must work through many hidden psychological quirks in their personalities, and that is accomplished by experience, they must thresh the wheat of each other's minds by discussion. Wives are given as a gift of God (Prov. 18:22), and with that their natural desire to support and be loyal to their husbands' thoughts—but to do that, they hunger to know his thoughts. The consistent cry of wives is, "Talk to me." In prayer ministry, we find too few husbands who freely share their thinking with their wives as much as they should. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17).

Many husbands learned in childhood that whatever was revealed to Mama "can and will be used against you in a court of law." They have painfully experienced that mothers have elephantine memories that preserve details men have long forgotten. This leaves them afraid as husbands to reveal to their wives all that they think or feel. They fear being controlled, censored, castrated, or all of the above. They feel unequipped in verbal battles because wives' memories put them at a disadvantage. But husbands who have learned to share with their wives find their own balance, wisdom, restraint, and self-discipline. Only as husbands have learned to trust and become willing to risk themselves in Jesus can they impute that quality into their marital discussions and so find grace to open their minds to the full scrutiny of the wife's mind and heart.

A wife finds herself insecure and confused if she cannot know whether what she thinks and does is in accord with her husband's thought. She finds her mental security in the teamwork of sharing. If a husband's philosophy is too narrow or shallow for her commitment to Christ, she feels lonely and exposed, uncovered and endangered. She is shocked and feels betrayed if she overhears some new idea shared first with a friend or acquaintance at a party. If he presents that new idea as if it represents both of them, she feels railroaded or swallowed up in him and is hurt.

One of the most striking, probably purposeful, omissions in the Bible is found in Genesis 2 and 3. When the command was given not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Eve had not yet been formed from Adam's rib (Gen. 2:15–22). When Satan talked with Eve in Genesis 3:1–6, Eve revealed great confusion. She thought they were never to eat of the tree "*in the midst of the garden*," whereas there was no proscription not to eat of the tree *in the midst*, one of which was the tree of life (Gen. 2:9) God had only told Adam to abstain from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And she thought they were not to “touch it” (Gen. 3:3), though nothing had been said about touch. Obviously, either Adam failed to communicate accurately, or she misunderstood or forgot. How wise of God not to compound the battle of the sexes by telling us which was which! Still today, marital confusions abound because men fail to share and/or wives do not comprehend or retain. Perhaps no greater restoration is needed than the capacity of husbands and wives to share their minds amicably and fully. A wife who finds herself living with a stranger cannot unlock the deep gates of sexual sharing. *Her mind must find where her threads knit to his to form the one garment that is the plaid of their clan.* Christian husbands must discipline themselves to carry on the regular habit of sharing—else, as of old, Satan finds a playfield.

Where was Adam when Eve was talking to that serpent?



THE IMPORTANCE OF A FATHER'S LOVE

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse.

—MALACHI 4:5–6

FATHERS' LOVE OF THEIR CHILDREN IS SO IMPORTANT THAT without it a curse comes upon the land! The word is not to turn the heart of parents or mothers to their children but *fathers*. The word is not to turn the minds or attention of fathers to their children but to turn their *hearts*. Men can give lip service to an idea or set their wills to accomplish something, but only the Lord can give grace to change and set the heart. We call men not to set their teeth to try harder but to set their knees to pray. God will hear, but only God-given repentance can accomplish the change that is required.

When Paula and I were in seminary and my major was in religion and personality, we were required to write a major book-sized thesis to qualify for graduation. I chose to try to develop a test to reveal what Sunday schools of various denominations had actually taught. We chose representative denominations, two liturgical, two fundamental, and two liberal, and asked for six students from each, having composed a long and exacting test, from which we wrote a thesis titled *Testing Young People's Grasp of Christianity*.¹ As we expected, we discovered that the liturgical and fundamental young people knew the Word far better than the liberal students, and the liberal ones seemed to have a better attitude about love and service. But what shocked us was an unlooked-for revelation. The test included a semantic space test, which revealed attitudes toward fathers and

mothers, pastors, churches, our bodies, sex, and many other things. Across the board, no matter in which Sunday school they were from, students who rated their fathers and mothers as worthless, distasteful, weak, shallow, and sinful revealed trouble in every other area, especially in their ability to meet trying interpersonal life situations and in what they thought of their bodies and sex.

The revelation was so unexpected and so incisive that it became one of the major considerations that propelled our ministry into the restoration of families. We saw unequivocally that unless the hearts of fathers were turned to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, it mattered little what else we taught or did in our churches! We saw beyond doubt that right head knowledge of the faith produced nothing in terms of ability to express the fruit of the Spirit unless what was lodged in the heart relative to parents was met by effective grace in Jesus on the cross. We saw that conversion by itself failed to affect the necessary sanctification that can only happen by confession and daily self-death. The test revealed to us that in dreadful, actual fact, a curse does lie upon all who dishonor their parents (Mark 7:10). It is to the lifting of that curse that the church must move, posthaste, through fathers.

Note that the promise of God is to send Elijah the prophet *before* the great and terrible day of the Lord comes and that he will, in fact, turn the hearts of fathers and children to each other. The promise of God is positive. He *will* accomplish what He says. It remains only to be seen by whom. Who will say, "Here am I. Send me" (Isa. 6:8)?

Mr. Carl Foss, who ministers to men in prison through an organization called The Vision, came to visit in our town. He called for men to volunteer to accept prisoners on a one-on-one basis as sons in Christ. He reported that between 90 and 95 percent of those in prison have never known the love of a father, and he referred simply to prisoners as "the fatherless." In a visit to a reformatory, speaking to more than forty young people, he discovered that not one could claim the love of a father. Offering to sit in private with whomever would come to be with a father for fifteen minutes, he was overwhelmed by the response, and with the tears of supposedly hardened tough juveniles. He reported that on McNeil Island, in that prison, a man who had become a prison lawyer, an extremely intelligent man and a competent artist, had prepared a handsome, hand-done Father's Day card, which he offered for sale to his fellow inmates for four dollars. Finding no

takers, he reduced the offer to two dollars. Finally, he tried giving the card away. Not one would take a Father's Day card! Stunned, he came to Carl, who said, "Have you spent twenty years in this prison, and you still don't know that not one of these 1,280 prisoners has a father who loves him?"

He reported that studies done by him and others have revealed that children raised without fathers commonly lack strength of character, lack "backbone," tend more to have sexually deviant behavior, and fall more easily into crime. More recent surveys reveal that fatherless children are five times more likely to commit suicide, thirty-two times more likely to run away, twenty times more likely to have behavioral disorders, fourteen times more likely to commit rape, nine times more likely to drop out of school, ten times more likely to abuse chemical substances, nine times more likely to end up in a state-operated institution, and twenty times more likely to end up in prison.² Shades of 2 Timothy 3:1–5!

Carl informed us that in 1965 in America, three million mothers were raising children without fathers, but that by 1975, ten million were without fathers. Today, the number is twenty-four million, or 34 percent of American children—the highest rate in the world!³

FATHERS GIVE LIFE

Why are fathers that important? Simply because God so created them. We could reiterate chapters 1 and 5, embellishing endlessly, and not exhaust the single fact that God created children to drink their life from their father's spirit. The greatest tragedy of our silly, materialistic culture is that men have been demeaned of their status as sons of God, not knowing what they are to their children. Truly Satan came to rob and to steal. Fathers' identities have been stolen from them!

We are created in the image of God. As we must drink our life from our Father in heaven, so must our children from us. Wherever a father hugs his son, takes him fishing, binds a wound, hears a complaint, gives a compliment, or administers discipline, there the Word of God is made flesh (1 John 4:2). We confess Him in the flesh by more than lips. For if we shout His glory from the hilltops but fail to say a kind word to our little ones, we do not truly believe that the Word of God has become flesh, no matter what we say. And God says to us:

When you come to appear before Me, who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer, incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly. I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts, they have become a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. So when you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you, yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

—ISAIAH 1:12–17

If a father fails to be with his child, that child’s spirit withers. Jesus told us that unless we abide in Him, we are as a branch apart that withers (John 15:5–6). So must a child abide in his father’s favor and love. Affection is effective transfer of energy. Without strength of spirit, we cannot withstand. Fathers impart that strength. Their love is not a nice addition; it is the *sine qua non*, the essential necessity of a child’s life.

If fathers fail, substitutes can be provided. The Father “did not leave Himself without witness” (Acts 14:17). But no substitute can ever discover to a child the identity that calls from his genes to be realized. Most failures in life can be traced sooner or later to the breaking of the one command, “Honour thy father and thy mother... that it may go well with thee” (Deut. 5:16, KJV). That is the root and trunk of the leaf of most blessings and problems in life. Girls who are raised with violent, drunken fathers almost invariably marry violent, drunken men. Dominant, brutal fathers breed dominant, brutal sons and daughters whose husbands become dominant and brutal—unless the cross of Christ intervenes.

Mankind is infinitely varied. But the equations of the heart are as easy to figure as fractions. We all have one common denominator—our life with or without our fathers and mothers. Upon that base, numerators vary to infinite varieties. Satan has no new game—only variations on a theme.

Every Christian is a counselor, professional or not. For the Holy Spirit is the Counselor, and He would heal families through every child of God. Therefore, every servant must know the basic rudiments of hearing and understanding, and of intercessory prayer.

God has built an orderly universe. All things operate on principles, whether we are aware of them or not. When God commanded that we honor our parents “that it may go well with you,” that was a description of the operation of a specific law of the universe. If a child judges his father for lying, by that law of Deuteronomy 5:16 (plus Matthew 7:1 and Galatians

6:7–8), he dooms himself to become a liar. When a daughter hates her father for not sharing himself, being too quiet, and withdrawing from her, that dooms her by law (unless the cross intervenes) to reap the same from her husband and/or her children. If a child rebels against a father's judgmental, hateful ways, he will struggle against his own predilection to judge others until he repents of his judgment of his father. If we see that each judgment of our parents as children must be reaped in our own lives, we see the reality of the curse that brings death, of which Jesus spoke (Matt. 15:4; Mark 7:10). These verses speak of physical death, but the greater curse of sin is death to our abundant life and happiness.

If we agree that each sowing of sin reaps trouble, then conversely we can see that many present troubles have their roots in our early life with our parents. Every Christian who ministers to another should therefore not heal lightly, touching only the present surface events, but track from leaf to branch to root in those early years and apply forgiveness through the cross of Christ.

WHAT ROOTS ARE ESTABLISHED BY A FATHER?

The following are questions we use to locate the roots of evil in any human heart. "Did your father give you affection? Could you run and jump in his lap? Did he ever rough and tumble with you?" Since children are loyal, adults frequently remember the best and repress the worst. Therefore, questions must often be rephrased more specifically, such as: "Would he ever take the initiative and, seeing your need, come over and take you on his lap? Or did you have to come to him first? If you had a problem, would you feel free to tell him everything? Would he understand or jump to conclusions? How did he discipline? Was he fair? What kind of job did he have? Was he gone a lot? If you did some work around the house, would he notice, not notice, affirm, or criticize? Did you feel that you pleased him? Did he approve of you? Would you say he was a kind man or cruel? Which would be closer to the truth? Was he a drinker? Did he have any other vices? What about his faith? Did he believe in God? Did he take you to church with him? How did he get along with your mother? Did he show her affection? Did he respect her? Do you know whether he was a faithful husband?"

Far more importantly, we ask, “How did you react?” For we are not looking to blame parents. Parents are indeed accountable for how they treated us, but we alone are accountable for our reactions and for allowing those reactions to infect the way we relate to self, to God, and to others to the present day. In countless moments of living with our parents as little children, we have formed judgments. Our spirits sense when parents act wrongly or fail to do good. Emotionally, we react. Sometimes the mind loyally refuses to acknowledge anger or excuses parents. But that hurt remains in the heart. If the same hurtful thing happens repeatedly, our inner heart forms a bitter judgment, even if we successfully rationalize and control feelings on the surface. Conscious judgments and grudges are more easily remembered and recognized but are not more vitiating in effect than what is unconsciously stored in the heart. In both cases, seeds sown will have to be reaped either by us or by the Lord for us in merciful deliverance. Since the person may be vastly unaware of what is lodged in his heart, know by the evidence what is there. Jesus said, “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit” (Matt. 7:16–18). If a problem exists in our character, that is bad fruit. That bad fruit cannot exist unless there is a bad tree somewhere in our nature. Nor can good fruit exist outside of grace unless a good tree has been planted in the character by refusal to judge father or mother, or by repentance for judging them and all who have similarly wounded us.

No one else is as primary. This is the importance of a father’s love, that if a father’s love is sufficient, whatever else is done to us by whomever else will only add to his good root, or if evil, will be overcome by the father’s more basic example. If whatever else happens finds a lodging place in the heart, it probably has a congruent root in the child’s judgments against the father, else it could not endure.

We see that principle in the case of Adam and Eve. Eve was deluded and ate of the forbidden fruit. But nothing happened! She gave to Adam and he did eat, “then the eyes of *both of them* were opened” (Gen. 3:7, emphasis added). The principle of husband and wife is true for parents. In the natural, the influence of the father is primary to the influence of the mother. Praise God, in grace the power of the Father says that “...the unbelieving husband

is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). Here, we trace the impact of the sin nature. Let us remember that given equal presence of both parents, the father’s nature takes precedence.

A Christian friend’s task is to track the present bad fruit to past experience, like stopping a leak by shutting off the water at the source. By this, we do not mean that any passing resentment felt in childhood will be reaped in adulthood. When we accepted Christ into our hearts, any sin committed before that time was forgiven. “Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ” (2 Cor. 5:17–18). Some accuse us of denying this scripture by insisting on looking at childhood. But they miss the point we are making. We do not propose that we should confess childhood sins that are no longer producing bad fruit in our lives. These have been washed away by the blood of the Lamb. Rather, we confess whatever childhood sins we have continued to practice to this very day. By doing so, we fulfill the second half of the thought expressed in this passage: “We beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (v. 20). The day we received Christ, He reconciled us to Himself. But that does not mean we instantly responded in kind. Inner healing is a means by which we make that response.

Once the root has been discarded, the hearer is involved in the confessional. But one might protest, “I don’t remember ever feeling badly toward my parents. Why, then, should I forgive?” Because the fruit of your life tells you that the bitterness is there, whether you feel it consciously or not.

For instance, a girl earned five As and one B. When she showed her report card to her father, he ignored the As and berated her for the only B. In order to “honor” her father, she suppressed any anger toward him and redirected her feelings into self-blame. From then on, she strove to become a more perfect student. But the bitter feelings toward her father remained, boiling under the surface, looking for an outlet. Later, as an adult, whenever she did her very best, and her husband failed to praise her, she would overreact and blow up at him. She came to realize that not all of her anger was about him. But consciously, she felt no anger at her father, for she had never allowed herself to feel angry at him. So why should she forgive him?

Because the fruit said that she was bitter toward him, whether or not she felt it. How could she forgive him? Having seen by faith that the presence of a bad fruit indicates the presence of a bad root, and having seen by counsel or insight that the root lies in hidden resentment and judgments, she could repent by faith, no matter what she felt or didn't feel.

No one can reach in to change his heart. Can a leopard change his spots? (Jer. 13:23). We are not merely involved in asking for forgiveness for judging. Sins of judgment and bitterness can be forgiven easily. The blood washes clean of *all* unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). But far more important is putting to death the practices that are built into the character. Wounding and resentment cause adaptive behavior patterns, called by St. Paul "the old self with its evil practices" (Col. 3:9). Countless such "practices" form our carnal flesh. Our sinful character can only be dealt with by the cross. Forgiveness of *sins* through the blood dismantles or transforms nothing. It only washes clean. Solely, death of the *sinner* on the cross breaks the engrams in our character and sets us free from the inner prisons of sinful tendencies. For this reasons St. Paul writes, "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the *old self with its evil practices*, and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him" (Col. 3:5–10, emphasis added). And Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24).

Therein is the battle. Any Christian can easily claim the forgiveness of God according to the Word in prayer with any other or by himself alone. But to overcome sinful structures in the flesh is a matter of daily struggle to let Jesus bring that aspect of our sinful construction to its death on His cross.

Therefore, we do not need to blame or criticize or be unthankful for our fathers. What they have done, however wicked or wholesome, gives us the context of our struggle in life. That is the basic importance of a father's life with his child. His genes, his example, his presence, his touch, and his absences form the context of our soul's struggle with God. In the shape of

our father's track with us, we will wrestle with our own selves before God. His blessings will be ours. But the merciful providence of God is that whatever we formed in negative reaction to our father will be so transformed by His grace that in the end we shall be empowered to minister to the degree of our trouble and sinful reaction. "For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able..." (Heb. 2:18), the same is true of us. Whatever we suffered under our father will become that much more sweet and blessed by the life of Father God in us, as we allow His shaping hand to increase and purge every inheritance, and turn every evil to good, according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).



THE PLACE OF A WIFE

An excellent wife, who can find? For her worth is far above jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life.

—PROVERBS 31:10–12

FROM THE BEGINNING (GEN. 2:18), WOMAN WAS CONCEIVED AS the gift of God to man. God’s idea was that she should be a companion and friend, a helpmeet, to do him good all the days of her life. I cherish the beauty of each successive word in, “The *heart* of her husband doth *safely trust in her*” (Prov. 31:11, KJV, emphasis added). She holds his heart *in hers*. Becoming one flesh does not mean one body, but such a union that the woman is as St. Paul was for the church at Philippi, “...because I have you in my heart” (Phil. 1:7). And the heart is hidden. What wife does not know her husband’s heart far better than he? And “safely.” Much assurance is held in that simple promise. It is security and rest to me that I never have to worry about Paula’s heart for me. All her scolding and sharing, teasing and lovemaking have behind them that fact that God has locked her heart into mine to do me good. Even if she errs, which is often, love covers a multitude of sins (James 5:20), and God turns her efforts to good for me. His Word is true, so that she truly does do me good *all* the days of her life, whether I know it or not. Such is the grace and providence of God.

It is God who brings the woman to the man (Gen. 2:22). By whatever method of choosing or selection, by dating or arrangement, free will or shotgun, we believe that normally God by His providence manages to connect us to the right one for us. This is not to say that occasionally our sin may not fail the will of God and trap us into the wrong marriage, but that given normal sinfulness and confusion, God in the long wisdom of His

foresight has managed so to plan within the confines of our free will and seeming chance that the child of God who was created to be ours so often becomes so.

Paula and I were fortunate. God spoke to me and said, “She’s the one,” and that settled it. But perhaps I was more of a Thomas, less blessed for having to be told so concretely what many discover by hindsight or happenstance. In any case, we believe God knows how to gift us with the one of His choice.

“And he will have no lack of gain” (Prov. 31:11). We have found it to be a principle, as in Psalm 133, that where unity exists, God has commanded the blessing. Where husband and wife pull together in harness, prosperity, whether inner or outer or both, is soon manifested. Sometimes other things block the prosperity their unity should reap, but always disunity sooner or later fractures wealth. “It is not good for the man to be alone” (Gen. 2:18) referred perhaps not only to his need for companionship but also to his need for someone to help him gain and store prosperity in heart and land as well. A wife is given that man should prosper, as Proverbs 31 so amply lays out. However, the flesh being the weakness it is, union and unity have a way of merging into a thousand and one forms of possession and use of each other. Fearing that, men all too often flee connubial bliss into the silent divorce mentioned in chapter 3. Or, as is the case, they protect themselves by reducing the wife to a servant, slave, or mannequin programmed to give back only what is put in.

Far too often men find “justifications” in the Scriptures for behavior that does not sanctify the Lord in relation to their wives. Men would reduce the gift to a machine, but God would woo us to a friend.

Paula is her own person, and I want her to be fully that. If Paula were to come to me for permission to go to a regular meeting, to go shopping, or whatever, I would say, “You are your own person. Make up your own mind.” I want a full partner. Paula and I detest hearing that so glibly used cop-out phrase whenever a wife expresses her own opinion: “You’re in rebellion.” If Paula’s voice is silenced, I have lost half of my wisdom. Submission and the docility of 1 Peter 3:1–4 is not an exterior silence. When Peter says that husbands who are disobedient to the word “may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives” (v. 1, emphasis added), he is not saying that a wife may not express an opinion, or even a rebuke. Rather, he is saying that she must not use words to *win* him over. A wife

can and should express an opposing truth to her husband. But she must remember that she is not the one who has the authority to convince him of that truth. John 6:44 says, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him.” If a wife nags and cajoles her husband to accept a truth, she has violated the precept of 1 Peter 3:1, but if she shares that truth kindly and reverently, then allows the Father to draw her husband to that truth, she will have won him “without a word.”

If either Paula or I face a major decision, neither should make it without consulting the other. That is being subject to one another as we ought. We are a team, not a man with a helper.

In Genesis 2:18 the Lord said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make an help meet for him” (KJV). Note that in this translation, the word is not *helper*. It is *help MEET*. Actually, the Hebrew word is, in fact, *helper*. Yet at this particular point, the Revised Standard Version is truer to the spirit of this text than most translations. For the Hebrew (and some more up-to-date translations) says, “a helper *suitable* for him.” According to the *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, the word *suitable*, *neged*, means “a help corresponding to him, i.e., *equal* and adequate to himself” (emphasis added).¹ Thus, a wife truly is a “helpmeet.” She is a full and equal partner who stands alongside her mate in equal possession of their common purpose and destiny. “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15, KJV). My wife is my friend, not merely my helper.

Before I met Paula, the Lord called me and gave me the commission to serve Him. When I met Paula and we began to be serious in our relationship, I told her, “Paula, I am given to the Lord. Whatever He calls me to do, I will do. If He calls me away from you, I will go. You need to understand that, and if you can still accept me on that basis, OK.” Paula wisely just accepted me, not at all agreeing. I had no idea how arrogant I was and what a misunderstanding of the nature of God I held.

For years, therefore, I thought God had given me a ministry, and then brought Paula along to help. It was *my* ministry and she was *my* helper. The Lord was never content with that (nor was Paula). That had never been His intent. Gradually He caused me to see that He had called her to a mission too. But I still thought of the work as my mission, to which she had also

lately been called. Through the years, He humbled my arrogance and opened me to Proverbs 31:10 and the verses following. At last He caused me to see that from the ground plan of Creation, He had created Paula and me as one team. It had never been *my* ministry but always *ours*. As with Adam in Genesis 2, He gave me the description of the calling first, but that was only a matter of His speaking to the head first, not of His purpose in creation and ordination. Paula felt that call on her life years before she met me.

Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve, the relation of husband and wife reverted from full and equal partnership to dominance. God said to Eve, "...yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Already by nature of her creation, Eve's desire was unto her husband. The Word is not redundant. The interference is plain that He meant that natural desire would become inordinate. Wives often tend to develop great insecurity for fear of not being pleasing to their husbands. Wives, more than husbands, tend to idolize their spouse, seeking from them what only God can give. As love scorned becomes hate, so we tend to disrespect those we have idolized when their faults grieve us. For this reason wives become so frustrated and disillusioned with their husbands. They expect them to act like gods, and they don't. For that reason the Word had to be given so many times to wives to respect their husbands. Sin created disorder, a desiring of the man more than God, perhaps as a reaping for the fact that Adam, not as deluded as Eve was, knowingly chose Eve before God; so idolatry sown reaped idolatry.

"And he shall rule over you." God's principles that the firstborn shall rule and that the man shall have headship were already the facts of their existence, whether or not consciously known by Eve. The Word means, then, that sin fractures easy cooperation of hearts and minds so that the natural flow of direction and command in love is broken, and rule becomes oppressive rather than liberating. Had Adam and Eve kept the order of God, his headship would have rested lightly, as blessing upon her. But wherever men have fallen, women have become suppressed and controlled. Most heresies bear the distinctive mark of suppressing women. Jesus would restore women to the glory of their creation as full and equal partners in life; Satan would rob and suppress. Never should a husband allow himself to get between God and his wife. "The husband is the head of the wife" (Eph. 5:23). But the Lord is her Lord; the husband is her companion.

FROM PAULA

“Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22). I am subject to the Lord because I love Him, because something is not complete in me without Him, because I want to bless Him with the gift of myself so that His mission to restore me to the Father might be fulfilled in joy. I *give* myself to the Lord because it is not His nature to force, and without that voluntary submission of my life I would never be a partaker with Him, copartner with Him, and coheir with Him of all that God gives. I know that if I seek to save my life, tenaciously hanging on to the control of me, defending my position, measuring costs and benefits of giving according to my ambition for self-advantage and advancement, I will lose my life, for that would be to spend my energies counter to the plan of my Creator. But if I risk myself and submit every area of my life to the Lord in identification with Him for who He is, out of love for Him for His sake, I will gain my life, for that is the way God has provided for me to become all that I am. I will listen and learn from Him with a teachable and respectful spirit. I will share with Him in all His sufferings. I will rejoice with Him in His victories. I will rest in Him as the one who provides the structure of our life together and walk in His protective cover.

My husband is not my Lord. But I will relate to him “as to the Lord” (Eph. 5:22), voluntarily and lovingly giving, self-sacrificing, trusting, and risking all that I am in the faith that life is a gift to those who live within the plan of the Creator.

In the early years of our marriage, I rebelled at the idea of living in submission to another person. My husband was obviously not the perfect one I knew my Lord Jesus to be. I was capable of making enough mistakes on my own without risking participation in the reaping of my husband’s errors. He was the sort of person who would plunge headlong into whatever task or opportunity lay ahead. He was searching for truth with a vigor, not yet having come to rest in the truth of who Jesus is. I followed him down many tangents, leaving black skid marks, becoming ever more afraid to trust. I did not know then that while we are warned “do not trust any brother” (Jer. 9:4), we are to trust the Lord to relate to us faithfully through those to whom we are joined by Him, however flawed they may be.

The faithfulness of God is greater than anyone’s inadequacy or sinful character. “If we are faithless [do not believe and are untrue to Him], He

remains true (faithful to His Word and His righteous character), for He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13, AMP). He is large enough to overcome all error and bring good out of every circumstance (Rom. 8:28; 1 Thess. 5:23).

A second cause of my reticence to submit had to do with the fear of being somehow diminished or swallowed up in my husband’s life and ministry. He had a specific call to serve. So did I. He was gifted with a multitude of talents. So was I. He is a strong personality. So am I. My delusion was that I had something to protect. My arrogance was that I could defend myself better than my Lord or my husband could.

Light began to seep into my mind and heart when I fully realized that abundant life is promised to *all* of God’s children (John 10:10), that in the kingdom there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28), and that submitting my life to my husband does not mean being wiped out as an individual but being offered the privilege of complementing another in a unique way that enables the Lord to bring a new dimension of life to both. I began to see that flaws and imperfections in him were appropriate to the areas in me that needed revealing and refining, that it was for that reason as much as any that the Lord had brought us to one another.

We needed the kind of struggle our coming together would create in order for us both to be broken and prepared for a growing depth and expansion of service to Him. Without that polishing in a close human-risk relationship, neither of us could have come into our own. I began to accept the realization that the pain that might develop was well worth the joy that would result. I began to pray in repentance for my lack of trust in God and my husband, for the spirit of control that I had developed, and for the load of negative judgment and expectation that I had dumped on him to help him go off course. Then I began to realize the reality and practicality of seed planting. I had been reaping what I had sown.

As I began to give more wholly and freely of myself in every area to John, I was not diminished; I was set free to receive abundantly more than I had thought or asked.

Proverbs 31 began to come alive to me. I became aware that in being submitted and committed to her husband to do him good all the days of his life, a woman fills a very important variety of roles—enough to keep any woman hopping if she were faithful to them all! The “wonder woman” of Proverbs 31 is engaged in planting and harvesting (vv. 13, 16), providing

food (vv. 14–15), making clothing for her family (v. 22), preparing the food for a household she also manages (v. 27), buying land (v. 16), and delivering handcrafted goods to the merchants (v. 24). Besides all this, she ministers to the poor and the needy (v. 20). She is strong, courageous, wise, kind, honorable (vv. 17, 25–26), and blessed by her children (v. 28) whom (apparently) she has not neglected while she has been doing all these other things. To me, that sounds like a terribly exciting life with potential for expression in unlimited directions. And to top it all, the good wife is not simply an extension of her husband, for the scripture says, “Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let *her own* works praise her in the gates” (v. 31, KJV, emphasis added). All this is for the woman who fears the Lord (v. 30), which I believe means to be in awe and respect of and obedience to the perfect order of almighty Father God. Real freedom has never meant license to do as one pleases. Rather, it means complete freedom to express *within* the operating principles of God’s universe. Those principles manifest solely the nature of Jesus, who calls us to give as He gave Himself, that in dying to self to lose our life, we might find it (Luke 9:24).



THE IMPORTANCE OF A MOTHER'S LOVE

Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast.

—PSALM 22:9, NIV

ONE OF THE MOST LIBERATING REVELATIONS OF MY LIFE was the realization that the “poor and needy” in my life are those lives especially entrusted to me—my husband and my children. I always cared deeply for them and knew a measure of the importance of love expressed in their lives and mine. I had some awareness of the unique position I have to feed and nurture them. But for a time the depth of that awareness was blocked by my own lack of mature insight, and the rich excitement of motherhood was well hidden beneath a pile of dirty diapers and the repeated accumulation of “same old mess” associated with small children. I wanted to hurry past these to get on with the “important things” of life.

Like thousands of other young mothers, I was blind to the fact that the ordering and reordering of my home in an attitude of blessedness was in itself designed to teach invaluable lessons to my children that they could learn in no other place. And so I defeated myself and wasted a part of my calling for a time by chafing against what I had judged to be interruptions and blocks to my creative urges. I sometimes envied my husband who seemed to be so much freer than I to minister to the hungry and the naked and the lame in a significant way—out there in the world.

It was not that I was confined to home duties by any means. As a pastor's wife I was busy with a round of meetings—choir practices, women's fellowship, youth activities, Sunday school, prayer groups, community

service—running here and there wherever an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and a need to perform well called me to respond. The more I did, the harder it was to hold it all together, and the more irritated I became with clothes tossed carelessly on the floor, messes left in the kitchen sink, and splatters on the bathroom mirror. My martyr's mind asked, "Why am I the only one in the household who knows how to put a new roll of toilet paper on the spindle?" I felt more and more heavily the pressure of conflicting demands on my time and energies, the confusion of undefined priorities, and the apparent ingratitude of people for whom I alone seemed to be working so hard.

My mother worried that I might work myself into a nervous breakdown. My children reflected the pressured driving pace of my life through their busy cluttering, and my husband, who seemed always to be bringing one more task for me to do, wasn't much help when he said, "Sometimes I wish I'd married a woman who didn't know how to do anything except love up on me!" The Lord caught me mercifully in the midst of a sputtering response. He opened my eyes to see my husband and children as needing *me* infinitely more than all I could possibly *do* for them, and He began to reorder my priorities.

Again and again in my devotional time the Lord called my attention to the scriptures in Matthew 14 and Mark 8 about the loaves and fishes. I began to identify with that little boy who offered so simply the little that he had for the immediate feeding of those close at hand. I realized that I *am* those loaves and fishes and that it is my calling to offer myself simply where the Lord has placed me. It is the Lord's job to do the breaking and multiplying and distributing. I had been trying to do it all. Succeeding in the breaking and distributing, I had spread my resources too thin to feed anyone well, because only the Lord has the power to multiply. And He has established a holy order that works to multiply and distribute blessings through families. Every other order works temporarily and with diminishing effect. Perhaps the best way I can represent the vision of order He has shown me is in the following:

1. My husband and I blessing the Lord and being nurtured by Him daily
2. My husband and I nurturing one another

3. Us nurturing our children together
4. Our family nurturing the church
5. Our church ministering to the world and all creation
6. The church in the world witnessing to principalities and powers in heavenly places (Eph. 3:10)

I have found to my great joy and relief that in this order my energies flow without my striving, as every endeavor is empowered by the Lord as I do what I see my Father doing (John 5:19).

I look at this list as I would peer into a basket. The Lord will multiply the offering of my life to overflow the basket. But my offering is not hung on the top rim of the basket (number 6); it is poured first into the depth of the center (number 1).

Practically, and specifically for me, this means that though the Lord has called me to receive people for prayer ministry during the day, I will be free to greet my children when they come home from school. My listening *ear* must be sensitively attuned to the confessions of the people to whom I minister, but my *heart* must be in established rapport with my own children. For if I am not there for them when they want to talk, some other prayer minister or counselor may have to deal with them someday.

I must not allow myself to become so poured out for others that I come to my husband drained and limp, or so full of the concerns of others that that is all I have to share with him. The appointments John and I make to minister to individuals or address assemblies are to be held no more inviolate than the plans we make with our family for playing games together, sharing a picnic, or attending a ball game or band concert in which our children have a part. It used to be very difficult for me to turn anyone away or put them off for fear that I would be failing both them and God. The Lord set me free from that bondage to self-importance and unfaith by teaching me that He does not call me to answer every need and trouble I see around me, that He is quite capable of providing for all His creation (“...God is able from these stones to raise up children...” [Matt. 3:9]) through the caring and sharing of many. But I am the only wife He has provided for my husband and the only mother He has given to my children. I am uniquely and irreplaceably important to these few.

Every mother must examine her own life to determine decisions about loyalties and expenditures of time and energies. I suggest these commonsense questions as guidelines:

- ✦ Does this activity I want to become involved in contribute to or compete with the goals to which our family is committed? (Hopefully you as a family have considered these together.)
- ✦ Is this activity so timed that my participation will not put an unhealthy strain on my family? Is God calling me to do this thing *now*?
- ✦ Does my husband put his blessing on my involvement in this activity? If not, are his objections valid? If they are not and he perceives my giving to some other project as a rejection of him (or perhaps even the church or the Lord as a rival for my affection), then how am I failing to love and nurture him in a satisfying way so he is secure enough to bless my going?
- ✦ While I am investing myself outside the home, do I maintain our home in the sort of relaxed orderliness that enables my husband and children to bring friends home to visit comfortably and without apology? Is enough of my skill and artistry reflected in the meals I set on the table to say consistently to my family, “I love you and want the best for you”? Or are special colorful culinary efforts only a signal to the children that company is coming or that Mom is taking her pride to the church dinner?
- ✦ Does my attitude set up invisible images and demands that my family must live up to so that I can be free to “do my thing,” or do I meet others where they are and adjust my desire to freely express with their need to be themselves? Do I communicate to my children that they reside in *my* house and must live according to *my* rules, or do I communicate that *we* live in a home in which the Lord

rules by love and invitation to share? Do I communicate that necessary behavioral rules are a guide to considerate living together, or my defense of my own image as a “good mother”?

- If I decide to take employment outside the home to add to the family income, are the tangible benefits worth the possible cost of the loss of intangibles?

For everyone, the most important question is always, “Is this the perfect will of the Father God for my life today?” Answers will not always come clearly. We may not be sure that our expressions of love are motivated purely. But if we are consistently choosing to lay down our lives for others, to walk in the paths God has prepared for us, if we are making ourselves available to His leading by prayer and study of the Word and family discussions, the Lord will have ample access to direct our decisions. Only He can effect balance in our lives, give grace to correct error, and create good in all circumstances.

REAL LOVE MEANS SACRIFICIAL LIVING

Sometimes real love may mean sacrificing for a time those very personal adult relationships that have taught and supported us as parents. One young couple was concerned over their son’s bed-wetting problem and their daughter’s slipping grades. Prayerfully examining their lives, they saw that they were going in too many directions with adult friends, leaving the children alone too much, and thus scattering their children’s base of security. It was difficult to determine where to retreat from meaningful and enriching activities, but they determined for a time that there would be at least one parent at home as an anchor every night of the week. This bore good fruit.

Children need to know that there is a home base to touch that doesn’t move. It is important for mother to be “there,” available, providing continuity for all the coming and going. Our son John was independent at age five and eager to begin kindergarten. I had already gone through the experience of releasing three babies into the scholastic world, so I was not

really clinging to my fledging when the first day of school rolled around. But I naturally expected that I would walk to school that one time with him (in those days, it was safer for children to walk to school alone).

“You don’t have to come. I know the way.”

“I know that, John, but there might be papers to sign—and it would make me feel good to go with you once. Mothers are like that.”

He agreed, but I had to follow at some distance behind him, all the way! Several weeks later, I was shocked to find this superindependent, well-adjusted young man sitting in a dejected heap outside the door when I returned home fifteen minutes late.

“What’s the matter, John?”

“I didn’t know where you were.”

Years later he managed excellently for himself—but he still wanted to know where I would be, how long I would be gone, and when I would be home.

A mother is a nurse ready to supply tender love and first aid to bind wounds, with enough detachment not to bind her children to their wounds.

She is interpreter to inform in the gaps that cannot be avoided between children and their father as he travels between two worlds. She is not to defend or to get into the middle position that prevents direct communications; she is not to choose sides. But she often is the connecting link through a simple word:

“Susie’s feeling low today. She had a falling-out with her boyfriend.”

“Be careful what you say to Joey. He didn’t make the team.”

“Be sure to notice your daughter’s new hairdo.”

Her prompting in love should communicate to him and to the children a considerate affirmation of his caring, not an accusation for his not noticing.

If a mother finds herself in the position of referee in the outcropping of sibling rivalries or heated interchange among playmates, she must know she is there to draw lines and enforce rules, not to fight battles for her children and rob them of the lessons to be learned in the struggle. One mother we knew was continually in the midst of her children’s quarrels. Rather than learning to settle differences themselves, they seemed to be learning that to quarrel, tattle, and complain loudly are sure ways to attract Mama’s attention. Her willingness to be manipulated in that way set the children up for a continual wail. There was no peace in that household. If such a mother does not learn to stand back and quietly suffer childish outbursts and check

her impulse to control, the wail of the children will become such habit patterns that as adults, they will be their society's malcontents, the stirrers of trouble, the blamers, and the self-pitiers. Real love does not rob a child of the enterprise of his own growth in skills needed to live peaceably among men.

Every mother cherishes a close relationship with her children where dreams and joys and sorrows can be shared, but a wise mother will always remember she wears a parental mantle that cannot be taken off. In her sharing, she must preserve her supportive role for her growing child, regardless of her own need; she should never allow the relationship to become inverted by dumping a load of care, hurt, fear, or frustration on a child who will respond in loving sympathy, but will in no way be prepared by maturity to carry what she lays on him.

All too often John and I have ministered to overserious, joyless, striving individuals borne down with the weight of the world's problems to the point of rage or depression. The root is then revealed to be that at too early an age the child assumed the role of confidante or counselor to a mother who is widowed, in marital difficulty, or divorced. The burden is too much to bear. Loyalty to a loved parent prevents rejection of the load. The child has the functions of a spouse without the marriage bed, and so he grows into adulthood trapped by a confusion of roles, unable later to come to rest and relate freely through the loving gift of self with a mate.

THE INFLUENCE OF A MOTHER'S WHOLESOME ATTITUDE TOWARD SEXUALITY

Often, because a mother is available when questions arise, she becomes the child's instructor in sex education more than the father. If she answers questions frankly and openly, without embarrassment or anxiety, sexual being and functions will be communicated as a natural part of everyday life—wholesome, clean, and comfortable. In that context, proper warnings and restrictions can be presented, and they will not be interpreted as negative taboos to be rebelliously violated. Neither will they register as “nasties.” Regarding such matters as being “nasty” prevents uninhibited nurturing sexual relationship with the spouse in later years.

“How much detail should I share in answer to my child’s inquiries?” Many mothers have asked that question, and the answer is simple: “As much as the individual child is asking for, qualified only by that child’s maturity level to receive with understanding.” One of our friends tells of an experience she had with a curious preschooler who was her neighbor. Our friend (whom we will call Sandy Williams) had just given birth to a baby boy, and obviously there had been some discussion about the exciting event among the neighborhood children. A little boy came into her home one afternoon and carefully and admiringly examined the baby sleeping in the basket. Then, after a few moments of thoughtful staring at Sandy’s midsection, he ventured:

“Mrs. Williams, the baby used to be in your tummy, didn’t he?”

“Yes, Tommy, he did. I went to the hospital so the doctor could help when it was time for him to come out into the world.”

“Did it hurt when the baby came out?”

“Well, yes, it hurt some. But mothers forget that hurt very quickly because they are so happy to see a beautiful healthy baby.”

“Oh”—long silence—“Mrs. Williams, can I ask you another question?”

“Yes, Tommy.”

“Promise you won’t tell my dad?” Sandy summoned her poise and prepared herself for the next question.

“What is your question, Tommy?”

“Mrs. Williams—can I have a banana?”

The whole picture need not be spelled out for a preschooler, but if a parent wants his child to know the facts of life within a Christian context before he has been significantly influenced by the misinformation of his peers, before he has been colored by the amoral influence of the media, he had best do some carefully accurate and sensitively communicated teaching before the child reaches the junior-high level. If a parent who wants to teach the spiritual values of sexual relationship feels inadequate to accurately describe the physical functions of the male and female in sexual union, then it is a simple matter to enlist the aid of an illustrated encyclopedia. But it is unreasonable and irresponsible to abdicate this most important aspect of a child’s education to someone in the public school system and then accuse and blame the schools for failing to teach morality and spirituality. That is not their job. A teacher, nurse, or doctor in the public school system will be prepared with encyclopedic presentations but often cannot inculcate the

moral and spiritual as parents can and should. We welcome sex education in the schools so far as it does not oppose Christian principles, but we urge Christian parents to give their children early on a basic structure of understanding in which to receive clinical sexual information, that such might come to them as a tool for living life, and not as an awkward weapon that can be used destructively.

In the earliest stages of sex instruction, a parent needs to realize that every God-given organ of the body deserves the respectful use of its proper name. If a parent finds it more difficult to pronounce aloud the words “breast,” “buttocks,” or “penis” than he does “nose” or “elbow,” and finds it necessary to substitute some cute slang expression to cover his own embarrassment, that parent has a problem to face in himself or herself. The Lord would like to deal with that before it is passed on to a child with compounded confusion.

A mother who accepts her own sexuality as a God-given gift and grace and knows what it is to meet her husband sexually with a sense of wonder and thankfulness that the Creator has given such a beautiful plan will not be shocked and devastated to find her small child stripping before the giggles and applause of neighborhood children. She will be able to lovingly and firmly stop the show and explain to the child in a way that does not lay a burden of condemnation on him. The meanings of the words *modest* and *private* (which have nothing to do with shameful), *inappropriate* (which does not mean bad), *mysterious* (unrelated to perverted), and *naked* (not at all connected with pornographic) will be conveyed to the child as much by her relaxed manner as by what she says. Mothers need to know that experimentation and voyeurism are natural outbursts of childish curiosity. Most importantly, by her attitude a relaxed mother will invite her children to grow up looking to her as a reliable, understanding, and sympathetic source of accurate and valuable information. We have ministered to many whose later sexual life was fraught with fear and tension because mother came down with oppressive, fearful, condemning hands and words instead of laughing and easy teaching.

LETTING GO

Finally, mother is a launcher. When parents think of the wedding of a daughter, father gets all misty eyed at the thought of walking down the aisle with his little girl by his side. Mother dreams of flowers and showers, dressmaking and music. Papa dreads the bills. But seldom do both realize that on their part the most important thing they do is contained in that short response to the simple question, "Who giveth this woman to this man?" When the father says, "Her mother and I do," and takes his seat beside the mother, a dramatic role change is effected, a most necessary relinquishment of responsibility for the child. From that moment on motherhood will mean a quiet and "distant" supporting of the relationship of the bride and groom. In no way does she have position to control or manage her children's marriage, or even to instruct, except by expressed consent, and then with reticence.

Many a young marriage has been hindered because the sharing of confidence was never transferred from parent to spouse. The young couple was never given the chance to work things out for themselves. Parents continued to dominate, control, or to do too much for one or both of the marriage partners. Some counselors and prayer ministers maintain that parents are among the most significant causes for divorces, and some would place most of the fault on parental interferences.

One of the most beautiful examples of healthy mother-in-lawing we have ever seen was in the home of some friends of ours. There, a lovely lady, visiting from overseas in her son's home, managed by the grace of the Lord to live sensitively with her children and grandchildren, participating but never interfering, working alongside her daughter-in-law, never criticizing, offering who and what she was freely but never in a spirit of competition. If she saw error, she kept silent and went to the Lord with it; she never chose sides. Her contribution to the home was significant enough to cause them to miss her deeply when she left, but in no way were any of them dependent on her so as to throw the household off balance in her absence. She knew who she was and gave of herself to them as she maturely related to their needs. She was not driven by any insecurity from unaffirmed love or confusion of roles to push, pull, demand, manipulate, or compete in any way. Her daughter-in-law wept great tears of sorrow when she returned to her own country. Never had she been a burden to her but only a blessing.

Let it be the earnest prayer of every mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother that she can so rest in who she is in the Lord, that in all her

attempts to love, there might eventually be accomplished that same sort of transition that happened between Jesus and His mother. At the wedding at Cana, she desisted from orchestrating her son's first miracle and handed the reins to Jesus, saying to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (John 2:5). Three years later, He passed on that blessing to His disciples (John 15:15) as He loved them to freedom to become His friends. A mother must relinquish. She must die to her role as mother and let her child go in order to receive again a friend and companion who, in turn, will be enabled to do the same for others.



GETTING AT ROOTS OF BITTERNESS

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

—HEBREWS 12:15

A LADY CAME TO US, COMPLAINING BITTERLY. HER FATHER HAD forced her to work on the farm like a hired hand. When she came in from the fields, he would drunkenly accuse her falsely of all manner of alleged evildoings, including fornication. Having endured her drunken father all of her youth, she married a man who for eighteen years forced her to go to work while he drank, and when she returned from work, reviled and accused her falsely of all manner of evils, including adultery. Finally she divorced him and shortly remarried.

Within a few months, that man made her get a job, stayed home, and got drunk, and each evening reviled her and accused her of all manner of vices, including adultery. After two years, she divorced him. Being both attractive and determined, she carefully sought out a husband with whom she could be happy. At last she found a Christian man who had money in the bank and real estate holdings. One month after they married, he sent her to work while he (who had never been a drinker) stayed home to drink and began to revile her each evening after work, accusing her of adultery!

What was causing that? Did she have some kind of psychic power to control men's lives? Of course not. But the law of God does have such power. "Do not judge lest you be judged" (Matt. 7:1). Not psychic power but the law of God swings inexorably to retribution. An old proverb says, "He who gossips is like him who throws mud straight up." Another simply

says, “Expressing hate is like spitting into the wind.” As what goes up must come down, so what is said must return. Unfortunately, the law of judgment is effective not only for what is conscious, known, and expressed outwardly, but also for what is lodged in the heart, repressed, unknown, and unexpressed. Judgments, once formed, must reap bitter fruit. Bitter roots not brought to the cross must defile.

Bitter roots are perhaps the most powerful negative force in all our life, bringing destruction not only to us but also to all our loved ones. In this chapter, we will unfold the depth and power of bitter roots. Let us be clear, however, that we are not speaking merely of the power of psychological expectancy.

Psychology has caused us to ascribe too much to the power of negative thinking as though that alone has the power to cause much of the good or bad that happens to us. Positive or negative thinking does indeed have some effect, but what we presently think or feel consciously and unconsciously is not the main determinative factor behind what is spoken of by St. Paul as a bitter root springing up to cause trouble (Heb. 12:15). Christians need to remove the blinders of psychology and return to the Word of God. What is primarily causative in human life is not psychology but the law of God: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Children, being small and loyal, not yet knowing the art of forgiveness, have little opportunity either to express angers, admit resentment, or achieve forgiveness. Consequently, oft repeated wounding tempt children to form unconscious forgotten patterns of expectancy; but worse and far more causally, they tempt them to set up judgments that act as seeds sown to be reaped in due time. *Conscious and hidden inner judgments are perhaps the most determinative factor in our lives apart from the mercy of the cross.* In countless ways, we form judgments and suffer accordingly. “Honor your father and your mother... that it may go well with you” (Deut. 5:16) is consequently no nice “ought” or “should.” It is not optional. It is an absolute description of reality. In whatever area or way we do not honor our parents, it will not go well for us. “For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, *until all is accomplished*” (Matt. 5:18, emphasis added). Positionally, Jesus has fulfilled all the legal demands of the law upon the cross (Col.

2:14). Unfortunately, however, that fulfillment must be claimed by specific confession, else all is truly fulfilled by the law of sowing and reaping.

For our sanctification is not only positionally complete. It is simultaneously ongoing: “By one sacrifice he has *made perfect forever* those who are *being made holy*” (Heb. 10:14, NIV, emphasis added). Former sins are under the blood. But if we are presently practicing a sin, we must yet repent of it, as Jesus taught every Christian in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts...” (Matt. 6:12). This sheds light on the common question, “Why should I repent for judging my parents long before I was born again? Isn’t that under the blood?” Yes, it is! Positionally, Christ has paid for every sin you ever committed. But if you are still practicing a sin, you must pray, “Forgive us our debts.” If you are still living out a judgment toward your parents by taking your buried bitterness out on others, you must take it to the cross in prayer and thus invite our Lord to enact the second half of Hebrews 10:14, “...those who are *being made holy*” (emphasis added).

We cannot say why some things are surely and quickly accomplished at our first reception of Jesus as Lord and Savior, nor why other hidden sins of judgment must be revealed and confessed specifically, else we reap the full extent of the law. God does know.

For instance, a man whose father had been severely critical of him came for prayer ministry. No task accomplished met an embrace or affirmation from his dad, but only attacks. This man could never hold a job. Bosses always reviled him and made life so miserable that no matter how hard he tried, in the end he would have to resign or be fired. Recently he had taken a new job and performed well. The boss thought, “Sam’s been doing well. I’ll go in and sit down and have a chat and compliment him.” Within five minutes the boss found himself ripping Sam up one side and down the other. The boss left shaking his head, wondering what had happened. “I didn’t want to do all that; what made me do it?” Sam’s attitude, his remarks, his expectancy to be criticized didn’t help at all, of course, but these alone could not be enough to so divert and pull off balance his boss’s mind and heart.

Bitter-root judgment is far more powerful than that. By “bitter-root judgment,” we mean more than the power of negative thinking. This is not merely mental expectancy. It is sin, which, by the law of sowing and reaping, demands that our judgments be reaped. That law tugged on the

man's boss with a force that the power of thought alone could never exert. We are not saying that the boss was thereby forced to respond in kind. But nothing tempts more powerfully than expectancy fueled by unrepented bitterness and empowered by natural law. This is made far worse by the fact that by the law of increase we sow a spark to reap a holocaust, or wind to reap a whirlwind (Hos. 8:7). Sam's boss stepped into a hundred-and-fifty-mile-an-hour gale, only to turn in the direction of the wind, and succumbed to the urge to criticize Sam.

A beautiful woman came to us who had had three horrendous marriages. Each time she had dated a loving, gentle man, had been unable to become interested in him, and had ditched him to marry a drunken, violent bum. We could see that the next marriage was likely to turn out the same way. For a long time she came for prayer ministry. We could find in her relation to the man she called her father nothing so vitiating as to create such a pattern. One day she muttered again and again (while rocking back and forth), "I don't have a father. I don't have a father." Then she admitted for the first time what she had never been able to tell us before, that her "father" was in fact her stepfather, and that she had met her natural father only once, when she was eighteen. He had been a drunken, violent bum who had beaten on her mother again and again while her mother carried her. When she was six months old in the womb, her father pinned the mother's arms behind her while the mother screamed, "I hate you. I hate you. I'll kill you," whereupon he left and never returned. The baby came out of the womb with totally ambivalent feelings.

First, her bitterness toward her father was buried and forgotten. Later, when any man was ever angry or the least bit out of control, forgotten pain threatened to surface and overwhelm her. So she learned early to keep pain suppressed by making herself unaware when men were threatening her. Therefore, when she met a flattering yet violent and drunken man, she automatically minimized his negative qualities and fell prey to the flattery. Unidentified bitterness about repeated wounding reinforced a lifelong tendency to distrust the idea that there is any such thing as a gentle man. She increasingly identified fatherly love with the violence she had felt so early in life, even while minimizing that violence. Therefore, any violent, drunken man could reach depths and stir responses no gentle man could. Second, virulent, hidden judgment ("men are like that") and bitter expectancy that the man of her life would be a drunken, violent bum ran

rampant below the level of consciousness. No man who could upset that judgment could be allowed close enough to threaten the inner world; therefore, gentle men had to be ditched before they got too close.

It was not this pattern alone that caused her husbands to become drunken or to beat on her. It was already in them to be that way; that is what made them appealing to her. But what determined whether she would help such men change or drive them further into it was what was in her. Her bitter root defiled the men around her. The law of sowing and reaping thus had an easy field to bring forth its tares in abundance. For her husbands, marriage to her was like stepping into a cascade through a gorge; the law of sowing to the waters reaped a roaring river of destruction.

This example was vivid to us not only by its starkness but also by its revelation of the hiddenness of sin, even while the woman was yet in her mother's womb: "You have been called a rebel from birth" (Isa. 48:8); "The wicked are estranged from the womb; these who speak lies go astray from birth" (Ps. 58:3). When we saw the depth of the pattern, we explained it to her and asked her to forgive her natural father. She would not believe that anything so stark had actually come upon her, especially that far back. She had no conscious awareness of hatred for her natural father, and when she met him at eighteen, his debilitated condition only evoked pity and shame. That day, John was ministering to her, and so he said, "OK, let's just enter into prayer." After a while John said, "Now, will you say to the Lord, 'I forgive my natural father'?"

She began to tremble and shudder violently and finally struggled to say, "I can't do it. I just can't say it."

"Now do you see, Betty, you really do judge and hate him?" She saw it. We prayed. And the Lord began to heal her heart. She left the area, and to this day we do not know whether she has married again, but we have faith for her that the Lord who came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8) is setting her free to have an abundant life.

So long as judgments remain hidden in the heart, they swing like an ever-increasing cycle of a pendulum to greater and greater retribution. Some might object to the idea that there are sins of which we are unconscious, but Scripture is clear about this. David prayed, "Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults. Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; *let them not rule over me*; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression" (Ps. 19:12–13, emphasis added). The

principle holds true that when God in His mercy reveals whatever troubles our own heart, we may be delivered from it (Ps. 51:10–12). That is how we are to obey the command: “See to it that... no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble” (Heb. 12:15). Not by repressing or struggling unaided as we face our hidden sins, but by simple confession and forgiveness and the hauling down of inner strongholds (2 Cor. 10:4–5).

THE BITTER ROOTS WE OVERCAME

Few have such dramatic roots as some we have chronicled here. But all have countless little roots that trouble mightily. Paula and I, being normal, with good parents, have had many (and still have some). Paula had healthily rambunctious brothers who continually did “dumb” things that added gray hairs like a snowstorm to her parents’ heads. That angered her, and unbeknownst to her, tempted her to form a bitter-root judgment that men would always be doing “dumb-dumbs.” Her favorite expression in place of a curse word still today is, “Oh, brother!” (Paula then and now loves her brothers and remembers many hilariously happy times. She admires her brothers, but judgments had already been lodged in her heart.)

When we first married, I discovered I had a propensity from the pulpit to say unnecessary, shocking “dumb-dumbs.” Paula would say to me, “You aren’t going to say something startling today, are you?” And then, of course, I *had* to, if only to declare immature independence.

When I was invited to teach, away from home and away from Paula, I was surprised to discover wisdom flowing from me. I didn’t have to say “dumb-dumbs,” but at home, out they would come. That puzzled both of us. At last the Lord revealed that Paula’s bitter expectancy was tempting me. When she repented of her judgments of her brothers, I was freer, in her presence and out of it, to preach and teach in wisdom—and to make my own mistakes!

Having been told in a dream, before she knew she was pregnant with me, that she would have a son who would be the Lord’s servant, my mother had time to think before I was born. She decided to say nothing to me before the Lord called me (which He did when I was seventeen), and to work me harder and to discipline me more severely. I had no awareness of her motives, only anger (now mixed with appreciation) for the work and

discipline. We had cows, chickens, an orchard, and a large yard and garden, which became mine to take care of. Work never seemed to have an end. She used to promise me that if I would just do this one more thing, I could go play. Almost immediately play would be interrupted, and there would be Mom with another chore, and yet another. My younger sister revolted and wouldn't do the work (it was too much for her, young as she was), and my mother made me do her work as well. It seemed that every time there was a promise and opportunity to play, there was another task! And, again, if only I would get this one more thing done, then I could go play.

You should have seen my brothers and me play cards—fast! Play had to be gotten in quickly, or something would interrupt. I judged Mom for all those “unfair” demands. My bitter-root expectancy was that God and life would treat me like that. There would always be more work. I would never get to play and enjoy life. Life was and would be work, work, and more work.

What's more, when opportunity to play did come, I could never relax. On vacations Paula would be furious because no sooner had we set up camp than I would be finding some camper in trouble to minister to or help in some way—all the while blaming God that He wouldn't let me rest! I couldn't let God bless me with a restful time, for that would blow all my inner mind's judgments. That bitter root defiled happy time after happy time for the family. One day our children said to Paula, “Dad's definition of heaven is a line a mile long sitting outside his office while he tries to save them one by one! And Dad's definition of hell is a lovely, restful place with a deep armchair, a good book, nothing else to do, and nobody waiting on him to do things for him.”

Not until I quit blaming my mother, gave thanks for her sternness, and asked that the Lord haul that bitter root to the cross did things begin to change. We die slowly, so for a long time I still got swamped with work, and I would keep at it when God would have me rest. But at least He took the self-glory and self-pity out of it. I now know it's my sin, not God's requirement.

In the church, I continually had to pick up work others had left lying around. In ministerial alliances, other men would sometimes fail to carry the ball, and I would take up the slack. Earlier in my life, at work at Delta Airlines (Midway Airport, Chicago), as a foreman, I would drive myself far harder than any of the other workmen, far more than what was necessary.

This was not something to be proud of, but a defilement of others, as it prevented them from coming into the fullness of their own responsibilities.

Our Protestant work ethic exalts industriousness, so I could cloak my bitter roots behind “noble” motives. Unfortunately, I am so far from being unique as to be representative of most men in our work-oriented culture. This very thing is one of the most destructive aspects of our Western heritage, seducing men into too many long hours away from their families. The point is that we fail to heal men when we merely hammer at them to set their priorities right and spend more time with their families. That may help, but unless the *heart* is turned to the children, the family is not restored. Each father needs to be helped to see what bitter roots defile his family life, so that the real judgments and bitterness that find their expressions in too much work can be taken to the cross.

Paula and her father

My father was a grand guy. He loved us, and when he was home, everything was fine. But he was a traveling salesman, gone two weeks at a time. The heart of a child is not as magnanimous as the mind. The mind says, “My daddy has to work; I’m proud of him; he works so hard for us.” But the heart says, “I need him. Why can’t he be here for me?” Unbeknownst to me, I had formed a bitter judgment: “The man will not be there to defend me. I will always have to defend myself, by myself.” And, “My man will always be gone when I need him. Something else will take him away.”

When we were first married, John, as a pastor, continually found himself making house calls much later each day than necessary, coming home late to supper night after night. I would reason and plead and scold and demand, and he would promise—and soon fall back into the same habit. We both thought it was something only in John. Finally the Lord revealed my own bitter judgment and how it was defiling John’s mind and heart. I repented. Immediately John found himself more easily coming home on time.

John never seemed to notice what the children were doing. His being absent-minded, a dreamer, and totally capable of tuning out all noises so as to be able to concentrate made it seem obvious that it was simply John; he didn’t notice what he should notice, and he left me to handle the children. I felt the burden of discipline and soon fell to haranguing the children, taking out my anger on them.

It seemed totally unfair and misleading when John would respond to my accusations by saying, “But you are angry at your father.” How could I be? He had been such a perfect father. I loved him and never knew a moment’s anger at him. And besides, I could point out to John that at least when my father was home, *he would* discipline, *he would* notice, compliment, and defend me. But at last I could dodge it no longer and faced the fact that the bad trees in our lives obviously have some roots in me as well as in John, and by faith I asked the Lord to remove whatever bitter roots were lodged in me against my father that he was gone so much when I needed him. I never did feel any anger, repenting by faith only. John quickly took up his rightful headship. He was determined to discipline; the Lord would break into his concentration in his study, and he would come roaring out of the office to insist that the children obey me. Truly, my bitter root had coupled with John’s (his father was also away from the home a good deal) to defile our family.

John and his parents

My parents received inheritances and Osage oil money so that for periods of my life we were quite well-off. But they had a genius for losing money! In the day before theft insurance, they opened a jewelry store and were robbed three times. They started a fine gift and furniture store in Joplin—just before Joplin went into financial depression. And so it went, again and again. Little blame could justly be attached, but that didn’t keep my sinful heart from doing it. My picture of life and God was formed unconsciously in bitterness. God would go bankrupt as far as I was concerned. I would not be consistently provided for. Some emergency would always bring likely prospects to defeat. I would never have enough and would have to work extra hard all my life only to lose anyway.

Neither God nor life could go against the deep levels of my will. Life went that way. Always there was some emergency just when it looked like clear sailing. Three congregations dutifully starved us. My psychological projections streamed messages to trustees’ boards, but that only helped to turn away salary increases. The reaping of judgments was what pushed them not to be as expansive as they would have been. Not until the Lord revealed the depth of my sin did things change. Whereas I blamed congregations for being unloving and stingy, now I saw that my bitter-root expectation had tempted them and they had lost their balance. I had

prevented them from receiving the blessing of giving to God's servant. My bitter root had cheated them more than me. I repented and claimed God's faithfulness. Not only did God provide the gift of our wonderful home (*The Elijah Task*, chapter 4), but He has also caused people to shower gifts upon us consistently since that date. We never charged for counseling nor asked for an honorarium for speaking. We gave, and God caused men to give into our bosom (Luke 6:38). God has provided at a rate three times above anything given us as pastor and wife in the church until this change. Our children suffered unnecessary lacks, and worse, received a picture of the church and of God that failed to sanctify the true generosity and faithfulness of either. Again, my bitter root had defiled many.

Paula and her siblings

I was the first child of five and felt responsibility to lead the family by performing well. Two normally rebellious brothers, full of pranks, followed. Jerry and Stan got into so many escapades that seemingly a great deal of parental attention went to them. Though they were brilliant, they seldom received better-than-average grades; life was too much fun, and Mom and Dad praised their Cs and said little about my As. Jerry eventually directed a nationwide computer service corporation, and for a while, Stan was news director of a TV station. But in that process of struggle with the boys, I was unconsciously (and sometimes consciously) bitter that my straight-A cards and dependability seemed to be taken for granted. Small incidences in school added to my judgment that I would achieve but not be recognized. In the first grade I was placed in the second soprano section because I could harmonize; somehow I translated that to mean I was considered second best. I sang my heart out and never got out of the second soprano section. In the second grade I proudly spelled my name in cursive writing on the blackboard only to be called "stupid" for not spelling it "Pauline" (that was never my name) and a braggart because we weren't supposed to be writing in cursive style yet. I hated that teacher! In another grade, to honor me above the other girls, the teacher allowed me to carry the Maypole for the May Day celebration—but I wondered, why didn't the teacher know how well I could have danced? One year I sang with a special Girl Scout caroling group. The next year I didn't make it; I didn't know that my voice had matured to that point that it would not blend with children's voices, and I felt rejected.

In high school it seemed I was usually on the effort end of projects rather than the glory end. When I was elected to student council I rejoiced and then felt fourth rate when a friend said, “Oh, I thought you should have won, and you only got treasurer!” It was trained into me at home that it was a sin to cheat. But at graduation a large scholarship went to a classmate who openly bragged that she always hid the answers to test questions on a paper slipped into the top of her stocking. Actually, I found out years later that my classmates thought of me as a “big wheel.” And I know my parents were exceptionally proud of me. But my bitter roots were already grown by confusion and sinful reaction—all mine.

That bitter root set me to compete with John unconsciously and to expect that he would get the credit for what we both did. Even after twenty years of marriage, after many aspects of this root had been dealt their death blow, people were still saying to John what a wonderful talk he had given (that we had given together) while neglecting to say anything to me, and they even consistently complimented him for remarks I had made. Emcees introduced John and left me sitting beside him. People, conversing with both of us, would say to John, “That *Elijah Task* is a wonderful book you wrote, John.” Having invited both of us to speak, pastors would lay hands on John and anoint him, neglecting me. John would prompt “...and Paula,” and they wouldn’t hear him or act on it. I was truly the invisible woman! Were people really that deaf and blind? Not at all. The stream of retribution is that powerful. “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you” (Matt. 7:2). My bitter root had jeopardized others, tempting them to fail common courtesy. Now that my repentance is more complete, that pattern has ended. I am honored in my own right, for my own life.

In the church I always had trouble enlisting teachers and helpers for daily vacation Bible school or whatever else I was in charge of. And people would let me down. The very spring the Lord began to reveal my bitter root, and I repented, I was asked to head the daily vacation Bible school again. Instead of the previous tedious phone calling, we merely put a sheet of paper on a table in the narthex and announced that anyone who wanted to volunteer to teach or bring refreshments could sign up accordingly. That year for the first time in the church’s history we had team teachers for every class and more people signed up for more refreshments than we could use. No one let us down or failed to show up, and we all had a glorious time! My

bitter roots had tempted God's people not to volunteer as they normally would have. I wonder how often we pastors and wives have reaped our own sowing in the church and then blamed the church for failing! Truly the judgment of God begins at home, in the heart.

John and his mother

I seldom received affirmation or compliments. My mother, having grown up in Oklahoma ranch culture, would say, "Well now, you never worked like Uncle Leon. He would have been up by 3:30 and had a day's work done by breakfast. You slept in until 5:30!" There was almost never a thank-you or an approval. Rather it was, "But why didn't you do this that way?" or "OK, you did that, but I also told you to do this," or "Look at that [whatever] you missed. You have to learn to do things right and to do it right the first time." I was angry and bitter. Three congregations dutifully seldom complimented me, I thought, and criticized whatever I did. The truth was they were quite complimentary, but I had set my sails not to catch those winds and so didn't hear, or couldn't. It seemed to me that people were absurdly critical of the very things I had done well, and they almost never mentioned an area in which I had, in fact, erred terribly. That perception completely bamboozled and upset me. I never seemed to be able to please (though, in fact, people were often pleased and said so). I seemed doomed to lose no matter how hard I tried.

Then the Lord revealed the truth of my bitter root, and I repented. Now, almost no one ever falsely criticizes me. If someone does have a criticism, they say it appropriately, kindly, and directly to my face; it helps me and I appreciate it and love the people for it. My attitude had kept me from hearing the compliments that were there and had spawned criticisms, but more than in attitudes, the law of retribution swung through people to me. I came to see, in the process of healing, that it was the very people who loved me who could be so influenced to criticize. I saw again that my bitter root had jeopardized God's people, for His discipline falls on those who dishonor His anointed. (Having been set aside and consecrated in the ceremony of ordination, every pastor is especially His anointed, though we also ought to understand that anyone whom God calls to a task is for that moment His anointed.) Merely confronting a servant of the Lord is not to be taken as dishonoring. The Lord's servants need honest people. "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). The Lord looks

on the heart. Finding pretexts to criticize, or excuses to attack, in order to avoid obedience to God's Word is to dishonor. My repentance that I had hurt God's people by tempting them to revile me does not totally exonerate them or excuse them, neither does it prevent me from rejoicing when men begin to revile and persecute falsely (Matt. 5:11–12), for the law of judgment (Matt. 7:1) is not the whole story. But my repentance can keep the law of bitter roots from defiling any more of God's people.

DOES THE REAPING FIT WHAT WAS SOWN?

One question begs before we leave the subject. The law says, "and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you," which seems to denote equal and exact return for judgments given. But we see in actual fact continual and grievous reaping far beyond what seems to be the measure sown. We don't understand fully, but we suggest these possibilities. One, perhaps the extent of our judging was far more vitiating than any of us suspected, so that God's justice is equal. Two, perhaps the law of increase is understood but not said explicitly, so that the Lord did not mean equal and exact retribution, but retribution measured as a harvest of grain is a multiplication of seed sown and nurtured. In such a case, God is yet fair, for the law works equally to increase rewards for righteous deeds, and shall we say that it is fair to reap increase of blessing but not discipline?

Behind all this operation of inexorable law lies one blessed fact that so outshines all of our personal history that everything else in all the universe pales beside it. God has fulfilled all the legal demands of law in His own Son's body on the tree. We have only to repent and claim that fact to be free and happy.

How good God is that He prompts us untiringly until we do some good thing, and then He lets us reap a hundredfold, as though that thing had been all our own idea. And the Father laments for us in the Spirit until we hear and repent so that He can pay the whole price of evil, reaping for us in His Son. Nothing is more sure than forgiveness. The Christian family need never fear exposure of evil and the conviction that follows, for that moment is the moment of release.

Having received forgiveness, we may yet have to resist the old habit formed in our character, but once forgiveness is claimed, it is as though

someone had been ringing the town bell for all to hear. An old habit can be just like that bell. Though it may continue to swing and ring awhile, no one is pulling the rope any longer. Now that repentance and forgiveness have stopped the effects of sowing and reaping, it will be a lot easier to stop the momentum and quiet the bell at last.

We, therefore, feel it is necessary to clarify what is meant, and not meant, by the healing of the inner man.

HEALING THE INNER MAN

In one sense, there is no healing of the inner man. The Lord does not want to put new wine into old wineskins (Matt. 9:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37–38). He does not want to heal what needs to come to death in Him. Many idealistic people, not grounded biblically, have heard of the healing of the inner man and have rushed in to pour water on a fire God is building.

A psychologist has his eyes on capacity to function. He wants to restore people to function normally. If he can do that, he thinks he has succeeded. A prayer minister has no such primary intent. He knows, as Bob Mumford has said, that if he fixes the fix God has fixed to fix a man, God will have to fix another fix to fix him.

A prayer minister knows that when a man has received Jesus, all that man's sins have already been forgiven, and positionally that man's sinful character has died, but not all of the person's mind, heart, and spirit has received that blessed fact. Consequently, a prayer minister's work is to bring into full effect that conversion, death, and resurrection that has already happened. A prayer minister is involved in helping Christians reckon their sin as dead in Christ (Rom. 6:11) in order to claim their new life.

Christ did not come to improve us. He did not come to make us better people. Nor does He want committed people or devoted, good, gentle, kind, or wise people. He wants dead ones, that the life of Christ may shine through us (Gal. 2:16–21, Phil. 3:9). He does not want to repair our righteousness. He wants to slay it so that His righteousness may clothe us anew (1 Cor. 1:26–31, 15:47–49, Gal. 2–3). We become better people not by healing our broken places so that we can function better, but by dying to

self so that His righteousness may be expressed in and through us. He will then be that devotion, kindness, and gentleness in us that He wants us to be.

Healing seems to connote that something was once good and “done got broke,” so we fix it in order for it to work again. There never was anything morally good in human life that could be repaired! (See Psalm 14:1–3; Romans 3:10–12.) It has been continuing grief to me that many Christians who do not understand the radical nature of sin and the centrality of the cross, and therefore the necessity for death and rebirth, have rushed into the healing of memories and have in fact postponed the fullness of death and rebirth! Because of this serious error on the part of a few, there have been negative reactions from some quarters toward all who pray for inner healing. Hear this: We are not servants of mammon, trying idealistically to restore people to the good life so they can be happy. We are servants of Jesus who depart from Him the moment we forget that every ministry encounter has as its base the necessity to evangelize unbelieving hearts (Heb. 3:12).

Our task is to reveal hidden sins that they may be forgiven. Our task is then to help people reckon as dead on the cross whatever practices in the old man are still being practiced (Col. 3:3–10). Then we stand by in faith as the Lord resurrects the other in newness of life.

Transformation of the inner man is most desperately needed for the restoration of families. But as the Lord restores such a powerful ministry into fragile human hands, we can stumble into countless pitfalls. Our sinful propensity is to turn every blessing God has given into bane. For instance, the sacrament of Communion given for unity is changed into something to quarrel about doctrinally, or sex given for blessed fulfillment into pornography and prostitution. Just so, we manage to turn great insights for healing the inner man into perversions and corruptions. We list, then, the many pitfalls and corrections, not necessarily in their order of importance.

Many who have entered into the ministry to the inner man (both those who give and those who receive ministry) have become problem-centered. Life is not an overcoming of problems, one after another. We are not navel contemplators. Life is sonship in the Lord Jesus Christ, living to bless the Father God. It is celebration and wonder, human laughter and fun, growth and mystery, procreation and labor, and so on, defying definition. The only reason one looks at problems is to discover, like a good mechanic, what is keeping the machine from running—not merely to restore to function but to

enable that death and rebirth that are essential to maturity into sonship. Many problems do not have to be seen and addressed. We simply grow out of them. To this date, some fifty years into this ministry, I cannot tell why some things must be known consciously and others not. Not knowing, we are left with simple dependence on the Holy Spirit rather than human control.

Becoming problem-centered is part of what causes some in this ministry to elevate the conscious mind too high. It is then as if we must know and understand a great many things in order to be saved. That is the heresy of gnosticism: that we are only saved by right knowledge. It is not by right knowledge that we are saved, but by the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. To what degree He wants us to understand in the process of salvation and growth to maturity, to that degree let us be open to hear, but when He leads us to freedom to live and love without ever understanding what blocked us, blind to the process of healing, let us be willing not to see.

Becoming gnostics who insist that we see in order to be saved makes us idolaters. We have hacked out a position whereby we require the person who ministers to us to guide us, lest we be lost. Just as the deluded soul will no longer do anything without consulting his diviner or astrologer, so many will no longer act without consulting their prayer minister or confessor, fearful lest they not have the right bit of insight.

Once we have established knowledge and insight on the throne, it is a simple step to install knowledge of the workings of the soul rather than the Word of God as our guide. I personally was well trained in psychology, having a minor in social psychology in college and a major in the religion and personality department at seminary. But having entered this field of ministry, I renounced psychology. I want no ministry or thoughts other than the Word of God. This does not mean that I reject all insights from the field of psychology. It means rather that all of my mind is captive to the Word of God that I may be free (2 Cor. 10:5), so that the Holy Spirit in balance may reach in to use any psychological insight, but no psychological insight can use me. I weep for a number of my brothers who started out in the Lord dancing with psychology and now, unbeknownst to them, are out of the Lord while psychology dances with them. The same can be true of any insights, however biblical they may be, including those of inner healing.

It is a frightful thing to mess around with the insides of another! For this reason many have said that we have no business whatsoever in the field.

But the Word is clear: “A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, but a man of understanding draws it out” (Prov. 20:5). “Prepare plans by consultation, and make war by wise guidance” (v. 18). “In abundance of counselors there is victory” (Prov. 11:14).

No one should ever be allowed to “mess around” inside another. There is risk enough for those who are determined to die to self so much as never to interfere in another’s life, without ever thinking we have license to change another. It has come to my attention that there are prayer ministers and writers who, upon hearing of something traumatic in childhood, have advised the person to whom they minister to change the memory. For example, having had a violent, critical father, they are advised to go back and paint a vivid picture of that father being loving, gentle, and kind. That is a terribly fallacious approach! Such treatment is a lie. It is a veneer that the honesty of the Spirit will someday throw off. It participates in autosuggestive techniques akin to hypnotism. Worst of all, it avoids the simple power of the cross. Nothing must supplant forgiveness, death, and rebirth. Healing of the inner man never erases or changes a memory. That would invalidate our purpose for living through what has happened to us.

We also lie when we repeat that old saw, “Well, if you haven’t forgotten, you haven’t forgiven.” Nonsense. Romans 8:28 is His purpose: “*All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (KJV, emphasis added). Healing is the transformation of the mind and heart (Rom. 12:2) whereby we remember what happened as it happened, but with a changed attitude. What once was crushing becomes blessing. What once was the lizard on our backs becomes our steed. Healing is not complete, nor is the purpose fulfilled for which God allowed a given thing to happen, until in retrospect we are even grateful it happened. By going through it, we have become surer of His grace and sweetness, more humble and compassionate, more able to minister to others. As with Jesus, so it is with us: “For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18).

Many evangelically minded people think there is no need for the healing of the inner man. They charge that this undoes our conversion experience. They maintain that all the problems of the inner heart died with us on the cross and that we simply need to believe that and walk on in faith. How heartily we agree that when we received Jesus, the “old man,” our carnal

flesh, died. It is dead. We do no new work. Herein is the most fundamental correction we make for all who enter this field not soundly based in evangelical faith: We are not adding to or changing what Jesus has done on the cross. Nor are we mending an old self-image that needed to die and did. What we *are* doing is extending the application of that death once died to every area of the heart and mind. In short, not every area of our inner being believes or has received that good news we have claimed. In a sense, we are converting anew the already converted.

What has been lacking in Christianity is a proper theology of sanctification. In the vacuum, many have stepped in to try to build Christian character. Transformation of the inner man is not the healing or building of good character. Many groups in Christ have erred by trying to build Christian character. But, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Jesus has already become our character, and He is writing it into us. Christian growth is a matter of growth in faith. Maturity is a matter of rest in Jesus. Sanctification is simply an entrance into the fullness of death and rebirth.

Psychology has persuaded all too many to accept the lie that we need a good self-image. Therefore, many in the counseling field have set out to make people feel better, to find some area in the person that works so that the person can find confidence and stand on that area. In inner healing we point out that Christians have died to self. Our attempt to build an acceptable self-image is what died when we received Jesus, that He might build us anew. We do need to cherish and give thanks for the new creature we are in Christ Jesus. But that is not a self-image that gives glory to our own flesh (1 Cor. 1:29). That is to love what God is building in us and praise God continually for new and joyous life in Him. Thus, we live for Christ, crucified, dead, and new in Him. Our only self-image is, “I am a sinner, redeemed and new in Jesus Christ.” “For we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and *put no confidence in the flesh*” (Phil. 3:3, emphasis added). “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, *who walk not after the flesh*, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, KJV, emphasis added). Trying to find and support a good self-image is direct seeking after and supporting of the flesh to find some righteousness in ourselves on which to stand. Its opposite is what we work for:

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31

And that results in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” That is a Christian’s image, that God can and will accomplish all good things in and through Him.

Therefore, sanctification does not mean that we strive by healing the inner man to build a better self that will be more acceptable. It means that we reveal the hidden works of darkness in the human heart because Jesus came to destroy the work of darkness (1 John 3:8). We pray that the Christian may claim more of that death he has already died so that more of that life that is already in him by the indwelling Christ may shine out.

The prayer minister is necessary because the human heart is deceptive. The prayer minister works by the gifts of perception and knowledge to expose what areas of the flesh yet operate to block the expression of the life of Christ. His aim is to witness how the Holy Spirit shall convict and release the other in the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But pitfalls abound. Some prayer ministers buttress pity parties. Some, not grounded in the Word as they ought to be, have rushed in to comfort people whose parents ostensibly failed them, and then wondered why persons they helped continued weak and faltering. The more comfort given, the more self-pitying the person if we do not understand God’s Word. Let every prayer minister hear: look behind every childhood wound for sinful reactions to the one who wounded. The Lord Jesus Christ came to bear our sorrows and carry our grief (Isa. 53:4–5). But if that is the extent of our ministry, the other will not get well. For we react to wounds sinfully. The response to hurt or neglect is anger and resentment. Resentment becomes hate, most often repressed and forgotten, but lividly active, like a land mine waiting to be stepped on. A prayer minister’s task is to help people to see and confess resentment, else he only buttresses self-pitying.

Prayer ministers may be tempted to probe around in people soulishly. Some people want (unconsciously) to “run numbers” on their prayer ministers. They often want to tell a prayer minister their list of gripes and

confusions so that they can confirm their errors if only the prayer minister will listen and agree. Telling someone who agrees seats that thing in the mind. Prayer ministers who are not dead to their techniques put people in boxes. They try to turn out people as carbon copies of their own style of life. “Love does not insist on its own way” (1 Cor. 13:5, RSV). A prayer minister’s task is to lay down his life so that each person may come into his own life in Christ.

Prayer ministers may usurp the position of others—pastor, husband, father, wife, or mother. Prayer ministers and those they minister to may fall into soulish transferences, by which the person thinks she or he is in love with the prayer minister. Prayer ministers may fail to keep confidences. Persons receiving inner healing may “use” what the prayer minister has said to “whip” others, or quite often put words in the prayer minister’s mouth that he in no way intended or said.

Sexual confusions can and do abound so profusely in and about prayer ministry that many avoid the healing of the inner man altogether when they ought to risk it—and some ought to flee out of it and don’t!

Pitfalls are as endless as the capacity of human nature to find varieties of ways to sin. Nevertheless, our Lord has called us to minister to one another, and we must. What we see so repentantly is that men have so fallen from walking in the Lord according to His Word that more and more fathers and mothers are failing or abandoning their children. Because children react sinfully and are formed in sin, because they must be loved to life in order to become human, we see that these children are producing children less human than they, and the others worse than the first, so that we are rapidly heading into the curse of Sodom and Gomorrah. Our nation is now ravaged by groups of youth who fulfill St. Paul’s prophecy:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

—2 TIMOTHY 3:1–5

But when the enemy pours in as a flood, the Lord raises up His ensign to stand in the gap. And we have the promise of Malachi 4:5–6: “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet *before* the coming of the great and

terrible day of the LORD. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with a curse” (emphasis added).

Therefore the call is upon the Lord’s own. We must learn how to “... rebuild the ancient ruins; you will raise up the age-old foundations; and you will be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets in which to dwell” (Isa. 58:12). We must learn how to heal and restore broken lives so that our Lord may turn this very history of denigration and degradation into the glory out of which the redeemed will minister. We must restore individual members of families else we cannot restore the Christian family. And we must proceed apace with the preventive medicine of solid teaching. How many have said to us, “Oh, had we only known this when we were young and still had our children with us! God forgive us!”

CHRIST’S LORDSHIP IN THE HOME

We believe that restoration of the Christian family must begin with return to the lordship of Jesus Christ. Some Christians have never really known Him. They may have received Him as Savior, but they still do not know who He really is and what that means in Christian family living. Some, knowing Him, have forgotten or been distracted. Knowing who Jesus is, is essential to family living: “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice” (James 3:16, NIV). Jealousy and selfish ambition manifest wherever men, women, and children have not subjected their unruly passions of the flesh to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

We are called to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, RSV). That is not a nice exhortation but a statement of principle for family (or any other) living. Its inverse corollary is: “If we are not subject to the Lord Jesus Christ out of reverence for Him, in no way can we be subject to one another.” “Subject” does not mean “controlled by” or “dominated.” “Subject to one another” means voluntarily surrendering our prideful self-wills in love in order to bless and bring happiness to the other. But we cannot do that. We cannot escape the demands of the flesh; we cannot overcome our fleshly inclinations short of Jesus’s lordship. Families that try, not knowing full surrender to Him, fail in ratio to their determination to succeed, for the strength of sin is the law (1 Cor. 15:56).

Put more simply, when we try to live like Jesus without His grace to do it, the harder we try, the more we enlist the strivings and ambitions of our prideful and jealous flesh, and so the sooner we fail.

Who then is Jesus? He is not just a man, nor is He only God. He is the God-man, fully God and fully man (John 1:14), who created us (John 1:1–3; Col. 1:16) and who redeemed us by His blood (Eph. 1:7). But more than that, He is our ever-present Lord and ruler (Matt. 28:18, 20; Acts 2:36). Throughout the New Testament, the apostles referred to Jesus by His full name and title, “the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor. 1:2; 7–9; 2 Cor. 1:2–3; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2–3; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:1, 3; 2 Thess. 1:2; 2:1; 3:6; in Paul’s letters; James 1:1; 2:1; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 Pet. 1:2; Jude 4; and throughout 1, 2, and 3 John and Revelation). Such naming is not simply a verbal issue. It is crucial to family life (and all our life) that we know and recognize Jesus for who He is. He is not merely the Savior who did that wonderful thing for us way back there in the past. He is the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13), the beginning blueprint and finished product of all we are. He is the fully human, fully spiritual person like whom we are becoming. And He is presently reigning as Lord, not merely sometime in the future when He returns. We do not come into the fullness of salvation until we know Him as Lord. We do not say, “Know *about* Him as Lord.” We say, “Know *Him*,” as in Jeremiah 31:34: “‘No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying “*Know* the LORD,” because they will all *know* me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the LORD” (emphasis added). So intimate is that word *know* (in the Hebrew, *yadah*), that it was sometimes even used of the act of marriage, as in Genesis 4:1, “Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived” (RSV, emphasis added). Although *yadah* is sometimes used of mere head knowledge, in these contexts it conveys a sense of experiencing, meeting, and embracing. Salvation does not mean only justification and redemption but also the fullness of life in Christ as He intended (John 10:10). Only as we invite Jesus to express in us the fullness of His lordship does He have permission to humble us and crush us (Matt. 21:44) as He must to bring us into that meekness by which, and only by which, we can live together as families in blessedness.

The flesh must be conquered. All of human love, which we honor as so noble and wonderful, is in fact shot through with use, manipulation, exploitation, control, and demand. Every person, whether he knows it or

not, is seeking to build and establish his own image, his own self, his own empire. The most naturally loving and kind are yet fully “self-ish.” From that proclivity to build our own kingdom arises every sort of vile jealousy and disorder. Therefore, outside of the lordship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the flesh *will* rule and destroy.

It is not safe for us to live with each other as we are. What is in us will come out, no matter how we try to suppress, sublimate, or control our wayward impulses. The flesh is incorrigibly destructive to self and others. “Let *everyone* be on guard against his neighbor, and do not trust *any* brother; because *every* brother deals craftily, and *every* neighbor goes about as a slanderer” (Jer. 9:4, emphasis added).

The church must regain awareness of the radical nature of sin, not sins. Sins are deeds done. Sin is the structure built into us that inclines us toward such deeds. With that awareness, we must return to complete daily momentary dependence upon the lordship of Jesus. “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it’” (Matt. 16:24–25).

Our Christian families are falling apart because we think that having accepted Jesus as Savior, we ought now to be automatically able to treat each other rightly. And so we become furious with each other, insistent and jealous, blaming and condemning because we think the other ought to have done better because he *could* have. Nonsense! We cannot. Compassion begins to develop when we join hands at the foot of the cross, realizing we are all shot through with sin, no one better than any other, and all dependent moment to moment upon the flow of Christ’s love through us to bring forth anything good at all. We have too much lost sight of the fact that the flesh profits nothing (1 Cor. 13:3; Gal. 5:17; 6:8) and “for apart from Me you can do *nothing*” (John 15:5, emphasis added). Since Jesus has washed us clean, we think we ought to be able to live like Him, not understanding that the purifying process is also ongoing, “because by one sacrifice *he has made perfect* forever those who are *being made holy*” (Heb. 10:14, NIV, emphasis added), and so pastors exhort and parents scold. But absolutely no one in himself can express the fruit of the Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit can express the fruit *of the Spirit*.



BALANCE THROUGH THE FULCRUM OF CHRIST

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

—EPHESIANS 5:21, NIV

MOST OF US CAN REMEMBER A TIME WHEN AS CHILDREN WE played on a teeter-totter. If we could find a playmate just our size, it was fun with no hassle, and we enjoyed relaxed hours of going up and down in the sun. But it was another matter when we weighed sixty pounds and our friend weighed one hundred. Then our play necessitated shifting our weight forward and backward until an easy balance could be achieved. Sometimes in our immature anxiousness to satisfy our own desire for pleasure, we entered into wrangling for a position:

“Come on, you have to get closer to the middle.”

“Well, that’s no fun. You get all the good ride!”

“It’d be OK if you weren’t so fat.”

“I’d rather be fat than a runt like you!”

“If that’s the way you feel, then I’ll find someone else to play with.”

And so our bigger friend hit the dirt as we jumped off. But once in a while, an older brother would find us in our impasse, soothe our ridiculously ruffled feelings with affectionate chuckles, and assume a position at the center of the fulcrum, holding a balance for us with the magnificent power of his legs. So long as he remained in that position, we could relax and enjoy ourselves, neither shape nor weight nor position being important any longer.

As married couples, we are as those two dissimilar children on opposite ends of the same teeter-totter. By token of those dissimilarities, we will

simply force the other to compensate for what we are or are not. In some areas of life one is heavy and the other light, and in other areas and instances vice versa. Jesus Christ is our elder brother. Only as He is the power at the center of our lives can we relate to one another without strain from the extremities of our differentness. Without Him we tend to accuse the other of being overbearing when indeed he is unconsciously compensating for our timidity. Or we are angry when the spouse abdicates his responsibility, not recognizing the tendency in us to take over and crowd him out. In marriage we are called to be one with each other, and we need to become aware of the automatic, unconscious dynamic of balancing one another that soon occurs in the process of living together. We need to come to real repentance and forgiveness, else we will increase our compulsion to accuse and our power to drive the other to become more of what we condemn.

In a marriage relationship, we are called to complement one another, not to change one another, though change will naturally occur as a result of sharing strengths and weaknesses. God did not create us to be altogether compatible; rather, we in many ways are opposite and conflicting. Some sameness of interests, goals, likes, and dislikes may help, but we will find that our personalities are nearly as opposed as plus and minus. But we need that differentness! In the first place, life without it would be boring. Someone has said that if two people always agree, one is unnecessary! More to God's purposes, He uses that conflict to force us to see ourselves, face our sin, and die with Jesus on the cross to what we are so that His new oneness of flesh may be formed.

St. Paul wrote that through fear of death we are kept in lifelong bondage (Heb. 2:15). The death we fear most of all is not the physical death but to die to sins we don't want to face. When we fear death and thus refuse to change, we fear the other's differentness that calls for it. Thus we fortify and defend our own ways to the exacerbation and death of our marriage. Truly he that would keep his life will lose it (Luke 17:33).

The answer, however, is not for either to jump off the teeter-totter, either by copping out from oneself by becoming all that the other thinks he wants, or by divorce. It is only the Lord who can break down dividing walls of hostility and so make peace (Eph. 2:14). It is only as He gives sufficient grace (namely love) to cast out our fears (1 John 4:18) that we gain the

freedom to laugh at what once threatened us and enjoy the jagged edges of the other without need to polish or correct.

THE “COUNTER” BALANCING ACT

In what specific ways do we push one another to counterbalance what we are? John and I share from our own lives, inviting the reader to identify both with our sin and with the unmerited grace of the Lord that enabled freedom and transformation that we might strengthen one another.

John’s tendency was to be impulsive and adventuresome to the point of being courageously foolhardy. Every dare instantly became a challenge, every warning an invitation to overcome. My tendency was to be more cautious, practically weighing and considering before choosing, and then carefully proceeding. John’s intensity caused me to dig in my heels till the path of our lives could be traced by big black skid marks. At the same time, my caution caused him to press forward all the more. We lived that tension, each unwilling to let go for fear of ceasing to be our own person, risked in a position not of our choosing. When the Holy Spirit called my cautious stance “fear and mistrust” and revealed that John’s rushing forward came from overcompensation for the same root, and we individually repented, the Lord established for us a healthy, easy balance. I am now free to be spontaneous and to venture, whether it be in a car on a mountain road, or in the freshness of some new spiritual revelation. And John can hear a word of caution without having to surge ahead to prove independence and capability. In the grace of Jesus Christ, our differentness has become a mutual support as we offer what we are to one another through Him.

John’s logicality naturally dictated to him that the only way to paint a wall was to begin at the upper left-hand corner and proceed methodically left to right until the entire area was covered, finishing at the lower right. But I am an artist, and to me that has always seemed boring. I prefer to paint here and there in what John calls interesting but impractical “swiggles”—and then fill the spaces in between. That difference, which symbolizes the variance in our approach to much of life, stood as a bone of contention between us for a long time. I judged him to be stodgy; he judged me to be disorganized, and we drove each other to the extreme—until we learned to accept one another in Jesus. Now He enables the two of us to

contribute who and what we are, and He does the blending. John outlines the edges and the corners; I paint the middle, and the war is over. We share many activities—yard and garden work, redecoration, traveling, speaking, writing, whatever there is to do. Having confessed to the Lord and been forgiven for mutual judgment and criticism, I can now accept with appreciation John's more structured way, and he is able to enjoy himself more in mine. More than that, we find emerging between us a new way that surpasses anything either of us previously defended as "the" way.

John was so absentminded that as a child if he were sent upstairs to get something, he would not only forget what he was to find, but he would also forget he had been sent! That quality later combined with an ability to concentrate deeply with impenetrable, imperturbable single-mindedness. This was further developed as a necessary virtue during seminary days when he did most of his studying as he waited for cab fares in taxi stands all over Chicago, or tried to read in the midst of the noise of crowded apartment living.

My training had always been to be aware of people around me, to be conscious of and responsive to their needs. As a child, it had been too easy for me to become lost in a book or some self-interest, and as a part of growing up I had accepted a sense of responsibility not to indulge in that fault.

COUNTERBALANCING AS PARENTS

When John and I began to produce children, we found that these qualities, while virtues in appropriate situations, were often enemies of family peace and harmony. I was easily aware of what the children were doing, and because I had been the oldest of five, I could discipline our children instantly. But I believed that John as head of our home should also discipline. I resented his being oblivious to the activities and needs of our offspring and his seeming contentment with letting me take charge. Unconsciously I began to overdiscipline to fill the vacuum. John consciously retaliated by criticizing the way I "drove" the children. Mercifully, the Lord broke through what would have been a vicious circle (and a whirlpool for the children) and enabled me to see that my judgment of John for not taking hold and my quickness to control were tremendous

blocks to the Lord's calling him into account. I repented for my sin, John for his, and the Holy Spirit was quick to release him to grow into the freedom to discipline in strength and love without my prompting. Until then we had entrenched each other.

COUNTERBALANCING IN COMMUNICATION

"Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph. 4:26, KJV) was for many years my scriptural justification for pushing John to settle all arguments and misunderstandings yesterday if not sooner. I *had* to settle everything immediately. John's inclination was always to mull privately for a while and then discuss matters when he had worked through them on the inside. The more urgently I would demand that we get things out in the open, the more he would retreat.

"John Sandford, you come out here and fight with me!"

(Silence followed.)

"You must like it there in that cave!"

(An imaginary clanging of a very real, invisible steel door within him.)

And my indignant self-righteousness would stand outside the door of his cave, both of us wishing we could erase the whole episode and begin again. And then the Holy Spirit revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ standing at the doors of our inner beings, knocking politely, courteously entering, sensitively identifying with us where we are, patiently inviting us until we chose freely to trust and walk out of our self-centeredness with Him. And I knew this to be the only way to meet another person without violating him or insisting on my own way. I could reread Scripture and know that it is my wrathful response that is called to instant account, not the settling of all things. I am rather called to support persons caught in unsettled affairs and people unable at that moment to face or discuss a thing. My inclination to hurry to talk things through is still there, as is John's to withdraw. But as we have learned to trust the Lord to do the convincing, the calling to account, the establishing of meeting time and ground, and the interpreting between us, the urgency to attack, defend, and retreat is gone. Our differentness has ceased to be our disunity. It has been transformed into that which protects the other. I now appreciate that John will not be stampeded into premature conclusions. He treasures that I will

love him enough to venture into his hiding places to draw him out with patience. And it is a blessing to find less and less occasion for this new trust to be tested.

We were like many couples who measure well-being by the behavior responses of our spouse. By doing that we subject ourselves to periods of unnecessary anxiety that can compound hurt to effect actual destruction of the love relationship. Only as we look to the Lord for primary security are we able to rest, trusting while a spouse exercises his yet immature and unhealed areas. We need to know that the Lord is in sturdy position on the teeter-totter, that He will preserve our life in balance as we grow together, and that the unresolved struggles of the moment need not threaten or consume us. The only real threat is in the perpetuation of that struggle through cherished resentment, angry accusation, vengeful tit for tat, or continual reinforcement of defensive walls to hide behind.

SPIRITUAL BALANCING

Perhaps one of the most frequent complaints we hear from wives is that their husbands are so completely occupied with work and sports and TV that they neglect their spiritual life. “How can I look to my husband as spiritual head of our household when I’m way ahead of him in spiritual matters?” Our answer to that is simply, first, there is no “ahead” or “behind” in the kingdom of God. God calls each person uniquely and individually to be where He wants Him to be. All measuring of ourselves over against our neighbor is fruitless. We play against our own individual par set by the Lord, not against each other. The only valid question is whether or not I am where God wants me to be at this moment. And only He knows the answer to that. Second, we have no business measuring our spouse by where we are; if a wife is on a pedestal, thinking she knows more than her husband and that she lives closer to God than he, she must abdicate that position if her husband is ever to come into his own full spirituality. Her superspiritual stance will necessarily tempt him to consciously or unconsciously counterbalance by being superearthy or even worldly. A wife can never drag her husband into vital relationship with the Lord. But she can win him without a word to that voluntary giving of himself by her “reverent and chaste behavior” (1 Pet. 3:2, RSV). Spelled out concretely, I believe that

means letting him know by words and deeds that she loves him and honors him. It means a well-ordered home, a consistent and unqualified expression of affection and sympathy, especially when he doesn't deserve it. It calls for interest and participation in pursuits that bring relaxation and refreshment to him. It means forgiving and blessing, complimenting and rebuking in an attitude of respectful caring. It means activating him in his Godordained position by relating to him in an attitude of celebrating his already being the spiritual head whether or not there is any evidence of his having any awareness of that fact. Many wives who have begun to ask their husbands the questions they used to ask their pastors have been astounded at the wisdom issuing suddenly from their spouse. And countless husbands have then scrambled to the Word, and to mature counsel, for wisdom to share.

If a wife makes a judgment upon her husband that he "just isn't the spiritual type at all," that is both untrue and tends to lock him into that stance. But if she believes the truth, that her husband was created with the breath of God in him, that he is already consecrated through her belief (1 Cor. 7:14), and that he may even be better than she is, else God would have called him first (1 Cor. 1:26–31), then her humility before God and her servant position to her family will free the hand of God to move upon her husband and children as He has already desired. But she must wait patiently in faith, continuing to serve the family with love. And she must be earthy with them, lest that dynamic of counterbalancing force the husband to be too much earth to her spirit.

If a wife has the love of Jesus over her and moves into alignment under her husband, that love has now come over him.

Marriage must be worked at. We train for years to play athletic games and study more years to become competent in a profession. But somehow we think that the most important factor in all our lives—our ability to live as families—will just happen. It will not! Daily death of selfishness and resurrection into His gentle nature is a discipline that must be steadfastly endured or we shall reap hell rather than blessing. All too many families do not know there is a price to pay. On the teeter-totter of human life the cost is daily giving to the other's joy. Fifty-fifty is a balance for divorce. One hundred percent given for the joy and well-being of the other is the only viable formula for the life of Jesus in our midst.



RESTORING THE
BIBLICAL FUNCTIONS
OF THE FAMILY

And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

—GENESIS 12:2–3

WHEN THE MATERIALISTIC MIND-SET CONVINCED MEN that only the demonstrable is real, the resultant erosion of biblical mentality eventuated in the loss of many vital functions of the family. Biblical functions in a family depend upon awareness of the needs of spirit and soul. When these are no longer regarded as primal, all those practices in the family designed by God to nurture and shepherd the spirit and soul atrophy and die.

The family is not to build the soul; God does that. But He planned to build the soul through what happens in the family. Satan desires to destroy whatever God would establish for the soul's nurture and care (i.e., church, school, and home).

In previous chapters we have sought to restore proper understanding of what happens to personality and character in a Christian home and to reveal what damages and how the cross and resurrection heal. Now we would rediscover to parents what are those biblical functions specifically related to the nurture and care of children's spirits and souls.

RESTORING THE FATHER'S BLESSING

Perhaps the most important gift a father has to bestow is his blessing. The blessing of a father directs the flow of God's munificence. God has so placed fathers that their prayers give Him access or block His graces. The principles are simple. God has given us free will. He has given the care of our children into our hands. He will not interfere or invade; He is a gentleman. Therefore, the children's blessing waits upon our invitation. Without it, though God wants to help our children more than we do, He restrains His hand (that is, unless the child manages to forgive his neglectful father and open his heart in spite of uncomforted pain). Consequently, a boy without his father's blessing often wanders in a spiritually arid and fruitless land. A man more than twenty-one, born anew in Jesus, is not so vulnerable to his father, having come to his own relation with his Lord. Even so, though the negative effect of a father's curse can no longer so greatly affect him, he cannot have the fullness that could be if his father's blessing rested upon him. A father's blessing opens the floodgates of heaven as it did for Jacob, who connived with his mother against Esau for their father's blessing and won.

So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; now may God give you of the dew of heaven, and of the fatness of the earth, and an abundance of grain and new wine; may peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you."

—GENESIS 27:27–29

Observe that Isaac's blessing upon Jacob is not general banalities but cogent specifics. Jacob is to prosper as a farmer; people will serve him, including his brethren, and everyone he blesses will be blessed, and whom he curses will be cursed. Precisely those things are yet being fulfilled today. A father's pronouncement of blessing is God's spoken word through His Son for that man's sons, and God's Word will not fail in the purpose whereunto it is sent. It will be accomplished (Isa. 55:11).

Jacob later blessed each of his twelve sons (Gen. 49). Each pronouncement was a prophecy, and some were judgments as well. Each was terribly specific and powerful unto discipline, mercy, and blessing. And each has been fulfilled in every detail. God will not violate the free will of His sons, nor will He let His Word through them fall to the ground.

Having failed to receive his blessing, Esau lifted his voice and said:

“Bless me, even me also, O my father!” And he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and has taken away your blessing.” Then he said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob, for he has supplanted me these two times? He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.” And he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?” But Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold, I have made him your master, and all his relatives I have given to him as servants; and with grain and new wine I have sustained him. Now as for you then, what can I do, my son?” And Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father.” So Esau lifted his voice and wept. Then Isaac his father answered and said to him, “Behold, away from the fertility of the earth shall be your dwelling, and away from the dew of heaven from above. And by your sword you shall live, and your brother you shall serve; but it shall come about when you become restless, that you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

—GENESIS 27:34–40

Again Isaac’s blessing is both specific and prophetic. He prophesies that eventually Esau, later known as the father of the land of Edom, would be free of Israel’s yoke, but as to the blessing erroneously given, what had been said, being God’s word, could not be unsaid. If a blessing was merely words of moral support, Isaac could have said, “I’ll repent those words for you, son, because I really meant them for you, not your brother.” But he could not, for what he had imparted to Jacob was more than mere words. It was a prophecy intended for one person and one person only. What was done was done and would happen as predicted by Isaac’s blessing.

Those who are older can remember when no one would think of marrying a girl without asking for her father’s consent and blessing. More recently, some may remember *Fiddler on the Roof*, in which Tevye’s three daughters came one by one for his permission and blessing. To the first he gladly gave both his permission and blessing. To the second he gave permission and added that they hadn’t asked his blessing but he would give it anyway. The saddest scene in the movie occurred when Tevye could give neither his permission nor blessing. The youngest of his three older daughters, the apple of his eye, then became no daughter at all to him. How have we fallen so far from God’s Word as to lose this greatest and most cogent of a father’s tools?

I was visiting in the home of a Christian psychiatrist when his daughters and son came at bedtime and knelt before him for his blessing. As he laid his hands on them and prayed, my spirit leapt for joy, and my eyes filled to overflowing. God was rediscovering to me the glory of His gift. After that, Paula or I prayed blessings over our children before they left for school. Having learned at home, our son Loren laid his hands on his wife’s

abdomen each night to bless their unborn child. Loren asked my blessing before marrying Beth. He often phoned long distance for prayers of blessing for the work in his church, and God prospered it.

When we were writing the first chapters of this book, Paula and I felt as though we were slugging it out against the powers of darkness in intercession. The battle grew heavier and heavier. We kept asking God and receiving Nehemiah 4:10: "...The strength of the burden bearers is failing, yet there is much rubbish; and we ourselves are unable to rebuild the wall." Then my father moved from Joplin, Missouri, to live with us, and in prayer with Professor Bill Johnson and a local pastor it was revealed that God had sent him to bless us and the writing. Immediately the anointing was full, the work was light, and we were refreshed. We were then writing the chapter "The Importance of a Father's Love"!

My father almost died and had an out-of-body experience in which the Lord sent him back for three reasons, the second of which he remembered as "for the writing of books." He had thought he was to write, but it was because God wanted this book to be the result of a family, and He knew we would need my father's blessing.

Parents should pray for guidance and, when sure of the leading of God, pronounce specific and prophetic blessing upon their children. There is no loss of power if parents want to consult with the children first, asking what they want, because God may speak through them as well. Unity is the prerequisite of power (Ps. 133).

Throughout the Old Testament, God speaks of the descent of trouble and sin from generation to generation (Exod. 20:5; 34:7; Lev. 26:39; Num. 14:18, 33; Deut. 5:9; Job 21:19; Isa. 14:21; Jer. 32:18; Lam. 5:7; and so on). But the Word also speaks of inheritance of blessing, both through Christ and through man. Of Christ: Romans 8:17; Galatians 3:29; 4:7; Titus 3:7; Hebrews 1:14; 6:17; etc. And through man: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-6; 17:1-8; 22:15-18; 26:24; 27:1-40; 49:1-28; Psalms 103:17; Proverbs 13:22; Ezekiel 37:25; etc. More is passed from generation to generation than we could ever fathom.

HOW BLESSING IS PASSED

Blessing descends three ways. First, through the genes we inherit both bodily health and propensities toward good character. Second, we receive a blessing by psychological emulation and formation. Third, by the law of sowing and reaping, for what a man sows, that shall not only he reap but his children's children will reap as well.

Despite our science, no one fully understands the mystery of the genes and the fullness of inheritance. The Word is both specific and cryptic: "And *in* you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3, emphasis added). Note that little word *in*. More profoundly and mysteriously in Hebrews 7:9, "And, so to speak, through Abraham even Levi, who received tithes, paid tithes." Abraham was the father of Isaac, who sired Jacob, who was the father of Levi. Yet St. Paul speaks of Abraham's actions as those of Levi and Levi's as those of Abraham! *In* Abraham? He speaks as though in some mysterious way Levi actually had something to do with or participated in his great-grandfather Abraham's actions from within his loins! Can there be a mystery of connectedness and inheritance far beyond our mortal ken?

I speak of a mystery far beyond us all, but let me at least suggest a line of thought by testimony. I was raised in Joplin, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, in the midst of people of great racial prejudice and fear. It should have lodged in me. But from some mystery within me, I could not receive it. I take no credit for that. My heart is as perverse as anyone else's. It is simply unaccountable to me that black was always beautiful. And I could not explain to myself why I always felt, deep within, a strange and unaccountable gratitude for black people. It did not cover all the depth of feeling to know that my first words were said from behind the skirts of a black housekeeper whom they say I loved.

In seminary I drove a cab at night in Chicago. When I began, a great scare had just occurred, and all the white drivers were afraid in the black sections of town. By law they had to carry their passengers into these areas, so they rolled up their windows and locked their doors and shot through stop signs to get back to the white neighborhoods. The law of supply and demand meant that there was plentiful business in the black areas, so I drove there most of the time. I never refused a passenger. All around me, my taxicab buddies were being held up. One was even left standing in nothing but his shorts way out "in the sticks" in subzero weather! Not only was I never held up, but also no one even gave me a rough time. The people

in that section of town were gracious and kind to me and often visited and chatted. I enjoyed being with them. Even in the midst of squalor they had an essence of dignity I could not fail to sense.

I often puzzled why I felt as I did and why I was treated so well. I seemed to have some sort of blessing or aura of protection about me. Then one day after my father came to live with us, he began to reminisce about his World War I experiences that he had never shared before. Upon arriving in France, his company of marines was called out name by name and marched off to the front—all except Dad. His name was not called. Somehow it had been omitted. There were no orders for him. The lieutenant responded, “Son, you’ll just have to make out for yourself. Find somewhere to stay and someone to feed you and hang around till orders come,” whereupon he also marched off and left him, an eighteen-year-old alone in a foreign country at war, with no money and no place to go. Two companies of stevedores were there to unload ships, one an Italian crew off the streets of New York, full of fights and knifings. The other was a black crew from the Southern farms. Dad went to the black crew, who took him in, treated him with great kindness, protected him, and fed him until much later when his orders came. He used to sit and listen by the hour as they chanted in deep rhythmic voices as they swung crates and boxes from arm to arm.

As he spoke, I knew by the leaping of recognition in my spirit and the anointing of God why I had had such love and gratitude for black people and one of the reasons why their singing always moved me so deeply. If Levi truly paid tithes in Abraham, is there a mystery of my father’s experience being mine? Did I somehow know it in my spirit? Or is it merely some kind of “descendancy” of blessings by inheritance?

Then I began to recollect, and my father added much I had not known before. It turns out that the Sandfords of my line were plantation owners in Kentucky; they owned slaves. They had been exceedingly kind to their slaves, and the slaves had loved them greatly. When one of my ancestors tried to set his slaves free and move to Missouri without them, they pleaded with him not to do so, and he relented and brought them with him somewhere north of Kansas City. Then he again tried to release his slaves to freedom, and they sharecropped.

On the other hand, it was a John A. Sandford of New York State, of our family line, who owned and abused the African slave Dred Scott, from

which came the celebrated Dred Scott court case and Supreme Court decision—which greatly helped to precipitate the Civil War!

Can all this “descendancy” be mere coincidence? How much blessing and propensity do we inherit? I don’t believe we need to know or understand the mystery of what actually descends. But I believe God wants parents to become aware that what good they do and respond to descends as a specific gift and function of their parenthood to their children.

Again, I was raised in a heavily Protestant, anti-Catholic atmosphere. Much prejudice, fear, accusation, and confusion were expressed all around me (not so much by our own family as by our friends and neighbors). Again, unaccountably it did not find a lodging place in my heart. I could take no credit; I tried to think as others did, but I couldn’t make it stick. I found myself drawn toward the Catholic Church. In seminary I especially studied the Jesuits and St. Francis Xavier and found that this touched unexplainably deep chords in my heart.

When the Holy Spirit came upon me, I soon found myself ministering much among Roman Catholics. Strangely, though I had never in my youth attended a Catholic Mass, I felt greatly at home in Catholic services. To my knowledge there were no Catholics in my family, yet I found myself feeling most happy and fulfilled in a Catholic charismatic Mass.

In 1968 my deacons’ board decided I was becoming too tired, and they advised me to ask others to accompany me whenever I went somewhere to speak. (At the time, Paula was busy being the mother of small children.) Camp Farthest Out invited me to speak in July in Tiffin, Ohio. I asked several friends in the Midwest. In the end, only Ami, our eldest daughter, and Barbara Shlemon (a Roman Catholic laywoman then of Chicago, later the author of *Healing Prayer*) could come with me. As we rode into town, we sighted an interesting church. Being early, we decided to stop. As Ami, Barbara, Hal Spence (son of the camp chairman), and I entered the church, the Holy Spirit fell on me with an anointing I had never experienced before. Ami looked at me and exclaimed, “Dad, what’s happening to you?” The church was St. Mary’s Roman Catholic Cathedral, and the Holy Spirit began to make it known to us that He was calling us to intercede in repentance for the great historical division between Roman Catholics and Protestants—Barbara as a Catholic laywoman and I as a Protestant pastor!

During that week, whenever we could grab a moment’s time between speaking and prayer ministry, we would pray for the healing of history,

repenting for all the lynchings, burnings, recriminations, and battles throughout church history. One day we prayed for all those of either persuasion who married across the lines and then were excommunicated or (in the case of Protestants) ostracized. That evening my mother reached me long distance—it was my birthday, and she had hunted across the states to convey congratulations. I shared with her what had been happening. She said, “Oh, Jack, I never told you. You always knew my mother as a Methodist. But she grew up a very devout Catholic. All the Osage Indians of our family were strong Roman Catholics, converted by Jesuit missionaries. When your grandmother married your grandfather, they ‘churched’ her. In those days, that meant they excommunicated her. That’s why she became so ardent a Methodist.”

Unbeknownst to me I had prayed that day for the healing of generational curses that had stemmed from the affliction of my own beloved grandmother! Was that only coincidence? What *do* we inherit? Could that have been why I felt at home in the Mass? Perhaps not, but it is certain to me that the blessing of love for the Roman Catholic church descended from my heritage.

HOW TO BLESS ADULT CHILDREN

All this testimony leads to one point. Many Christians have asked us, “What can we best do to help our grown children?” We say, “Purify your hearts. There is little that can happen in your heart that does not bless or afflict your children.” Note that when David sinned with Bathsheba, his son died (2 Sam. 12:14). And because Jeroboam had worshiped other gods, his line would be destroyed (1 Kings 14:10). Even his righteous son would die, although that son alone would receive proper burial, “because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good” (v. 13, NIV). Again and again in the Old Testament, fathers’ sins brought death to their sons and daughters. Today we have the cross to deal with that pollution. But until the sin in a family is brought to the cross, whatever we parents have done either purifies or muddies the flow of God’s waters to our children. It is as though we stand in a river, our children being downstream. Whatever cleanness is ours sweetens their waters. Somehow both before their birth and after, “*in*” us they are blessed.

Whether or not he can understand all this, would that every parent grasp by faith that great blessings descend upon his children the closer he approaches God! “A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children” (Prov. 13:22).

The biblical function we would restore by resurrecting our sense of inheritance is none other than holiness. Holiness is a thing in itself: “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1). But notice that here it is connected with the two last verses of 2 Corinthians 6, that of becoming sons and daughters, and to Hebrews 12, in the context of God’s chastening and of our seeing to it that no root of bitterness spring up and “thereby many be defiled” (v. 15, KJV). Our personal holiness thereby becomes a function of our providing blessing to our children, most especially that we not defile the waters in which our children and children’s children will swim to eternity. Thus, our personal holiness is directly a function of our children’s nurture and care.

There is no such thing as a private, individual, secret, or hidden sin—nor any blessing or consecration that is ineffective or wasted. No good deed, however secretly done, is ever lost. Our children inherit by immutable law. We pray that mankind may recover this corporate sense of belonging in the family of mankind.

THE BLESSINGS OF DISCIPLINE

We have spoken already to restore discipline (chapter 5) and authority (chapter 7). We only add that every parent needs to see that his discipline and authority are functions of nurture to the spirits and souls of his children. Such are not merely physical responsibilities. Nothing can be done through our body that is not an expression of our spirit. God’s Word becomes flesh through a spanking, a command, a rebuke, a chastisement, a discussion, or even an argument. We cannot escape incarnation. We bring forth God to our children at all times. Therefore St. Paul commands, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of *the*

Lord” (Eph. 6:1–4, emphasis added). Mark those words, “*in the Lord*” and “*of the Lord.*” Obedience needs to be *in the Lord*. Authority, discipline, and nurture need to be *of the Lord*. Neither can happen by our Lord in us unless children and/or parents are daily given to the discipline of living by His Spirit in the way He would act. Only so do we incarnate the life of Jesus in our midst. Giving vent to selfish screams and demands and self-righteous angers is not in or of the Lord and gives Him no glory. Parents must take the lead. Somehow we think to be careful to express courtesy to outsiders, but anyone in the family is often fair game for whatever undisciplined emotions arise. Courtesy must begin at home. We need to be more gentle and sensitive within the home than anywhere else, not the other way around. And we need to see that such gentleness in Christ is a specific function of Christian nurture of the souls and spirits in our care.

THE BLESSINGS OF PARENTS’ HEALTHY SEXUAL INTIMACY

We have also written concerning sex (chapter 7). We add that husbands and wives need to see their sexual life as a function of the care of the souls and the spirits of each other and their children. Through prayer ministry, we have discovered that most parents have almost no awareness of their relation to each other as a function of their care for their children’s souls and spirits. By blessing of inheritance and by example our children’s spirits learn to flow through and express to others, especially later to their own spouse, by what we are and do. Can it be an accident or something I could take credit for that I have never raised a hand against Paula, and only once in all our married life raised my voice to her? Can it be coincidence that I never utter a word in disrespect of Paula, or ever curse at her or call her names? Or she me? Could we take credit for that when both our fathers were gentle, kind men who carefully treated their wives with great respect? Their lives were nurture to our souls and spirits.

Both of us watched our parents express warmth and affection, banter and tease. Both of us watched as unintended slights did not call forth inflamed responses. Both of us continually watched good-bye and hello hugs and kisses. As children, neither of us ever saw an uncontrolled argument

between our parents. Both of us continually saw love expressed as affection in the home in our parents' relation to one another.

Does the above make real what we say about personal holiness as a function of nurture to children? Holiness is not uptight rigidity according to law. Holiness is the life of love lived momentarily day in and day out in a family. Religiosity can never pass for holiness; that only is holy that is personal love, personally expressed in a home.

Sexual intercourse is, of course, something private and should be kept so by the parents. Infant children ought not to be in the same room with parents in intercourse for the same reason as we have shown, that children's spirits are well aware before the mind is formed. Sex is holy and beautiful, but precisely because it is, and is distinctly a private wonder, just so children need not to be exposed to sights and sounds before the guardianship of understanding can handle it. Privateness and a proper sense of modesty are thus also functions of care and nurture of children's souls and spirits.

Noah's sons Shem and Japheth carefully backed up and covered him when he was drunk and exposed, whereas Canaan was cursed because he disrespected his father's nakedness (Gen. 9:20–27). Parents need to be careful about nudity or overexposure around the house—not that there are taboos and fears, but that there is a holiness of person that needs to be respected.

Although sexual intercourse is private and hidden, inheritance of blessing applies as firmly to it as to all else. Parents need to know that their care, delicacy, respect, and cherishing of each other in sexual intercourse also provides a blessing of inheritance to their descendants. So many times we have discovered in prayer ministry that daughters of frigid mothers also tend to be frigid, and that warmly free and sexually expressive mothers most often produce daughters like unto themselves, that we are tempted to proclaim it as a maxim. Fathers who are failures or successes as lovers almost always produce sons like themselves. Other factors may intervene, especially the child's own pursuit of a lifestyle of repentance. But if nothing does interfere, inheritance will run true. Prayer can improve things, but how much better if parents add to their own healthy desires the knowledge that the more improved their own sexual life, the more blessings descend, and the less has to be overcome and replaced by Jesus.

Since all that we are descends to our children, every skill and talent is also a nurture of our children's souls and spirits—the way we love to work or mangle, our neighborliness or lack of it, our generosity or stinginess, our diligence with chores or sloppiness, our timeliness or tardiness, and so forth.

After we receive Jesus as Savior, it takes many years before His lordship transforms pattern after pattern in our life. Let us remember that wherever we fail to express His nature, His grace abounds. And realizing He gave us our children, knowing how messed up we are, let us plod on to know Him, and knowing Him, to love Him more fully, that His life in us may affect our children more fully. Our prayer life is our first and most powerful blessing that descends to our children!



WIDOWED, DIVORCED, AND SINGLE PEOPLE

Learn to do good; Seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

—ISAIAH 1:17

This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

—JAMES 1:27

TODAY, WHEN DIVORCES ARE SHATTERING MORE AND MORE homes, the church needs more than at any other time to rediscover its ministry to widowed, divorced, and single people. That ministry was always clearly spelled out in God’s Word. Unfortunately, today when the church needs it most, we have been tardy in reactivating what has been laid out for us to do.

In biblical times, singles lived with parents (Luke 15). Divorced people returned home to the care of their parents whenever possible. But care for widows and the fatherless was most explicitly developed within the Word.

First, there was the protection of God’s law. “You shall not afflict any widow or orphan” (Exod. 22:22). “You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow’s garment in pledge” (Deut. 24:17). “Do not move the ancient boundary, or go into the fields of the fatherless” (Prov. 23:10). Prophets thundered when men forgot or failed to protect the widow and the fatherless (Isa. 1:17; 58:6–10; Jer. 22:3; and so on).

Secondly, the Lord made specific practical provisions. “And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of

thine hand which thou doest” (Deut. 14:29, KJV). “When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, that they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied. And you shall say before the LORD your God, ‘I have removed the sacred portion from my house, and also have given it to the Levite and the alien, the orphan and the widow, according to all Thy commandments which Thou hast commanded me; I have not transgressed or forgotten any of Thy commandments” (Deut. 26:12–13). It was for this reason that the Lord demanded, “Bring the *whole* tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house...” (Mal. 3:10, emphasis added). Provision for widows and the fatherless was not from the king’s treasury but from the Lord’s house! Regrettably today the state has filled the vacuum, and so we are overburdened with cumbersome and wasteful social machinery as the state tries to do the job of God’s people. Perhaps we cannot answer for the general body politic, but every church should take care of its own. If God’s people were obedient, serving God rather than mammon, by tithing as commanded, there would be abundance of food in God’s house for the care of widows and the orphans!

Thirdly, the Lord provided for the guidance, care, and counsel of widows. When a husband died, the law stated that his brother or next of kin must marry his widow:

When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a strange man. Her husband’s brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband’s brother to her. And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel. But if the man does not desire to take his brother’s wife, then his brother’s wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, “My husband’s brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband’s brother to me.” Then the elders of his city shall summon him and speak to him. And if he persists and says, “I do not desire to take her,” then his brother’s wife shall come to him in the sight of the elders, and pull his sandal off his foot and spit in his face; and she shall declare, “Thus it is done to the man who does not build up his brother’s house.” And in Israel his name shall be called, “The house of him whose sandal is removed.”

—DEUTERONOMY 25:5–10

It was for this reason that Ruth came to the threshing floor *by night* and Boaz ordered that no one make it known (Ruth 3:14). They did nothing immoral. Ruth had chosen Boaz, and Boaz desired her for his wife, but

Elimelech, as the next of kin, had the first right and duty of marriage. If Elimelech had known they desired each other, he could have extorted money from Boaz rather than taking off his sandal to indicate rejection (Ruth 4:8), therefore, the secrecy.

As polygamy waned, it yet remained the responsibility of the next of kin to counsel and watch over the widow and her children. When a man who had no brothers or other close surviving relations died, the elders of the city would call for men of the city to candidate for the position of counselor for his widow.

Such men acted as stewards over her house, with authority to advise, even to buy and sell for the widow. Some unscrupulous men desired such positions, in order to plunder widows' houses. For this reason Jesus said, "Who devour widows' houses, and for appearance's sake offer long prayers; these will receive greater condemnation" (Luke 20:47). Appearing before the elders and knowing they would watch for several days before making the appointment, such men made sure to dress carefully, attend the synagogue regularly, and make long prayers so as to seem to be pious and holy men.

CARE FOR TODAY'S WIDOWED, DIVORCED, AND SINGLE PEOPLE

Today, we need not reinstate the specific practices of the past, but we need to obey the intent. Every church should have counselors and mentors on hand to assist and care for the widowed, divorced, and single people in the congregation. Men and women respond differently to each of these situations; therefore, the assistance given to them will vary. For women, it is important for them to seek counsel from godly men—elders or deacons, whatever such men might be called—who are designated and recognized as dependable, mature, and honest. While this does not discount advice from a godly woman, counsel from a mature elder or deacon will help to balance out the woman's femaleness. Such men should not only be available but also take initiative to offer help regularly, once or twice a month. Few divorced people would take first steps to ask for such aid. Below are the several areas churches should seek to train such counselors.

1. Sound and godly financial protection and advice

Women who are alone should be advised never to sell property or buy or make major financial decisions without the counsel of a wise, godly businessperson or financial advisor. Insurance and investments especially should be subject to counsel. “In abundance of counselors there is victory” (Prov. 11:14). One of the most frequent and grievous things Paula and I hear across the country is that it is often “Christians” who take advantage of widowed and divorced people and plunder their houses! We are mortified, ashamed, grieved, and furious! If we who have sinful hearts are so angered, how shall the heart of God the Father not be deeply, grievously offended? Truly His judgment will be thorough! The church must repent sorely, and quickly, and arise to its task.

To our further shame, it is often secular and unbelieving bankers who act in proper righteousness to protect women—and sometimes unbelieving lawyers and family doctors as well. When will the church obey the cry God commanded us to hear?

2. Listening

Men who counsel widowed, divorced, or single women need to be there simply as listeners. Such women sorely need men to talk to, even more than they need advice. To avoid confusions and temptations, such mentors should either work in teams or, at best, with their wives. These mentors need at least rudimentary training in the art of mentoring. Pastors and elders especially need to comprehend the nature of grief.

Grief is a relief valve for a specific and temporary wounding of the heart, mind, and spirit due to loss and concern for the other. The recurrent emergence of sorrow is not a mark of lack of faith. It is rather a sign of healthy, normal attachment and emotions. Many immature Christians have insensitively berated women who continue to suffer occasional healthy sorrow, or on the other hand, failed to discern and be firm to stop inappropriate grief and pity parties. Recurrent sorrow arises from a very real ripping and tearing of the inner person. When a spouse dies, it is as though half the being is suddenly torn away and the other half hangs out raw and touchy. For months and even years thereafter there may be occasional outbursts of hurt and tears, especially at holiday times. This is quite normal and healthy.

Mentors should explain to widows that they may suffer recurrent sorrow and perhaps even experience occasional depression for perhaps as long as two years. Unless the bereaved know this and understand how sorrow arises from that very real ripping of the inner being, they may struggle with fears concerning their faith. They may feel that something must be the matter with them that they “don’t seem to be able to get over it.” They need to understand it is the little things that will catch their hearts and reopen the well of tears—finding his old work shoes tucked under the stairs, bringing in the newspaper one day only to realize anew there is no longer anyone to give it to, or something that triggers into a fond memory like a favorite song. Christmas and other holiday times are the worst, for they can feel empty without the lost husband.

Such tears, if simply lived through, are a blessing. They say the heart is normal and healthy. Absence of tears, often ascribed to the effect of faith, may in fact be quite unhealthy, a suppression of real feelings. As persons in hospital beds need nurses who are attentive but objective, who weep with them but not despairingly, so widows need those who can hear and understand but do not encourage the widow to be weak. Normal sorrow can easily become something to “trade on” or turn into a pity stance. It is enough to simply be there, momentarily empathizing, and then turning the mind and heart toward something alive and different.

Divorce is a far greater wounding than death. Divorcées may have the same recurrent sorrows plus the wounding of rejection. Divorcées often feel ugly, unwanted, and undesirable, and they feel they are a burden to others. Particularly wounding both to widows and divorcées is to feel like a fifth wheel among erstwhile comfortable couples’ groups. This is especially so when the woman senses that each wife now instantly has a protective air around her husband when she is present. This is more acute and aggravating to divorcées because women often feel that a widow, especially one who has had a good man, may not yet, because of love and sorrow, want to replace him, whereas they expect a divorcée to be a huntress for a good man to heal a bad experience.

Singles’ groups alone may not be the best answer. Without outside input, divorcées often devolve into a subgroup of women who still lack male companionship. Such subgroups tend to entrench hurts rather than get over them. We believe that women who are alone for whatever reason should also be brought into Christian church fellowship groups where there may be

couples, other single people of both sexes, and a variety of interests and problems. Self-centeredness and lack of outreach into others' lives are deadly traps for persons living alone. Where there is not enough contact with couples and families, singles' groups can tend to become marked as male-hunting clubs—which creates a false atmosphere for relaxed getting to know one another before thinking in terms of finding a spouse. If a single person is in a singles' group, she should find a better range of interests and deeper security by belonging at the same time to another fellowship group in a church.

3. Help with children

Mentors need to be available for women alone raising children. Trying to be both father and mother is terribly wearing. If an uncle or grandfather can step in to be a surrogate father, at least advising concerning discipline, well and good. Otherwise the church should provide a man-and-wife team, available on a regular basis, so that the single parent is kept from feeling like an unwelcome chore. She should know that that time belongs to her as a gift of God. It is a time when she can air her family problems in the company of friends who are “closer than a brother.” “Should I let Bobby go out for football? If I do, how about accident insurance?” “Last night Ben got into trouble with the law. How do I handle it?” “Mary wants to date this fellow; I just can't see her with him at all. What do I tell her?” “Should I let Margaret take piano lessons? I don't know if we can afford it.”

4. Financial hardship assistance

Such mentors should have access to adequately supplied funds from church tithes to assist in cases of hardship. *We believe it is wrong to let our beleaguered families find their aid from the state's treasury when the Word of God is explicit that it is for this very reason that God has commanded His people to tithe.* A committee or board can handle such a fund and mete out its resources according to their judgment. We know of a young husband who suddenly died of a cerebral hemorrhage. Her church instantly informed his widow that they would see to it that she lacked for nothing. Probate time is difficult for widows.

5. Warning or blessing for remarriage

Designated elders should give words of warning or blessing concerning possible remarriage. A scoundrel played up to a wealthy widow we knew. Her friends saw and tried to advise. She called on John to come. He perceived that she could not hear her friends' advice, so he could only caution her to go slowly, give no money, and wait for time to reveal the truth. A few weeks later she called John to report that though this man had said all the right Christian words of faith, he had managed to persuade her to give him eleven thousand dollars—whereupon he took off for parts unknown! Here the problem was not the lack of advisers. She wanted the touch of a man so much that she was unwilling to hear good counsel.

Mentors must avoid control and dominance. Widows and divorcées need to learn to stand on their own feet. Some would be all too willing to cop out from all responsibility by putting too much on the mentor's shoulders, while others won't lean enough. The task of mentors is to do themselves out of a job. Their aim should be to stand beside the lone woman, avoiding doing so much that she fails to mature, while doing enough to protect and guide so she grows into unfamiliar areas safely and maturely. Among the many blessings God would bring out of the fires of suffering is maturity. Mentors must be careful not to comfort so much that growth is prevented.

No one who has not lost a mate can know the depth of loneliness of those who have. The never-married know an aloneness, but never having been married, they cannot know the poignant power of lonesomeness for those who have been joined to another and have lost their loved one. Sometimes among older couples, for whom life has been full, the pain is lessened by the sense of nearness to eternity and reunion. Sometimes newlyweds have not had time to cement the bond. It is those from thirty to fifty, especially those who have children to raise alone, who need our most diligent care.

THE NEEDS OF SINGLE, DIVORCED, OR WIDOWED MEN

We have spoken mainly of women, but men are often as needy. Women need support, companionship, and practical guidance, whereas men can usually handle the practicalities; but in the heart, men are often far more devastated than women. Worse yet, normally because of their cultural

training, men have not been as able to be in touch with their real feelings. Therefore, they handle the world of feelings far more inadequately than women. Men need support groups where both men and women can have the opportunity to help them own what they really feel.

Widowers and divorced men seem to be far more vulnerable to “sirens” than women are to Casanovas. Such men need to commit themselves to being with a support group at least once a week; the women in the group can help them spot a vamp and warn accordingly. Men need homes that are open to them for meals and quiet evenings of visiting. A man alone often gravitates to taverns for company and finds there only those women who know a kind of life that is not what he and his children need.

We believe that mentors should avoid the temptation to become matchmakers. Having ministered to many lovely young women and strong young men, Paula and I have often been tempted to get some of them together. The few times we have succumbed when it seemed so obviously right, the results were disastrous! Now we see that prayer ministers should help lonely people face the fact that what is in their hearts attracts trouble to them, and then let God bring His choice to them by His “coincidences.” We have found that if the person lets God and His servants truly set the heart right, it is usually not long before He somehow brings the one who turns out to be just right.

A WORD OF COMFORT REGARDING REMARRIAGE

Many who are divorced fear remarriage because of the teaching on adultery: “Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery; and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery” (Luke 16:18). We would not lessen any law of God; our Lord straightly warns against that (Matt. 5:19). We always work to save marriages. But let us not be caught in legalisms, which exalt the law above our Lord’s mercy. Of course our Lord does not want us to divorce or be divorced. And of course our Lord is grieved by our rising divorce rates. But let us remember that when the legalistic Pharisees exalted the law of the Sabbath above His mercy, our Lord again and again healed on the Sabbath and told a man to rise and carry his pallet, knowing the Pharisees would accost Him for healing and the man for carrying his bed on the Sabbath day

(John 5:1–16). By many such actions, Jesus was clearly stating that God is eminently merciful and practical and that it does not sanctify His loving nature before men when we insist on obedience to the letter rather than mercy and new life in Him. We have known some couples who have been so crucified by the legalistic within the body of Christ that it would *seem* more practical to murder a spouse and be forgiven and then remarry than to divorce and not ever marry again or remarry and be condemned forever by immature Christians.

Paula and I cannot answer the dilemma of divorce. Would that it would never happen anywhere, but when men stumble and fall, can we not choose mercy rather than the letter? We plead with the church for a humble heart, that we not lay on the brokenhearted even heavier burdens, and that we at least examine each case for the fresh present will of our merciful and gentle Lord.

ADULT CHILDREN WHO KEEP RETURNING HOME

It is usually unwise for families to allow unmarried older offspring to remain in or keep returning to the home. Some young adults feel duty bound to “take care of the folks.” Whenever parents perceive that their very real needs have become excuses for their progeny to cop out from finding and living their own lives, they should make every effort in Christ to find some other way to be helped and set their children free to move on to their own destiny.

Some young adults seem unable to get over homesickness and keep returning, like a satellite that can’t quite escape the gravity of home base. A simple truth to remember is that if a child receives enough affection, affirmation, training, and discipline, he *can* leave home as an adult easily. If an adult child continues to return, saying, “I just love you folks so much, I can’t bear to leave,” the truth is the opposite. That child has *not* received enough (whether or not it was offered) and does not truly love or feel loved. Real love sets free. What passes for love—domineering concern, criticizing, and controlling—clips a child’s wings so he cannot fly as an adult. If a parent discovers his failure in this, he should pray that God would fill his son’s or daughter’s heart with love that will strengthen with might in the inner man. And then he should sit down and talk with that one candidly,

kindly, lovingly, confessing these faults and asking forgiveness. He should then clearly express his unqualified and steadfast love for that grown child and give assurance of his belief in that person's abilities to take hold of life and achieve as the Lord continues to nurture him and open doors of opportunity. That being done, he should insist that the child leave home and find his own way! That is the kindest thing a parent can do—it is not kind to allow a child to lock himself or herself away from life in the security of the home. I can see in the eyes and facial expressions of young adults when they begin to register that “kept” look. Seeing it in the eyes of a twenty-four-year-old man, I warned his parents and told them not to allow him to stay. They couldn't bring themselves to be that “cruel.” Four years later, the more cruel fact is that they had a confirmed bachelor on their hands who most likely would never seek his own life and his own wife. The security of the home can become a psychological trap, subtly curbing healthy desire for independence and marriage until those urges die altogether.

Home should always be there, a place of security for adults so long as parents live. But wise parents will watch to see that that base never disrupts a marriage or prevents a fledgling from using his wings. Wise is the eagle mother who tears up her nest when the eaglet fails to fly.



A PLACE FOR FANTASY

See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you, that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.

—MATTHEW 18:10

From the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast established strength, because of Thine adversaries, to make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

—PSALM 8:2

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.¹

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

A CHILD'S SPIRIT OFTEN SOARS FREE OF "THE PRISON HOUSE" AND uses his imagination to portray wonders far beyond our adult minds.

Parents of a seven-year-old, driving in six lanes of freeway traffic, suddenly had to swerve, causing the rear door to fly open. Their child

flipped out and rolled head over heels across four onrushing lanes! Miraculously, every car stopped instantly, and the child was unhurt even by the hard pavement. When the parents managed to stop and rushed back, they found the child exclaiming, “Daddy, Mommy, did you see them? Did you see them?”

“See what, honey?”

“Did you see the angels? Did you see them stop the cars and catch me so I wouldn’t get hurt?”

Was it “only” imagination? Or did the child, still free in his spirit, in fact see the angels of God? “For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, lest you strike your foot against a stone” (Ps. 91:11–12).

It is from the active spirit of a child that his imagination arises. He needs to find some way to express what his spirit senses or knows. Consequently, our counsel to Christian parents is, “Do not suppress the imagination of your child.” So often we hear of parents who have called out, “Go back to sleep. It’s only your imagination,” as though imagination were something unreal, unimportant, and childish. Parents thereby teach their children not to trust their primal apprehensions of life, to turn from and disrespect intuitive and imaginative faculties.

If a child cries out, “Mommy, there’s a man in my room,” Mommy needs to listen. A father or mother can usually tell by a few minutes of quiet talking with a child whether the imagination has been kindled by TV, a book, stories between playmates, or whether in actual fact something is going on in the child’s room. Samuel ran three times in the night to Eli before Eli realized something real was happening. Then he carefully and rationally instructed Samuel how to answer (1 Sam. 3:1–9). Eli neither scoffed nor spoke so crossly as to cause fear in Samuel to prevent the Lord’s approach.

Parents ought neither to give license to wild flights of imagination or to call out roughly, “Go back to sleep, silly. It’s only your imagination!” Our children’s imaginations are a most precious commodity to shepherd, certainly not to be scoffed at. A child may sense or see something we adults are not aware of because we are too imprisoned in the flesh.

When our family moved to Wallace, Idaho, our children would not play in our upstairs back bedroom. They kept saying, “There’s a man up there.” Loren, sleeping there, would sometimes have nightmares and cry out at

night. I would run up to pray for him, and Loren would say that someone was choking him and he couldn't breathe. Finally, Paula and I decided there could be something beyond mere imagination at work. When we went into prayer, the Lord showed us a picture of a large, heavy-set man with a mustache and bald head whom we knew by the gift of the Spirit to be a cruel man who had used that bedroom. We prayed, "seeing" the angels of God carrying a spirit that looked very much like him away.

The next morning we asked some of our parishioners and discovered that the parsonage had in fact been occupied at one time by just such a cruel man who looked very much as we described him and who had died in that room. Apparently this man had been quite demonized, and when he died, he left a demon behind that impersonated him, perpetuating his cruelty. Our children's imaginations, informed by their more sensitive spirits, had been right all along. Loren never again had trouble sleeping there, and the children could play freely in that bedroom after that.

Perhaps it should be said that Paula and I did not act immediately after our first suspicious experiences with the evil presence in the room. We did not want to teach the children to honor wild imaginings. Rather, we talked about their experience with them and let them know that sometimes we sense something real, and sometimes things are only fantasy. We said, "Let's wait and see," and told them by our unhurried manner that even if something were there, it was not something to be greatly feared. Only after Loren was bothered a number of times in the night did we cast the demon out of our home, and then we did it quietly, apart from the children. We reported to them that we prayed about it, and that God had settled the matter so that they should have no further worry.

If a child calls out, "Daddy, there's a cat in my room," we should respect that child's perception. Maybe something *is* there, interpreted by the child's imagination as a cat. We do not have to know exactly what is there or not there, nor do we need to be afraid or convey fear to a child. We can simply talk matter-of-factly, honoring our child's imagination as real. "What's he doing, honey? Is it a good cat or a bad one? Does it make you afraid?"

"I don't want him here, Daddy."

"Well, then, we'll just tell him to go away. Now, in the name of Jesus Christ, you just go away and leave my Billy alone. He wants to sleep. Thank You, Jesus. You are here with Your angels to watch over Billy."

Our manner in such instances should be calm (no matter how excited or fearful we ourselves may feel). Children need to see that we are not upset or intimidated by whatever may or may not be real in the unseen. Someday, by practice, they will learn to discern for themselves what is real and what is only fantasy. We need by our deportment to allow a child's imagination to live, without giving it either overdue license or abuse or scoffing.

Not everything a child imagines has objective reality to it. Children often project their inner problems into fantasy dramas. Lonely children sometimes "people" their world with imaginary play children or creatures such as Winnie the Pooh. Sometimes these grow to have their own names and personalities. We need not fear such imaginative activity, and above all should not accuse the children of lying. It is usually quite healthy and often acts out at the conscious level ideals and noble aspirations that by such early practice may later become cemented in what the child will indeed become. How many eventual ministers and lawyers have in childhood saved countless thousands of infant Guineveres or Maid Marians?

Sometimes children punish dollies or tear up comic book faces to express unacceptable repressed angers at parents or teachers. Some parents overscold for that or worry too much about it. If continued, such activity may signal real inner trauma. Praise God for readable signals and available counselors and prayer ministers. But occasional fantasy anger is merely a blessed steam vent until the soul learns the release of prayer and cathartic sharing.

We do not have to know what is actually transpiring behind our children's fantasies. God did not call us to be psychoanalysts but parents. We need only talk *with* our children, and whether we truly understand or not, they will read our heart's desire to love and appreciate. Our stance and tone will tell them whether we treasure their imagination as a valuable asset. That support alone will help them to sort out what is real from what is illusory. On the other hand, if we regard fantasies as immature or somehow reprehensible, or if we are threatened by those moments when our child does confuse imagination with reality, that lack of trust and fear is what we convey no matter what we say, because we cannot trust our child to wade through to maturity. Normally, children given loving support will naturally grow out of the world of unreality. Children who are overly scolded and controlled may entrench, hide that "other reality," and so retreat into an unassailable private world.

HOLIDAYS

Christian parents often express concern about the Santa Claus and Easter Bunny myths. We advocate that if parents are believing, teaching, and living the life of Jesus in the family, the children can enjoy some of the fun of the myths surrounding Easter and Christmas without losing sight of the historical facts that lie behind the celebrations.

We never told our children that a rabbit could not lay eggs. From their own observations, they knew quite early that chickens are responsible for those and that bunnies can only beget bunnies. But once we had taught our children the exciting truth of Christ's death and resurrection, and explained to them as clearly as possible the abundant life made available to them by those events, we saw no harm in celebrating with Easter eggs. Eggs are obvious symbols of new life. New life comes in as many colors and designs as there are people on the earth. As God's children we are part of the creation of that color and design and also of the discovery of bright new life that we need to search for and be alert to find. In our family we experienced no distraction from the reality or reverence of Easter in the egg-coloring project that involved the whole family, or in the after-church hunt to find those eggs. We were careful to focus our attention first on the reason of the celebration so that it never became a thing in itself.

Christmas in our home has always centered around the historical birth of the Son of God and the joy of the fact of His living in us. Our little ones grew up in the delight of being a part of a birthday party for Jesus, all gifts being given in His name. We knew and taught that we could love and give only because He first loved us. Christmas morning in the Sandford household began with a rush of excitement to appreciate for a moment the wonder of all the array of gifts under the tree, then settled quickly into a quiet sharing of prayers of thanksgiving and partaking of family Communion. Then the packages were opened slowly, one at a time, each one appreciating, thanking, loving, and sharing with every other member of the family. Sentence prayers were offered around the Christmas dinner table. This was the substance of the celebration, the Spirit of Christ born anew in our family in the midst of giving and sharing. Family participation in the music and candlelight worship services at church brought into sharp focus the meaning and priorities of Christmas. And around the fringes danced the myths—Santa Claus and all his entourage introduced to our

children not in the attitude of awesome wonder the gospel stories created, but with a twinkle in the eye that in itself invites delightful fantasies to play with and gracefully leave behind with the passing of other childish things. To our children we said, “Because of the birth of Jesus we have Christmas. Because God gave Him to us, we give to each other in His honor. St. Nicholas was a Christian saint who gave himself to honor Jesus. St. Nicholas, on whom the Santa Claus myth is based, went about giving in that same spirit to bless little children.”

Hearing of Santa in this fashion, our children did not feel at all betrayed to find out that Mom and Dad were really Santa, and the jolly old elf representation was only fictitious. Our children were able to eventually let go of belief in Santa without having to wonder if what we taught them about Jesus was likewise mythical. They knew Jesus was real because we staked our very lives on Him; they saw that we did not do the same with Santa. They took delight in discovering the truth of the game we had been sharing and slipped easily one by one into the role of playing Santa for the younger children. One of the funniest and fondest memories we have is of our teenage son Loren running around outside our home in the dark ringing sleigh bells and shouting “Ho, ho, ho!” for the sake of the little brothers and sisters whom he loved. Now they do the same for our grandchildren.

THE VALUE OF IMAGINATION

Maturity results from practice in handling imagination. In nature, all babies of all species play, imagining battles to fight and tussling and wrestling with one another. Parents who treat imagination as something to be scoffed at and grown out of quickly destroy creativity and spontaneity, inhibit intuitive and sensible faculties, and disparage initiative and social graces.

Not only is imagination far from being valueless, but it is also far from being impotent. Its misuse was the very reason God destroyed mankind in the Flood. “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent [other versions say “imagination”] of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). St. Paul listed as a most important task of Christians, that of “casting down imaginations” (2 Cor. 10:5, KJV). On the other hand, every good invention springs from the soil of creativity through imagination. Every creative idea finds its wings in

imagination. Imagination is listed as one of the five “wits” deemed precious by the ancients and from which we still use the idiom “keeping his wits about him.” Imagination is one of the most valuable gifts God has given to mankind. The higher the gift, the more mankind can pervert it; therefore, the importance that Christian parents learn to shepherd their children’s imaginations more than any other faculty.

One Saturday morning while Andrea, then two, was still asleep, a man came whose wife had been receiving prayer ministry from us. Filled with hate and anger, he sat on the end of the couch and vilified us for two hours. We had been trying to turn his wife’s heart to accept him again, yet he was so confused that he was threatening to sue us for alienation of her affections! He left before Andrea awakened.

When she awoke and as I carried her downstairs, she pointed at the couch where he had been sitting, eyes widening with fright, and cried out, “That bad! That bad!” And she clung to my neck like someone drowning. That night something jumped on her in her sleep just as Loren came home. He heard, woke us up, and together we cast it off of Andrea and exorcised the house. Andrea could see it and we couldn’t. Had we scoffed or scolded, Andrea’s trust in her own perceptions could have been greatly wounded. We handled it matter-of-factly, even in casting that man’s demon away from her, so as not to convey to her that unseen, harmful things are any more out of the ordinary or any less acceptable as reality than unseen love or hope. More than that, she knew by the experience that her parents would defend her and not put her imagination down by ridicule.

One day a lady came to my office, claiming she was inhabited by a demon. I didn’t believe she actually was, but because she believed it, I prayed the words of exorcism. Had I really believed her, I would have prayed to cleanse my office afterward. That night Ron, our son-in-law, and Jason, our grandson, were playing in the living room. Jason, then two, made a game of trotting down the hall toward my office and running back to jump on his daddy. One time when passing the office, he suddenly stopped in fright and came streaking back crying and screaming, “That bad! That bad!” Ron looked up, and by the gift of the Spirit, saw something evil standing in the door of my office. He exorcised the office, prayed for cleansing, and comforted Jason.

How did Jason’s imagination portray that demonic thing to him? Or did he, in fact, without imagination, see what was there? Whichever, he could

“see” naturally what the Holy Spirit had to open Ron’s eyes to see. Had Ron ridiculed him, Jason would have been thrown into confusion between his own honest perceptions and what the adult world would have said was real. Again, Ron simply handled it as a fact of life to be dealt with, which also said by inference to Jason that his reactions were normal and acceptable. Moreover, this said to Jason that such things are not fearful to the adult world, or something adults are upset about, and that his father could be trusted with Jason’s emotions.

Countless parents could tell many stories of children’s awareness. Our materialistic culture has taught mankind not to value what cannot be verified in a test tube or fit within the nice, neat boxes of what we have learned to accept as reality. What a shame and loss that is. When Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Matt. 19:14), to what did “to such” refer? We take it to mean “of the natures of children,” who possess blessed trust of parents and vivid imaginations. When He said, “Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3), to what childlike qualities was He referring? A child’s trust, love, imagination, and simple, unadulterated belief in God. Parents need to treasure all such qualities in their children.

Encouraging parents to treasure their children’s imaginations does not mean they should endorse their children’s imaginations *carte blanche*. Shepherding means to help them put on a bit and bridle, lest they run amok, while not undervaluing nor disparaging their imaginations.

PROTECTING AND SHEPHERDING CHILDREN IN THE FACE OF DEMONIC ACTIVITY

The church has been tardy in growing into a mature understanding of demons and other mystical realities. Therefore, many parents have far too little understanding concerning the stories we have shared here. We are writing both to novices in the faith and to the experienced. We do not feel we should fail to share for fear that the immature might be frightened about these things. However, we cannot teach here fully concerning demons and exorcism. (See our book *A Comprehensive Guide to Deliverance and Inner*

Healing.) Suffice it to say that no Christian needs to fear the demonic world. Jesus Christ has once and for all defeated and stripped the powers of darkness (Col. 2:15). He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). The least Christian can defeat any demonic power simply by the word of faith—as we have sung so often in Martin Luther’s mighty hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”: “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, / We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us: / The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him; / His rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure, / One little word shall fell him.”²

Since the field is so little understood, such things as newspaper stories of foolish attempts at exorcism and the movie *The Exorcist* have burlesqued exorcism into something weird and frightening. Many not only have no knowledge, but also they don’t want to know! Since children are more and more exposed every day to occult movies and TV series as well as occult games at parties, parents can no longer claim to be responsible if they remain ignorant of demons and how to protect their children.

Exorcism is done by simple faith and the word of command in Jesus’s name. The demons all know that Jesus is Lord (Acts 19:15; Phil. 2:10). An exorcism does not have to be dramatic and emotional. It can be done quietly and rationally in an atmosphere of dignity and reverence. If a parent feels illequipped and ill at ease, there are enough in the body of Christ who have the faith and knowledge required. In our case, being known as prayer ministers, we are quite often called upon to exorcise. Consequently, we have had to learn how to protect our children and our home. That is our subject here, not how to exorcise, but how to shepherd our children’s imaginations.

When we cast away demons from Loren and Andrea and from my office in Jason’s presence, the primary teaching of the children came through our own quiet, matter-of-fact faith.

Children’s spirits, more than ours, already sense the reality of evil around them. How we handle that reality becomes the model for their lives. In each case of exorcism, Paula and I and Ron remained calm, detached, and objective. There was never an aura of fear about us. The children saw that a Christian handles such things as easily as a man swats a fly, because he battles an already defeated enemy.

We minister to the children's hurts and fears equally as calmly and easily. We hold them and love them and quietly tell them that, yes, there are bad old spirits that do want to hurt us, but they can't do it because Jesus is our King, and He protects us so that we don't ever need to be afraid. Since we rest in the perfect love of Jesus that casts out fear (1 John 4:18), they learn to take occasional scrapes with demons as matter-of-factly as a bruised shin or a bumped toe in the dark. Today, Loren is a minister who does exorcisms whenever the occasion arises. Ami has been one of our prayer ministers at Elijah House, unafraid to greet wild-eyed people calmly and easily when they come for counsel. Mark, one of our prayer ministers, is filled with the Spirit and unafraid of the demonic. Our other children laugh and joke about some of the battles they have seen and heard.

Children who have learned to use their imaginations vividly and from practice distinguish what is good or bad, real and unreal, will have the stuff in them to become great prayer warriors for the Lord. It has been our experience that adults who say they never see visions in prayer have most often been raised by parents who prided themselves in being "down to earth," "realistic," "pragmatic," or "factual." There is nothing wrong with any or all of these if such parents also let spontaneity, imagination, and intuition live. But these parents thought it was their duty to scold their children if they fantasized about an imaginary partner or cried out in the night. They crippled their children's prayer life. But how wonderful that the Holy Spirit restores to His own the creative power of their imaginations.

An engineer with many years' experience in many offices shared with us that he had observed that in every office there are two kinds of engineers, what he terms "the drones" versus "the live ones." Drones, he explained, never have a creative idea of their own. They copy and expand what others dream. He observed that the creative ones are usually prayerful Christians who have kept a childlike quality of openness and imagination. What kind of parents could one suppose each had?

CULTIVATING IMAGINATION THROUGH READING

Paula and I both devoured children's books. My parents provided wondrous sets of graded reading materials—*Journeys Through Bookland*, *The New Wonder World*, *My Book House*, and all the children's classics—*Black*

Beauty, Little Men, Little Women, Moby Dick, King Arthur, Robin Hood, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and so on. Created to be a prophet, inquisitively imaginative, intuitive and full of fantasy and daydreams, I consumed all such books like a “bookaholic” on a binge. From there I proceeded even in childhood to search out *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, Greek and other ancient mythologies, and Indian and other folklore and legends, and loved every minute of it. I read *Robin Hood* thirty-one times and *King Arthur* thirteen. All this was good preparation to be a servant of the Lord.

Many zealous Christian parents tend to overcensor their children’s reading. Let us see if we can establish two principles: First, because Christ is as much human as He is divine, He would have us become as soundly earthy and physical as we are spiritual. Therefore, we did not confine our children’s reading materials to “spiritual” writings. Our advice to all parents is to let children enjoy the full range of good wholesome earth. Earthiness is not coterminous with worldliness. Jesus enjoyed the good earth. Earthiness is good. In J.R.R. Tolkien’s trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, the Hobbits, a folk smaller than dwarfs, turn out to be more resilient and tougher in moral fiber than heroic men, and more able to rejoice in trial than all others. Tolkien describes them as affectionate, lovers of good living, eating, partying, and sharing gifts and stories at the slightest excuse. He makes it plain that their strength of spirit came from their good life in the earth. We see that truth again and again in prayer ministry. We would write it as a maxim: only the fully, warmly human and earthy can be safely spiritual!

FULLY SPIRITUAL, FULLY EARTHY

Being quite involved with spiritual life, Paula and I carefully avoided enlisting our children in too many spiritual things too soon. We gave them normal exposure to church and Bible and prayer and then saw to it that they were free to experience the full range of life’s good human experiences—sports, picnics, camping, play, work, swimming, movies, TV, and so on. Though we avoided rank sex in movies, we purposefully took them to see some violence (in movies where the message was otherwise uplifting) so that while they were in the home we could talk together about all of life so that they would not be oversheltered and, therefore, overcome when they

left the nest. Imagination runs amok when the mind is prevented from knowing what is. (We realize that since then, movies have become far more violent. Today, we advise a greater degree of caution and discernment.) We wanted our children to see life in all its richness—appropriate to their age levels.

The principle is that children need to be freely, solidly earthy. Squelching life by too much censoring shuts down the vitally important intuitive and imaginative faculties. Then imagination, prevented from portraying life as it is and not having sufficient matter to work with, concocts what is only illusion and false fantasizing.

In incarnating His own Son, God did not find a grown man and invest him with Jesus's spirit. This is adoptionist heresy. He sent Jesus through a womb and childhood. We see the wisdom of God in Jesus's training in the warm earthy smells, sights, sounds, ideas, and touches of a carpenter shop. That was ideal grounding in solid human earthiness for the most spiritual of all men on earth. It can be historically documented that most of America's great leaders and inventors have come from farms and small towns in which rich, earthy experience fueled the imagination and built moral character.

The second principle was stated by Jesus in relation to the ritual washing of food, but it can be applied to all of life. "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man" (Matt. 15:11).

Christian parents have been incensed by much of what has been made available to our children on TV. Statistical studies clearly reveal a close connection between violence seen and violence done. But many parents have overreacted in fear and rigid censorship. This begs a counterbalancing word: children who have been raised in an aura of affection and laughter, acceptance and freedom to enjoy the good earth, naturally throw off whatever evil is seen in drama. If the love of God has been expressed consistently as nurture to growing children and the Word of God has been planted in their minds and hearts, they will have the necessary discernment from within to recognize evil and the strength to choose to reject it.

Children who are raised in uptight, fearful, unaffectionate homes have repressed anger and resentment. For them, violent drama may trigger animosities and fuel the imagination to act out evil. But every Christian parent should hear—drama does not put evil in; it only gives opportunity for what is there to find recourse to action. We put evil in our children's

hearts when we fail to express love and when we behave in selfish, hurtful ways.

If a child is full of deep inner wounding and resentment, that storehouse of violence will inevitably be activated by exposure to the drama of life as evil exists in the adult world he grows into. For such a child, censoring of his reading and TV viewing will only postpone the explosion. The one cure is in the healing that will come by bringing him into relationship with Jesus and into freeing experiences of love, blessing, repentance, and forgiveness in the family.

Pornography stirs more than imagination. It quickens sexual appetite in inappropriate and unholy ways, hooks into unregenerate flesh, stirs passion for passion's sake, and sickens the spirit. Parents should not expose children to that at all. But where Christian nurture has been given, exposure to drama, occasionally even of violence, informs and thus prepares us to handle life by seeing it. "For wisdom is protection just as money is protection. But the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the lives of its possessors" (Eccles. 7:12). Evil portrayed can have a cathartic effect, so that drama, employing imagination, works like a steam valve to objectify and release the hidden tensions of anger and resentment we all have. In such cases, drama (which in the Western Christian world was reborn in the late Gothic and Renaissance periods within the church as a teaching and cathartic instrument) acts as a therapeutic agent—indeed as an answer to prayer in many cases. Much healing happens through even poor or bad drama. For this reason, drama is used in psychotherapy and in many Christian experiences, such as summer church camps and Sunday school.

Being loyal, children normally repress any anger they feel toward us. Such evil needs to be seen and handled. That's why children laugh so uproariously at slapstick comedy in which stuffy, stodgy authority figures get pie in their face. They feel a need to see that kind of authority humbled. In laughter they release tensions that could otherwise fuel resentments that could lead to excesses of rebellion. Christians need never fear that normal or even violent drama will hurt or greatly influence their children if not taken in excessive doses. Rather than copping out by blaming movies and TV for influencing our children to violence, we should resolve to put consistent nurturing care and teaching into our children to develop in them a deep rooting in the love of God, a solid grounding in the laws of God, and sharp discernment of mind and heart to make wise choices. Too often we

have seen “model” children leave a sheltered nest to crash on the rocks they didn’t know were there. The strict discipline and protection of parents had artificially imposed structure and conscience upon them. Because it did not provide exposure to all of life and build into the child by open discussion his own base of judgment, life on the outside became curiously attractive in its newness and strangeness. Vulnerability invited disaster.

We are not advocating the resigning of campaigns to clean the polluted stream of TV programming. We are heartily in favor of doing away with the garbage. John founded Citizens for Decent Literature in Streator, Illinois. But in that experience we discovered that such efforts only scratch the surface. What we are proposing is that parents first of all face problems at the root level.

We surrounded our children with love and affection, prayer and laughter, while allowing them to watch *some* of most anything on TV. Now Tim will say to me if I sit down to watch something too violent, “Aw, Dad, what do you want to watch that thing for?” How can children develop their own judgment unless it’s through practice? Had we insisted the children not watch, like the Catholic Church did some years ago, we could have created best sellers by banning them.

Fear is the enemy of life. Fear is a false damper upon healthy imaginations. Christian parents need to read to their children such stories as *Hansel and Gretel* (that have mean witches), *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (with villains galore), and *Huckleberry Finn* (with the wicked Indian in the cave). C. S. Lewis’s Narnia series is a tremendous classic for children—full of witches and goblins and all manner of evils. Most especially, children need the Old Testament with all its violence and heroes and villains. Children’s spirits know there is evil in the world. Such stories portray, through the imagination, realities children know are there and give them practice dealing with all of life’s wild emotions within the safe environment of the home.

A few of us can remember a time before TV. How vividly our imaginations portrayed popular radio shows such as *Gangbusters*, *I Love a Mystery*, *Inner Sanctum* (“The shadow knows...”), and so on—including Fibber McGee’s closet. Therefore, we suggest that children be encouraged to read, lest TV rob them of their own richness of imaginative portrayal. Paula and I used to lie on the floor with Loren and Ami and make up stories to go with symphonies on the stereo. It was great fun, and it quickened our

imaginations. For beginners, it is easy to do this with Ferde Grofé's "Grand Canyon Suite."

When children come home from school, thrusting some barely decipherable splash of colors at us, saying, "That's you, Mommy," or "Look at Daddy's funny tummy," we should not belittle their work. Children often unconsciously draw what their real feelings are. Frowns, smiles, hairstyles, posture, and thick and thin figures can tell us a lot. Many mental institutions, especially for the young, are now hiring artists and teaching counselors to read what the drawing of patients reveal. We should never criticize a drawing or coloring or finger painting. Artistic ability is not what is important. What it expresses is. Appreciate. Ask questions. Imagination is the window of the soul. Through it we can come to more understanding of our children than most any other way.

Remember that this book is addressed to the restoring of *Christian* families. Families outside of God's church often tragically have given their children neither love nor training in the Word, so that their children's exposure to TV and movies is to them all too often a portrayal of what life *should* be! Drama has become a primary formation of their picture of life. For them, TV and movies are often horrible teaching instruments, needing to be cleansed. But for Christian families, we are overcomers, not conditioned by what comes into the home, but using it to mature our children. We are *in* the world, but not *of* it, and we do not need to be afraid of it.

Let's take another look at our children, parents. Their spirits are more alive than ours.

PART III



DEATH UNDER THE LAW, BUT LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence.

—MATTHEW 23:25

EVERY DAY OUR HEARTS ARE WRENCHED BECAUSE CHRISTIANS have not understood God’s daily work of grace to sanctify the heart. It troubles us to see countless families falter where a proper understanding of sanctification, or simply of themselves, could have saved them. We see men and women driven blindly by hidden sins of rebellion, hate, and fear that long ago ought to have been brought to death on the cross. Therefore, we insist that to cleanse the inside of the cup is to save the marriage. The church must cease to flee from comprehending the depths of sin *in the heart* and the depths of the need for God’s grace, or today’s pressures will succeed in destroying family life.

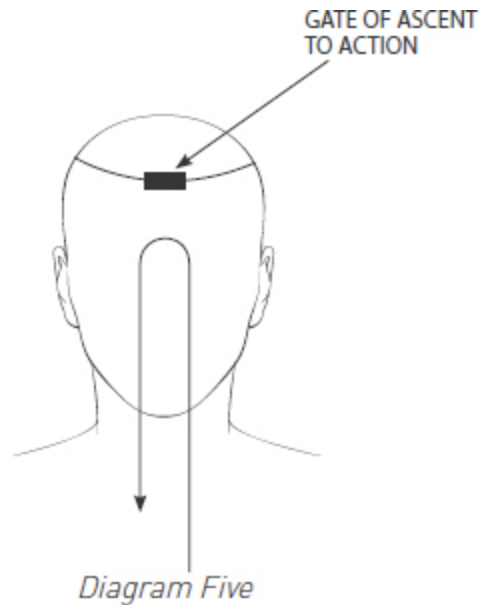
What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “You shall not covet.” But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind; for apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good, that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. For we know that the Law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the

very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that it is good. So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which indwells me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

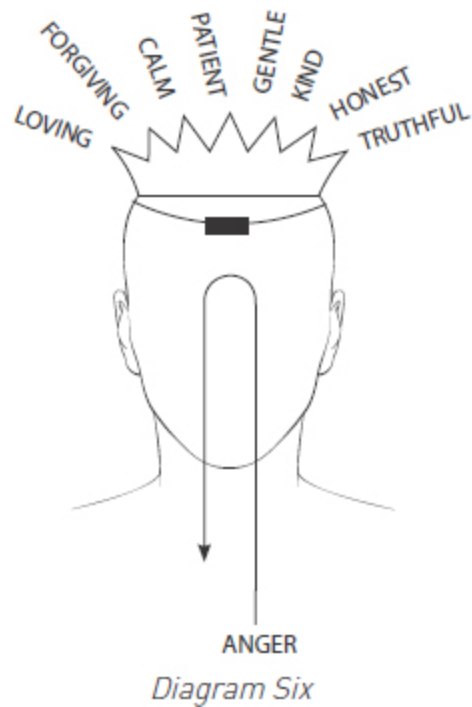
—ROMANS 7:7–20

This passage has mystified Christians for more than nineteen hundred years. How could trying to live by God’s good laws bring death? How could law “deceive me and by it kill me?”

When an impulse arises from within—a thought, idea, emotion, or whatever—we have a moment to decide whether or not to act. If we decide to act, we open the gate and let the conscious mind decide how and where. If we determine not to, we sit on that plug and push that impulse down. But unless we deal with the roots that compel us, the plug will eventually pop off like a cork from a pressurized bottle.



In diagram six we have added the crown of Christian character we are all trying to wear as new Christians.



It would seem good to try to be all those things that the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) lay out for us to be. In fact, God commands it. But let us see what happens when we try:

Papa discovers that the children have strewn his Sunday morning paper all over the house—again! What rises inside him? Anger and resentment. But he has determined to be loving and kind and calm. Therefore he pushes angry feelings down. Besides, it’s Sunday. Mama calls everyone to breakfast, and no one comes—again! The colder the eggs, the hotter the mama; but she has purposed to be loving, forgiving, calm, and kind, so she stuffs the anger back down. Papa goes to wash his hands and finds mama’s lingerie soaking in the sink again, after he asked her not to leave it there. What rises? Resentment, which triggers into many other stored-up little vexations. But he has set himself to be loving, forgiving, gentle, and kind, so he represses those angry impulses. He will not let himself act on them. The children leave muddy handprints on the towels, again! But mama has agreed to be loving and forgiving and calm.

The price of control is fearsome. The unconscious mind never forgets anything. Normal families multiply irritations little and large by the hundreds in a week, by thousands in a month. Thus, healthy normal

members of families become steam boilers ready to explode! We will explain later about the efficacy of prayer; for now we speak of those who intend to live as Christians but do not know the necessity of constant prayer. Whatever is not settled in us roils around inside us gathering momentum, so without frequent trips to the cross, we become explosions looking for somewhere to happen! (See diagram seven below.) Therefore, the law of sin runs rampant in Christian families.

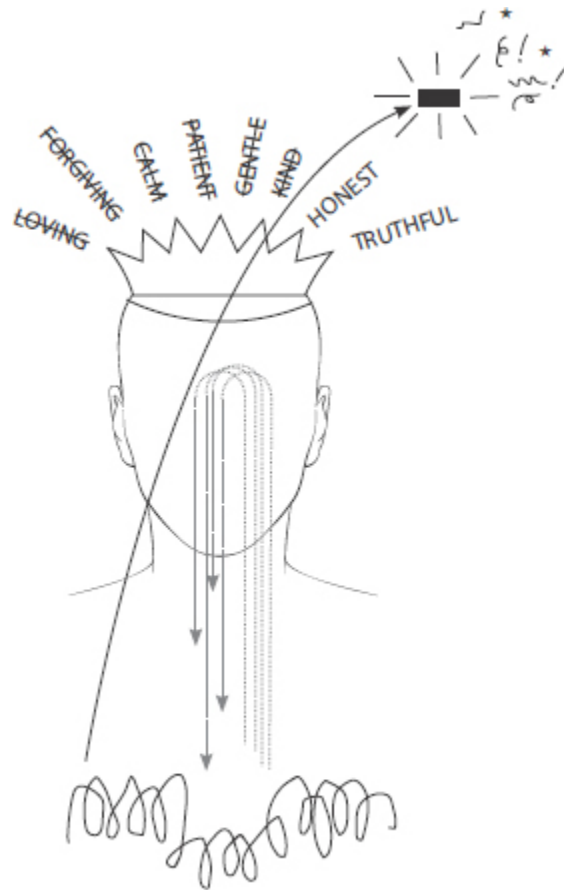


Diagram Seven

Finally, we can no longer hold ourselves in check. Someone does some silly little thing, which we could normally throw off easily, and we explode. We “flip our lid,” “blow our cork,” “get it off our chest.” Now we are mortified. We have failed to do what we set out to do and have disgraced our Lord. Forgiveness, kindness, gentleness, and all those good things have flown out the window. So we set ourselves even more determinedly! That probably will only mean that we will store up more violence before we

explode again. And so it goes. Apart from the cross, this dynamic is inescapable.

Whoever understands this dynamic of suppression and expression may comprehend the startling truth that the most dangerous thing Christians have ever done is to teach the church and the general public the *laws* of the Bible without imparting how to live *in Him*. Whoever, apart from the cross, tries to live the Ten Commandments, let alone the much tougher Sermon on the Mount, is doomed to failure in ratio to his determination to try. Whoever says, as we have all heard so often, “Well, I figure if I just keep the Ten Commandments...” has never really tried, or he would have discovered that he can’t. The hurrier we go, the behinder we get! Violence builds in direct proportion to the vigor of our effort to be good. This is one major reason why so many suddenly pick up shotguns and blast the family and themselves!

As prayer ministers, again and again Paula and I see Christian families striving with all their strength to express the fruits of the Holy Spirit, only to become more upset, angry, and violent than families that do not appear to try at all. What has happened is that each day, as they set themselves to be kind for Jesus, many irritations cause resentments to begin to rise. Each instance required an inner decision, either to act out the resentment or to do something with it. Not knowing how to relinquish irritations moment by moment to the cross in prayer and in confession to one another, they had no recourse but to suppress that emotion. The more such repressions piled on top of one another, the more difficult it became to maintain control, until finally some insignificant remark tapped a gusher and violence erupted.

All along there may have been little healings, touches of love in worship services, and acts of forgiveness, but they weren’t enough to quell the rising storm. Unfortunately, many Christian families, ignorant of this dynamic of suppression and explosion, unaware of what is storing up inside themselves, and too negligent in confession and prayer, have thereby been less able to act like Jesus than some families outside the faith. The simple difference is the matter of *striving* to live the law. How helpful and relaxing it has been to Paula and me to learn that it was never our responsibility to accomplish the law. Once we accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, we became His responsibility. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to express Jesus’s life in ours. It is our work to cooperate in positive response to the Holy Spirit.

We have also ministered to countless families who make no claim to be Christian at all, in whom the same dynamic of striving, suppression, and explosion was just as vitiating. To live by law is such a universal thing in the human heart that every group has its laws, whether spelled out or not.

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Call girls used to ride in my cab in Chicago, complaining bitterly to me about the girls who did not live up to the code of ethics they thought call girls ought to have. Workmen on the job have their codes of conduct. The Mafia has inviolable laws. Every social club develops its own traditions and holds its members to them. We cannot escape from law by turning from the Lord. Law is everywhere around us. Whenever we strive to live up to the law, no matter what the context, choices require suppression of emotions and desires. And suppression demands expression.

The remarkable difference is that when the strength of the Lord enters us by association with Him, we have more power to try harder. Thus, if we do not have commensurate devotion and forgiveness, we march to explosion faster than non-Christians.

God has designed the Law precisely to show us our inability to keep it. He knew in commanding that no one could live it. His plan was that whoever would try should discover his need for the Savior. “No flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20). It is as though Adam and Eve had said, “We will not let You raise us. We will raise ourselves.”

And in reply God said, “OK, try it. Here are some rules to live by.” God knew that the sooner and the harder we try, the quicker and more painfully we will discover we can’t accomplish what we know we should. St. Paul, therefore, wrote that through the law, sin deceives us and kills us (Rom. 7:11).

On the face of it and by logic alone, to live the law of God is impossible! As we see in diagram eight, if we suppress anger and give a loving and forgiving answer, we have failed to be honest and truthful. But if we act out what we truly feel, we surely will fail to be kind, loving, and forgiving! By purity of logic alone, disregarding human frailty, the contradiction is

inescapable. In his own strength, no one can be honest and truthful and still be gentle and forgiving.

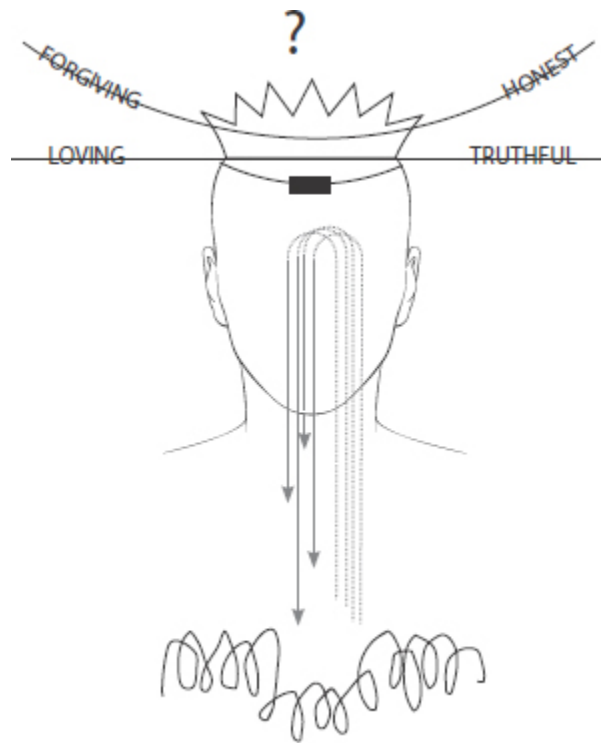


Diagram Eight

That simple equation demands another quotient, else it is unsolvable. That quotient is, of course, the cross. The essence of Adam and Eve’s sin, and therefore ours, was to try to be gods without the help of God’s Holy Spirit. Therefore, the essence of the plan of God for our salvation is to write on our hearts again and again our desperate need for both the Savior and His Spirit. The Law was given to bring us again and again to that point. The contradiction between kindness and truthfulness, and our consequent bellyful of hurt, is why St. Paul writes in Romans 7, “For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate.... For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.... But if I am doing the very thing I do not wish, I am no longer the one doing it, *but sin which dwells in me...* but I see a *different law* in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind, and making me a *prisoner of the law of sin* which is in my members” (vv.

15, 18, 20, 23, emphasis added). Put in psychological terms, that law of sin can be called the law of repression and expression operating in and through the power of our flesh.

We should understand that that dynamic of repression operates in all of us all the time, no matter what our stance relative to the Lord. In or out of Christ, that dynamic of repression will operate—until, unless, and to the degree of our ability to release it to the Lord in constant prayer. Not only will Christians who do not pray suffer the same dynamic as those in the world, but also that dynamic will be increased to the degree to which they struggle to be righteous without prayer. For this reason Amos said, “‘But they do not know how to do what is right,’ declares the LORD, ‘these who hoard up violence and devastation in their citadels’” (Amos 3:10). It is not merely exterior, ill-gotten wealth that we store up. As Micah says, “For the rich men of the city are *full* of violence, her residents speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth” (Mic. 6:12, emphasis added). Because none can escape the law of sin in our flesh, there is no one who is true (Ps. 14:1–3; Rom. 3:10–12). We are all liars, because we do not do what we say and live what we try to live. Behind our face is stored a thousand and one remembrances of anger. This is why a gentle man, under the influence of alcohol, becomes a bear. No one can love purely. No one can be truly kind and gentle. Whoever acts it out lives a lie above a volcano. No wonder Jesus said, “Apart from Me you can do *nothing*” (John 15:5, emphasis added).

This dynamic is one of the major reasons for the paradox that in the very time of the latter rain, when God is pouring out His Holy Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28–29), family tensions and divorces are drastically increasing, even among Christians. So long as we do not admit enough of the power of love in the Holy Spirit into us, we are not much impelled to try to live Jesus’s way. But as St. Paul said, “Apart from the Law sin is dead. And I was once alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died” (Rom. 7:8–9). As the Holy Spirit increases hunger in us to live for Jesus, the moment we try harder, sin revives in us by the dynamic of repression and we enter into death.

JESUS IS THE ANSWER

The answer is not to quit trying, nor as some psychologists would have us do, to lessen the law or do away with it. The answer is Jesus. As we see by diagram nine, we need such a constant walk of prayer that the moment of provocation is the instant of silent prayer. Each provocation to hurt and anger should find instant repair in the cross. “Jesus, I’m hurt. I’m angry. I’d like to belt him. Please accomplish forgiveness through me.” That way we have been emotionally honest. Hurt is not repressed. The heart is immediately refreshed, and we are then enabled either to rebuke kindly (Luke 17:3; Gal. 6:1) or to say nothing (Rom. 12:17–18; 1 Pet. 3:9). It is then solely Christ’s love for the other that prompts. It then becomes the Lord’s life that pours through us, not our own.

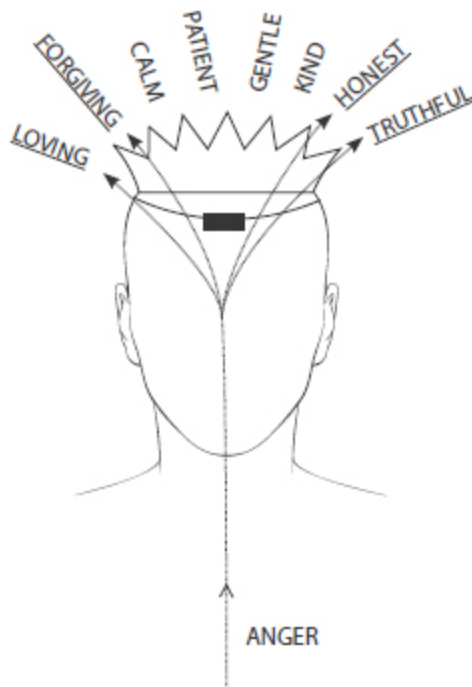


Diagram Nine

Our families are being torn apart in ratio to their distance from our Lord in prayer. When will we learn that the command to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17) is *necessary* to life, not a nice option?

Prayer, however, is not the full answer to the dilemma of Romans 7. The cross and our full self-death there is the answer. When we begin to try to live God’s way, at first our desire may be for His glory, but what happens is that that attempt to be Christlike becomes a thing in itself. As portrayed in

diagram ten on the next page, our attempt itself becomes an idol, the thing we actually live for rather than God.

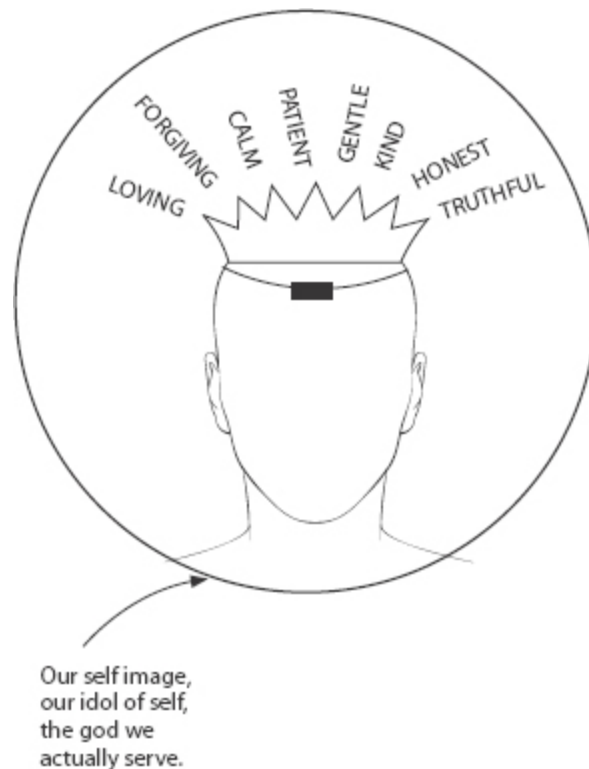


Diagram Ten

Fear of failure fuels our devotional fires at the altar of self. We want to make some people see and congratulate us that we *are* doing “it” right. If someone rebukes, criticizes, or gossips, we can’t take it because our god has been attacked. “How dare they—?” “And after all I’ve done for them—” “No one has tried harder than—” “How could he ever think such a thing of me?” “That just isn’t my way; I don’t act like that.” We are trying to live something we aren’t, so we become like the Pharisee who exclaims that he fasts and pays his tithes, unlike the publican (Luke 18:12), and we do not go *home* justified.

Because the problem of evil in us is far deeper than our surface behavior, the answer of grace is far more profound than simple prayer. The entire attempt to live Christ’s way is what we must surrender daily to death when we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. It is no longer solely our task to make

us be loving, kind, and gentle. That is the job we gave to the Holy Spirit. We are His burden, His project.

The way up is the way down. The sooner we see that we have no righteousness at all (Ps. 14:1–3; Rom. 3:10–12; 1 Cor. 1:26–31) and lay the entire idol of self on the altar, the sooner our fleshly striving can die. Then indeed “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom. 8:2). The delusion many have bought is that with God’s help we can do it. We never could. When the truth of Romans 7 has found its way into our hearts, we know that “nothing good dwells in me” (Rom. 7:18). Then and only then do we begin to be free to let the Holy Spirit, rather than our striving, express Christ’s nature in us. And what a blessed rest and freedom that is!

The deadliest thing extant in the church is the religious spirit. It was religious leaders who crucified Jesus. Today in the church and in our families it is usually those who are striving the hardest in their flesh to be what Jesus wants who are driving others to distraction and rebellion, but, “There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered His rest has himself also *rested from his works*, as God did from His” (Heb. 4:9–10, emphasis added). We cease from our own works when we see how we have striven to be gods, however good we thought our motives, and daily claim Jesus’s death as our own. As St. Paul said, “I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:31), so must we. For the flesh resurrects easily and soon plunges us into striving again, and the dynamic of repression and expression and explosion is on us again.

Jesus and His life are ours when we believe *in the heart* that He has us and call each practice of the unredeemed character to death on the cross as and when we see it.

Fullness of love and life is ours when we believe *in the heart* that Jesus does truly inhabit us through His Spirit, and we set out to give each hurt to Him in prayer and let His life cause us to express His forgiveness and love.

To die to self is not easy, for the flesh dies slowly. But it *can* happen once we see that our problem is never that other fellow out there but truly the log in our own eye (Matt. 7:4–5). Life in the Spirit *is easy*. That is the hallmark of the kingdom—no sweat. If we have to *try* to be loving, that is evidence that we are serving not God but the idol of our flesh. If kindness, love, and forgiveness flow from us easily and naturally, all credit goes swiftly and

easily to the Lord, for His life is in us. So the presence of striving is always our first clue to the dynamic of Romans 7 resurrecting itself.

Because Christian families have not understood this dynamic of the law or how the Holy Spirit would be the life of Christ in us, Christian families have often been more beleaguered and upset than families in the world. Men have asked us, “How come some non-Christian families seem to be happier and more relaxed than we are?” And Paula and I think ruefully, “Just wait till they start trying to live up to God’s standards.” The answer is not to give up trying but to surrender all our striving to death on Jesus’s cross, that His life may truly be ours—and to be filled with His Holy Spirit.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light.

—MATTHEW 11:28–30



NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S IMAGE

You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

—DEUTERONOMY 5:7–10

THERE IS NO SIN THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE IDOLATRY. IF WE steal, we have valued whatever we took more than God. If we commit adultery, we have elevated that woman or that man as more important to us than God. If we choose not to be in church on Sunday, we have made an idol of whatever we wanted more than obedience—pleasure, business, repairing the house, laziness, etc. If we do not tithe, mammon is our god, no matter what we say. We may protest with our lips that we love God, that we are born anew, that we have all manner of wondrous experiences with God, but if we have not put our money where our mouth is, all our belief and experiences testify only to God's grace, not our faith. Apart from works, faith lies dead (James 2:17). Proof is written unequivocally in the history of our giving. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

We are all inveterate idol makers. We do it by nature. For example, all we need is an anointed worship service, and the next time we get together we will try to copy what we did last time. We are no longer seeking the Lord

Himself. We want that experience of power and the goose bumps. These things have for the moment become our god, the idol we worship.

We often idolize pastors and spiritual leaders. That is why we hate them so when they fall. They have shattered our god.

If we check the many hundreds of little unconscious, unnoticed ways we break God's laws, we will see that even if we have tried, attended church and prayer meetings, and paid our tithes, we are still habitual idol makers. How about when the wife is angry, so we don't tell her the whole truth "just to keep the peace"? Peace is now the idol we serve that justifies lying. God said through St. Paul, "Do not provoke your children to anger" (Eph. 6:4). When we keep pushing the children away because they interrupt the ball game on TV, we have worshiped TV more than God. When the boss not only fails to compliment but also criticizes, and we blow up, it's a sure tipoff that we serve the idol of self. And so it goes, through every aspect of life. Idolatry is the first and greatest sin, behind all we do.

IDOLATRY AND THE FAMILY

Idol making is directly related to the family, for the command not to bow down to idols or serve them (Deut. 5:9) is the only command of the Ten Commandments that includes a specific warning for families. Only two of the ten include remarks directly concerning the family. To honor the parents brings the blessing of long life and provides "that it may go well with you" (Deut. 5:16). But to worship idols visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children from generation to generation (v. 9). It is not that God wants to hurt anyone. He always wants to bless. But His laws are inexorable; we *must* reap what we sow. Unfortunately, the reaping comes also in our children's lives, as we have shown in chapter 13.

The longer we walk with Jesus by the Holy Spirit, the more our thousand and one idols will be revealed and, hopefully, left behind. But there is an idol making that is central to all our living, which besets us every day and destroys the family more than any other. That is none other than Nebuchadnezzar's image.

Then the herald loudly proclaimed: "To you the command is given, O peoples, nations and men of every language, that at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery, bagpipe, and all kinds of music, you are to fall down and

worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up. But whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire.”

—DANIEL 3:4–6

This passage never informs us, further than details of height and breadth, whose likeness the image of gold represented. Whether of Bel, Marduk, beast, or man, most likely it actually glorified Nebuchadnezzar. It was his image, his power, his glory, his idol of self. We are no different. Our idol is his idol less visible. In the previous chapter, we began to reveal the idol of self we serve.

The significant dimension added here is fury. How shall we know when unconscious idols have ensnared us? By our furies. Whatever we defend with rancor is an idol. Whenever our furnace becomes heated up “seven times more than it was usually heated” (Dan. 3:19), we can be sure beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is not God or anything noble we defend but our own idolized honor! When we get mad, it tells us where our hidden idols are.

Nowhere is this truer than in the close confines of the family. In public we may be able to mask our idolatries, but at home sooner or later we are known for what is hidden in our hearts. When our beloved enemies refuse to bow down to our god (our idea, our view of the way things should go, our opinion of ourselves, whatever), we sound our warnings—bagpipe, trigorn, and lyre (v. 15)—and blow up!

When an idol is not behind what we stand for, we don't *have* to defend it. Suppose it is to accomplish something in the church, such as to win the church members to our idea of the way the youth program should be run. We want more leeway for the teenagers to have fun, such as having dances, swim parties, and fun and games along with worship and Bible study. Some older, more fundamental folks can't see how those things should be allowed at all in a church program, much less in God's house. Right there, in such disagreements, is where the absence or presence of unconscious idols makes all the difference. If we are dead to self and alive to God in faith, we know that the Lord will work out in His own way what is good. And though we may have some anger and impatience, it does not overcome us. We can handle it easily and find ways to involve our opponents with us in the youth program, or talk with them until some peaceable way has been tried to the fullest. But if behind our service in the youth program lurks an unconscious

picture of ourselves as the big cheese for God, our anger and impatience overpower us. We strut and huff and puff, insensitive to others in meetings, until everyone's back is up against us. We have blown our bagpipes, trigorns, and lyres, and we think they ought to have been intimidated! "Don't they know this is God's work!" "Look how our youth attendance has increased; what would they do without me?" "How can those old fogies be so blind!" Our fury is a sure sign of our idols. "This you know, my beloved brethren. But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19–20). "He who sows iniquity [idol making in this case] will reap vanity, and the rod of his fury will perish" (Prov. 22:8).

On the other side of it, most likely the "old fogies" have some pretty stern idols too. Their image of church decorum is only an extension of their icon of their life with God, confused with God so that that young upstart's program threatens the way "things (namely God, us, what's the difference?) have always been done around here!" When no idol is present, we can die to self, share our wisdom, and be gracious if not heard, which is quite likely. But the presence of the idol calls forth our fury to defend.

The same dynamic happens in the family, only with more tenacity. Johnny's disobedience may threaten father's image of himself as a good father. Dad's idols may be hidden beneath noble aspirations to be the best father he can be for the Lord. Without idols, a father can be understanding and gracious, bending with the changing winds of teenage lives according to God's wisdom in love. His discipline may be kind and appropriate, but unconscious idols of fatherhood generate the fury of the flesh, and Johnny is sacrificed on the altar of that god. "No son of mine is going to act like that!" Notice, not, "That kind of behavior will be harmful for you," but, "No son of mine..."

Until husbands and wives become aware of their idols, much of their life together is a teeter-totter of dominance versus submission, tit for tat, taking turns at giving in and getting our way. Self-righteous anger is a dead giveaway to the presence of an idol. For instance, if the husband continually comes in from the garden with mud on his feet, a wife dead to self can easily forgive, and her scolding, having no rancor behind it, is actually a blessing to her husband. But if an idol of perfect housekeeping is being continually tarnished, or an idol of self arises that says, "I ought not to be treated like this!" anger rather than grace takes hold. Then, however she

may attempt to control her vocal tones, her husband will read the anger of her spirit and react accordingly. We cast our own into the midst of the fiery furnace whether or not we know we are doing it. Sometimes we may be totally unaware of our anger, but it is there nonetheless.

Our children's performances at school elicit responses from us. To the extent that our children have become extensions of our idols of success, we cannot abide less than the highest marks. Again, anger tells the difference, for where no idol is, compassion will rule our concern for the child, and what we do, however stumblingly, can be received as love. But idols of parenthood, or the idol of necessity to succeed vicariously through our children's talents, will often turn our admonishments to bitter demands and insults.

How do we handle Sammy's fears? With tenderness and firmness or with yells because our image of courage is dimmed? How about Debbie's ungainly walk and sloppy ways (especially in the dumpy time of early adolescence)? Do we feel fear watching her because our image of ourselves as parents of a graceful queen is being shot down? Or do we feel quiet understanding and appreciation of the "ugly duckling" before the graceful swan appears? Absence of threat usually indicates absence of an idol.

SELF: A CORE IDOL

It is selfishness that is at the core in nearly all disruptions in all families. Selfishness always has at its core idols of self that demand adoration. Pride is nothing less than the first offspring of idol worship. And fear is its first stepchild. We defend what we are proud of for fear it will either not be acknowledged or be destroyed. Part of our fear arises from the guilt of inwardly knowing that somehow we are wrong somewhere. But since the best defense is often the best offense, we heat up the furnace and attack!

The entire purpose of this short chapter is to give to every husband and wife, father and mother, one simple key—the blessings of our anger. Anger that rises so that we can recognize them, whether or not we successfully control them, reveal to us what idols need to be smashed on the cross.

Anger that rises as love in the Lord for the other always comes in the glove of compassion. Physically, we feel such anger as a burden in the chest and a flame of anointing love about the head. Anger that arises from the

flesh in defense of an idol physically pulses in the temples, sweats in the palms, knots the stomach, shortens the breath, and we may feel hot all over.

Eyes informed by God's loving anger hold deep pools of His suffering in the other for us. Eyes of fleshly anger look flat and hard behind the surface—and there's a hundred-mile-an-hour freight train steaming down the track at us!

If Christians could learn to recognize their idols by their angers, much suffering and division could be prevented by grace. God wants to help, but He has to be invited in.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted God. They did not respond to anger with anger. They simply prayed prayers of blessing. (See the Prayer of Azariah, or the Prayer of the Three Young Men, in the Apocrypha.) Right then and there is when and where Jesus appears with us in the midst of the fiery furnace in our daily life in the family.

If Paula has not heeded my bagpipes, trigorn, and lyre, and has failed to fall down and worship at my demand, then I have thrown her into my furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be. But if Paula simply silently prays, His grace comes into that fiery furnace—and I guarantee you I become a very startled Nebuchadnezzar! I have expected her to crank up her own fiery furnace. If she had, then I would be off the hook. I could even justify my selfish angers. But if she lets her idols of self die (the idol is, "I don't have to stand for this kind of treatment!") and humbly trusts in God and lets my fire flow all over her, His appearance with her there in my flames rebukes me thoroughly, and, like Nebuchadnezzar, I have to acknowledge that this God is truly God, not my image (my selfish desire). So I die and am born anew in another needful area. On the other hand, it may need to be mentioned that sometimes love requires that a spouse rebuke sharply and expose the other's idol to him. But a husband or wife can only rebuke in effective grace if his or her own idol of self is dead. Let each begin with his or her own idols, not the other's (Matt. 7:3–5).

Our counsel is therefore twofold. First, let us be quick to discover and repent of our own idols. Second, let us not be terrified of others' angers at us, but trust in God, letting Him cool those fiery furnaces by His appearance. He is faithful. He will always be there. Just so, we can turn all our spears into pruning hooks (Isa. 2:4)—for pruning hooks cut away living and dead limbs that prevent our bearing fruit.



RENUNCIATION OR CUTTING FREE

If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.
—LUKE 14:26

YESTERDAY'S GOOD IS TOMORROW'S EVIL. WE MATURE AND change, and yesterday's harness won't fit tomorrow's task. Our relationships in the family change because we change. When we change, and relationships don't, there is hell to pay.

When we received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, that was a major change, which demanded an equally radical change in our family relationships. Sometimes that means cutting free and becoming our own person. This is God's plan for every young person. Therefore, when a young adult ties himself to his parents and abdicates his own destiny, he is turning his back on God. Perhaps that is one reason why Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate..."

Hate, like *love*, is a word that has many moods. We say of an ice cream soda or a good book, "I just love it," and everyone knows that doesn't mean the same as a boy saying "I love you" to his father and mother. And that means something other than those identical words between lovers. Just so, hate means many things. Jesus uses the word here to mean renouncing or cutting free.

In the biblical setting, whenever a person entered into a new walk, it was understood that he must clearly leave the old, and sometimes must burn bridges behind him. Genesis 2:24 says, "For this cause a man shall leave his

father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.” If a man does not leave his father and mother, psychologically and emotionally, indeed in every way, he cannot be joined to his wife, and the two cannot move on into the process of becoming one. Much tragedy results because one or the other partner still thinks primary loyalty belongs to mother and father. Truly yesterday’s good becomes tomorrow’s evil in countless marriages.

When Elijah called Elisha, he found him plowing with his team of oxen (1 Kings 19:19). Elijah threw his mantle over him, and Elisha said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you” (v. 20). Elisha meant that he be allowed to serve his parents until they died. “To kiss my father and mother” was an idiom that referred to a burial custom, as when Joseph “fell on his father’s face, and wept over him and kissed him” (Gen. 50:1). For the moment, Elisha had forgotten or disobeyed the rule that the call to the Lord’s service supersedes all family duties. What Jesus said in Luke 14:26, “He cannot be My disciple,” is exactly what Elijah then said to Elisha, “Go back again” (1 Kings 19:20). Elijah was saying, in our vernacular, “Forget it; you aren’t willing to pay the price.” But Elijah remembered that God had told him to call Elisha, so he gave him another chance by reminding him, “For what have I done to you?” (v. 20). At last Elisha comprehended and did what he should have done in the first place. He “took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah and ministered to him” (v. 21).

Elisha knew he must leave his father and mother, and because he had demurred at the first, now he must show his good faith; therefore, it was not enough merely to leave home and farm. He slew the oxen, broke up his instruments, and invited all the family and friends to a feast. Now he could not retreat to the farm. Moreover, anyone who understands the cattle business would know that the meat of work oxen would be stringy and tough. It was not for the goodness of the meat that Elisha and the family participated in a feast. They were all joining in an agreement, sealing it with a covenant of salt with Elisha, that this was the way he was to go. In Bible times, people usually shared a meal when making a covenant. This could be done as a pledge to seal the terms of a contract regarding the sale of an important item, or it could be done as a pledge to uphold and defend the other’s honor from then on. Just as salt preserves food, by sharing Elisha’s

salt, his neighbors agreed to defend and honor his decision to leave his father and become a prophet. From then on, they could never speak against that decision. Elisha's bridges were now totally burned; he could not return.

When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, "They immediately left the nets, and followed Him" (Matt. 4:20). They knew the custom; the old must be left for the new. The call was to become "fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). James and John were in a ship, mending their nets with their father, when Jesus called them (Matt. 4:21), "And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (v. 22).

But when Jesus had already arisen, and that fact was known to all the disciples, Peter said, "'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will also come with you'" (John 21:3). No wonder they toiled all night and caught nothing. They weren't supposed to be there. Commercial fishing was what they had left behind, and they knew it. That was why Jesus said to Peter three times, "Do you love Me more than these?" Jesus had called him to be a fisher of men, and they had turned back to the old occupation.

When Jesus was in Capernaum, "His mother and brothers were standing outside.... And someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You'" (Matt. 12:46–47). We are not informed whether or not the man who said that intended to test and trap Jesus, but it is sure that the Pharisees and scribes were watching carefully. Had Jesus turned from God's ministry to see first to the comfort of His mother and brothers, they would rightly have cried, "See, He's no prophet at all. He turns back from following God to take care of His family, which He ought to have left." Jesus avoided the trap by saying, "'Who is My mother and who are My brothers?' And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, 'Behold, My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother'" (vv. 48–50). Jesus also had truly left home for the new call of God and would not return, and in the process, He outlined for us all what is our new calling—to be a family in Christ, which supersedes the old natural allegiances.

INTERPRETING WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO FOLLOW CHRIST

It is not that when receiving the Lord Jesus Christ we should become callous or uncaring or have no feelings or duty toward our families. Rather, it is that the old man has died, and therefore so have all the old ways of relating. Now, all the family and friends will have to be related to in new ways and relegated to new priorities.

When we are born into this earth, our fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, race, nationality, and culture become as a womb in which our character and personality are formed. All are shot through with sin. None of those who formed us, however good, are perfect. Like the nursery story of the crooked little old man who lived in a crooked little old house, we are all formed crookedly by a crooked people “in the midst of a perverse and crooked generation” (Phil. 2:15; see also Deut. 32:5)—until the Lord comes along and makes the crooked paths straight (Luke 3:5). “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity” (Ps. 51:5) refers to this same fact of our formation.

When we are born anew, that means being born out of and detached from that womb of the past, to become “the survivors of Israel” (Isa. 4:2). If we do not cut the umbilical cord, the old blood of the old life will contaminate the new. Changing the metaphor, if, having become new wineskins, we do not throw off the old, the old will cramp and sully the new. It sometimes seems to us that transformation ought to be automatic, that having died, our old ways should simply disappear, for we truly are new creatures in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Nothing could be truer in the life of our spirit, but all of our heart and mind must learn to claim that death and new life we already have in our spirit. Therefore, the death of old ways is not automatic. Our salvation has to be worked out or made manifest in heart and mind as well (Phil. 2:12). We must claim that death and newness in every relationship in all our life. That is what Jesus means in Luke 14:26. If we don’t cut free and claim the new, we cannot go on to be His disciples.

LETTING GO AND TRUSTING GOD

As we have said before, all human love is filled with use, manipulation, exploitation, and demand. However much we may exalt mother love, it is still imperfect and finds its stopping place at the cross. When my (John’s) mother used to come visit, I underwent subtle changes. My mother

habitually did things that put me under control. Sons learn to play whatever games keep the peace—or disrupt it in rebellion. So I would gravitate away from Paula and the children, ceasing to be husband and father in order to become son to my mother—and Paula would be furious! It was not a matter of jealousy over attention. It was that I was drawn into role playing that caused me to abdicate my primary position and appropriate relationships. Then we learned this lesson of Luke 14:26, to renounce all old relationships as new creatures in Christ. That did not mean to hate my mother in any fleshly, wrong way. It did not mean to dislike her or disapprove of her. It did not mean to revile her. It meant by faith to cut free, to say in prayer, “I renounce and cut free from my mother.”

What I was actually doing was saying to all the old practiced ways of the flesh by which I used to relate, “I now deny you.” I was rejecting the habits, instincts, loyalties, belongings, and ways of loving that had belonged to the boy. I was also rejecting the unregenerate ways that were now invading and preventing my new freedom of life in Christ. I was rejecting what still broadcast from my mother’s flesh (though she was a Christian) and what was still trying to act in my flesh. I was reckoning all that way of life as dead.

Jesus still calls us to love our mothers. Not only had I not ceased to love her, but I also now could love her without trying to change her and without having to play the old games. The next time Mom came to visit, she still acted in all the old ways, but I was not bound to respond in the old patterns. I didn’t have to try to remember not to react; what she said and did fell off my back like water off a duck. I truly *was* changed. The old ways that had manipulated my behavior found no lodging place at all, and Paula rejoiced that she still had her husband.

My mother didn’t understand at all! Since I didn’t play the old games anymore, she was sure that I didn’t love her. She went home in a huff. We must be willing to run that risk for Christ. Two years later Tommy Tyson and I spoke together at a conference in Kansas. My mother was there, and she heard Tommy teach on the subject of cutting free. Now she understood. “I planted, Apollos [Tommy in this case] watered, but God was causing the growth” (1 Cor. 3:6). Part of cutting free is to let go of all those ways of acting and reacting by which we think to ensure our control of life so that people will keep on loving us. We must be willing to let go, trusting God,

and “let the chips fall where they may.” My mother understood and returned to loving me—but in the new way of Christ.

Paula and I have now had more than fifty-seven years of an exceptionally good marriage. The candle of love has never gone out. We have labored together in the ministry for more than fifty-six years, but there was a time when we were not free. Our love carried huge waves of demand. I would come home thinking, “I’m going to give Paula and the kids a hug,” and the moment I stepped in the door I would feel a wave of demand for affection coming through the air. Now I found it hard to do it. My freedom to choose had been challenged. Likewise, Paula wanted to have a nice meal and a refreshing quiet time ready for me, but my demand, “Leave me alone. I need to rest,” preceded me, upsetting the whole household. We must be free from each other in order to choose each other.

God Himself refuses to demand from us, and He pays the price every moment of every day for us to be free to stumble around so that all our choosing to love Him arises out of free hearts freely choosing to love. He cuts us free from Him, else He could have no real companionship.

Husbands and wives most often are bound up, as we were, in basically idolatrous relationships, demanding consciously and/or unconsciously that the other fulfill for us what only God can. We want that comfort and strength that only the unseen God can give, and we wrongly identify its source in the seen spouse. The more vast the unregenerate love, the more immense the demand levels. No wonder that the more the pressures of life increase, the more impossible our marriage relationships have become.

Paula and I learned from Brother Winston Nunes to renounce each other. Again, that meant only to cut free from the demands of the flesh in ourselves and in each other, to hate continuing carnal influence whomever and wherever it came from. We said in effect, “I cut free from all your flesh and my own. I reckon as dead that old way of relating. I reject all the old idols of our love relationship and set you free to be you.”

The result was immediate and refreshing. For the first time we were free to fail each other. Neither of us any longer had to fill that mold in the other’s mind of the ideal spouse. Nor did we have to live up to our own. We were free to love, freely choosing each other in the sunshine of a new day.

Such a prayer to be cut free may need to be said afresh every once in a while. Some aspects of relationships may not die that easily. There may have to be some struggle to free ourselves of already broken chains. Seeing

the traps and discussing them may have to be a regular diet for evening hours for quite a while. But the end result is worth it, for freedom to choose each other results.

Perhaps mainly from fear, we have all tried to build false guarantees around us. We somehow think, consciously or unconsciously, that demands will insure the love we count on so desperately just as Mama might have done. So we put each other under guilt to coerce the other to move for us. And then we wonder why the other wants to be free of us when we “did everything, just everything for him.” Our love is a prison, a bundle of chains by which we unconsciously seek to control the other so he will be everything we think we want him to be. Only those willing to lose their lives will find them (Matt. 10:39; Luke 17:33).

RENOUNCING OUR INNER SELF

This same dynamic works equally as powerfully within one individual alone as between two or many. Sometimes we try to control and make demands upon our inner self even more fiercely than upon others—until finally our inner “junior” expresses something outwardly embarrassing, like telling someone off or getting drunk or both. Therefore Jesus, after saying we must “hate” the members of our own family, included, “Yes, and even his own life” (Luke 14:26).

Our life has become our Isaac. And God calls us to lay that Isaac on the altar. Until we do, whatever that life is—our talents, our gifts in the Spirit, our office, our ability to love or to be a reconciler—whatever we have been given becomes our idol (as we have shown in previous chapters). We demand that our ministry be recognized—after all, it’s God’s anointed work! Unconsciously we insist that others give devotion and homage to our talent. The surest tip-off to our idolatry (other than anger) is jealousy. The moment we sense lack of rejoicing, petulance, or jealousy when the other brandishes some new toy in the Lord, that moment we may be sure our own gift has become our idol.

God would not have anyone be needed. He needs no one. He is able to raise from the stones at our feet children to cry “Hosanna” to Him (Luke 19:40). We want a handle on God. How could God fulfill His Word to raise up countless millions from Isaac’s seed if Abraham sacrificed him?

Abraham could have thought he had God in a bind. But God will have none of that. Therefore, He put Abraham through the breaking of asking for sacrifice until Abraham knew in his heart that it is God alone who rules.

I renounced all the ministry of praying for the healing of the inner man. Misunderstanding what that meant, I came home to announce that I would not receive any more people for counsel and healing. God only sent all the more. He didn't want the ministry stopped. He wanted *me* stopped. Until then the ministry had me. I *had* to minister. That idol had invaded all my thinking. It had become all I could see of the life in Christ. Now the idol was dead, and the Lord had the ministry rather than me. And I could be His disciple again, not merely the disciple of healing.

Whatever our life is, until we renounce it, it grows and has a life of its own, until it has us. Then the family suffers, for we are given to an "it" rather than to the Lord who would hold us in moderation and give us to our family. We cannot be His disciples until, like St. Paul, we have learned the lesson of Philippians 3, to "count all things to be loss" (v. 8). Indeed, he says to count all gain as "dung" (v. 8, KJV). Until we do, we will not be free to seek after Him, to know Him and only Him. Until we learn this lesson, our children become our trap, and so Jesus includes in Luke 14:26 that we are to "hate" even our own children. Once we release them to the Lord, He returns them to us, for now we will no longer grasp them to us and so snuff out their own life. We will rejoice in that life He brings forth in them.



FORGIVENESS

For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.

—MATTHEW 6:14–15

FORGIVING IS NOT A NICE OPTION. THE COMMAND CARRIES A stern warning. If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. Countless times we have seen Christians enmeshed again in the same old carnalities because they refused to forgive others; all that had been forgiven and washed away came back upon them. When Jesus told the story of the man who was forgiven ten thousand talents but refused to forgive one who owed him “a hundred denarii,” He added, “And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him” (Matt. 18:34). We see that principle in action in families every day in prayer ministry. Whoever has not forgiven father or mother, brother or sister, is handed over to torment. Whatever we judge in another we are doomed to replicate or to reap in our own lives (Rom. 2:1; Matt. 7:1–2). And whatever we do not forgive returns us to the mess we just came out of.

Given the countless continual irritations of daily family living and the law of increase in sowing and reaping (see chapters 8 and 9 in *The Elijah Task*), one can see that if the cross, through the act of forgiving, is not central to family living, every family will self-destruct. The command to forgive is an absolute *sine qua non*, the “without which nothing” for family living. Every resentment acted on or quietly nurtured in the heart is a sin that engenders an equal or greater response, which increasingly creates

further reaction. Only on the cross is there a stopping place, where for all things, “It is finished” (John 19:30).

Christian families (or any family) cannot afford the luxury of even one grudge. Whatever is not forgiven will work like a cancer to eat out the vitality of all the family life. Whatever is not forgiven will color like a drop of dye all other seemingly unrelated areas. A simple resentment for failing to come home on time for supper will affect ability to express affection, the freedom of sharing in conversation, physical health, sexual responses, and so on. A grudge held is like sand thrown into well-oiled machines.

HOW DO WE KNOW WE HAVE TRULY FORGIVEN?

The trouble about forgiveness is that we often think we have forgiven when we haven't. We may say the words, but who can make his heart follow? Who can know whether it really has happened? The fact of hidden and forgotten resentment is by itself reason enough for the existence of prayer ministers. For the first and major work of every prayer minister is to discover where grudges are lodged in the human heart—grudges that destroy present happiness. Truly the Grinch who steals our Christmas is none other than unforgiveness.

We often fool ourselves and have no awareness of that fact. We say, “No matter,” or “That's OK,” and it definitely is not OK. St. Paul wrote, “... without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb. 9:22). Whatever hurts us registers in the heart and demands a response. The mind and lips may be convinced and say, “It's OK,” but the heart knows differently. We cannot get at our heart to make it change. This fact alone guarantees our need of the Savior. Only He can change the heart, and this He does only by fulfilling the legal demands of the law in His body on the cross.

We may say, “It's OK” or even the good words “I forgive you,” only to discover ourselves yelling, “And you did that same thing last week!” Or closed doors in the heart manifest in icy behavior while our mind is still convinced forgiveness has been accomplished. Taut lines in the face and hard eyes tell others the truth. Forgiveness is no easy matter. We cannot read our own hearts to know whether it has really happened or not.

Here, then, are some simple guidelines:

1. If you have not made the hurt a matter of specific confession of resentment and hate in prayer, forgiveness is not accomplished no matter what you think you feel. Only Jesus can sprinkle the heart with cleansing blood (Heb. 10:22). Only on the cross is anything ever truly finished. If it has not been relinquished in prayer, it is lodged in the never-forget-anything banks of our computer, waiting to be recalled to action somewhere sometime.
2. By their fruits ye shall know them, so watch for the telling signs. “Dis-ease” can develop in relationships that formerly were more open and warm. Dreams of violence or of hurt to the other, even dreams where you are the hero saving the one who hurt you, are signals of a “dis-eased” heart.
3. Impairments to health. Physical discomforts along with other things are a pretty good barometer of inner storms.

Not all things lodge in the heart. Sometimes hurts are caught in the moment and taken easily to the cross. Sometimes, unaccountably, major offenses that should hurt us just don't register, whereas unintended slights tip the scales and score deeply in our heart. Sometimes we don't even know we are being hurt till suddenly the heart won't respond to the other as it used to, or we surprise ourselves by making some cutting remark. We may rationalize and excuse the other, or let loyalty cover his faults until the heart is loaded unbeknownst to us, and anger builds to an unexpected explosion.

HOW TO UPROOT SEEDS OF RESENTMENT

When we discover that a seed of resentment is sending taproots into our heart, we must enter into a discipline of forgiveness. Here we have found the greatest, most damaging ignorance. Too many Christians have not yet known how to let the Lord cleanse the heart in the art of forgiveness—or even that there is a desperate need and a work of cleansing required.

1. We need to identify the resentment.

We need to face facts squarely—no euphemizing, explaining away, excusing, or painting with whitewash. If something was done that *should* have hurt us, we must not listen to our “noble” feelings when they send up no-hurt signals. When the bad fruit of resentment is evident, it is far wiser to assume that hurt is there. If we have logically figured out why the other did what he did and excused him, it is only mental, and most often our heart is not there at all. Again, it is wiser to assume that the heart does not agree with such surface magnanimity. If we assume wrongly, and the heart has not retained anger, the exercise of prayer to cleanse the heart cannot harm. But to assume the heart has no angers and fail to pray can only be a lazy gamble that can bear no fruit other than surprises of dismay.

Therefore, identifying angers does not mean being able to consciously feel them, but being certain of what events could have produced resentment. It means to face history squarely, believing what the bad fruit tells you about the heart. Looking at events, remembering in detail what happened, is not the same as recovering the feelings of the moment. If we happen also to discover what we actually felt, that is helpful, but neither most important nor necessary. What is important is fact. Given the facts, we can say to Jesus, “I don’t know what I actually felt, Lord, but You do. Take every anger out of me to the cross. Don’t let me hold any resentments, whether I am aware of them or not.”

A prime example came into our office, a man who had very good, responsible, hard-working farm parents of German lineage. He loved them and had worked alongside them all of his life. He could remember nothing at all for which to be angry at them, but he could never express love to his wife or children. His recent adultery had confused him about his feelings for his wife. His sister described him as cold and unfeeling, and his eyes were filled with suppressed anger from his childhood. Questioning revealed that his parents had never expressed affection. The home was not filled with the warmth of laughter. The mind of the growing boy had only admiration and respect for his parents. But his spirit and heart were starving for love. He was internally angry and had not allowed himself to know that, but his life was now manifesting it. Piaget’s moral law says that if a man commits adultery, he is angry at his mother. His children were asking their mother, “Why can’t Daddy show us love?” His angers had never become conscious, and by that very fact were more vitiating to his inner being. Since his

feelings had actually been hurt deeply and were too painful for him to admit consciously, he had worked as a boy to turn off all his feeling centers so as to get through life performing by duty, not having to feel. He could no longer relate heart to heart with anyone. He had become the tin man coming to the wizard of Oz to get a heart. That starvation left him vulnerable to the adulterous woman, who knew how to touch the heart beneath the barriers.

That example of hidden anger is so classic it is tragic. Sometimes unbeknownst to us, while our outer being rejoices at the gift our brother or sister has just received, our inner heart may be convulsing in jealousy or anger at our parents or God. Or we may be unaware that the reason our mind forgot to bring a present is that we didn't want to. And so it goes. A continual difficulty about forgiveness is that we seldom know what and when and whom to forgive. Therefore we must learn to view present problems like the outcroppings of silver veins to trace to the mother lode in the heart. Present problems are almost always symptoms rather than causes. And we must track to facts, because the world of actual feelings will almost always surprise us and reveal that what we thought we felt was either only partial or false altogether.

When something has rooted itself in the heart, no easy, flippant, "Oh, I forgive you" will suffice, nor will a moment's prayer dislodge it. We will not get out of that prison until we have paid the uttermost farthing (Matt. 5:21–26). There is a process of forgiveness that allows no shortcuts. Jesus, Lord of the heart, will not allow us access to freedom short of fullness of healing, even as He would not let the lady who touched the hem of His garment slip away until she confessed in front of the whole community and was received by all (Luke 8:43–48).

2. Go to Gethsemane—that place of prayer.

Once we have discovered the facts—who, when, and where—He calls us into Gethsemane. Gethsemane is that place of prayer where Jesus laid aside His righteousness and became our sin. We are called to lay aside all our righteousness until it is no longer important whether we or the other guy is right or wrong. As He became our sin, so we need to say, "Lord, make me to know my sin, and so identify me with the sin of all mankind that I may know my oneness with my brother at the foot of the cross." People have often cried out to us, "Well, I could forgive him if he just deserved it, but do

you know what that skunk did?” as though to be forgiven required that you didn’t need it!

In bitterness, what happens is that we pull back from our brother, saying, “Well, I’m not like him. At least I don’t go around...” In so doing we elevate ourselves and become the Pharisee who says he pays his tithes and is not like the publican (Luke 18:9–14). We no longer want to be counted one with that brother. We think we are different, but we are not. The first task of prayer is to enter Gethsemane in order to rediscover our oneness with the sin of all mankind.

If we go deep enough, we may see that our bitter root has tempted our brother to hurt us, or some seed of sin sown by us has jeopardized our brother by causing him to be the one through whom we are reaping.

A Christian man picked up a hitchhiker. After a while the rider stuck a gun in his ribs and commanded him to pull over and give him of all his money. As he stopped, the Holy Spirit convicted the Christian’s heart and he began to weep.

The hitchhiker said, “Whasamatter fella? You yellow?”

“No, son, I weep in shame that you have ridden so long with me and still think you have to use a gun to get whatever help you need from me.” The Holy Spirit caused the robber to see the reality of the Christian’s repentance—and he received Jesus and went away with a gift of money as well! That Christian lived close to Gethsemane. The Lord could quickly show him his and mankind’s sin and unite his heart with the brother who hurt him. Our visit to Gethsemane is not complete so long as we are still inwardly marshaling defenses of our rightness and cataloging the other’s sins.

We would often rush with our hurts directly in to what we would like to call “forgiveness,” but the wisdom of Jesus says, “No, my brother, you must come the way I did, through Gethsemane.” If we do not come through the loss of our own self-righteousness and identification with ours and mankind’s sin, we will never be free, for we will always feel noble and self-martyring that we forgave the fellow. And then each time we have to repeat “forgiveness,” we will grow that much more self-martyring and noble and, of course, better than that fellow who keeps sinning against us. Our patience will wear thinner and thinner until we cry out, “I can’t do it anymore. I don’t care if it is seventy times seven. I can’t, I’m done, and I won’t.” Forgiveness has never been complete, because we have never gotten off our pedestal. We have handed down mercy to someone less than us. Perhaps

even God had to become one with our sin before forgiveness could be complete—else why not just forgive from heaven without having to come to earth! We need to begin our prayers to forgive by saying, “God, take me with You to Gethsemane until all those noble lines of who is right and who is wrong are lost in our sense of common guilt at the foot of the cross.” You see, behind all our hurt is the sneaky thought, “Noble me didn’t deserve that kind of treatment; it isn’t fair.” That false nobleness and separation from our brother must be defeated at the outset.

3. Claim Jesus’s act of forgiveness.

Hopefully at some time, every man will be so wounded that he will come upon the happy discovery that no man can truly forgive anybody anything at any time! We actually think we are pretty good fellows and sometimes say, “Forgiving was always easy for me. I never could hold a grudge.” There goes a self-deluded man. Forgiveness is never easy for any man, and no man can ever forgive another. Forgiveness is an impossibility for human flesh. The mind can fool itself, and outwardly gracious people can think they really are forgiving, but “the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9), and no man is capable of forgiveness.

We cannot get at our heart to change it. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer. 13:23). Only Jesus, as God in flesh, can enter the human heart and change it. For this reason “no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6). And no man comes to any other but by Him for the same reason. Sin and resentment separate, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us of all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

Once we are in a position to receive the gift, forgiveness is abundantly simple. We simply receive by faith that Jesus has accomplished it for us. Again, if we still think forgiveness is something we do, we are neither in position to receive the gift, nor have we died to our noble, forgiving self. People who think they can forgive cannot escape the pride of it. But those who come through Gethsemane know that neither the one who hurt them nor they themselves can accomplish it. They can only receive it afresh every time as an undeserved mercy of the Lord.

We claim by faith that forgiveness is accomplished and again do not go by feelings. If we still want to grind our teeth at the other fellow or find ourselves not liking him, it is not that forgiveness has not happened. It is

that we were robbed of it because we never got through Gethsemane to the foot of the cross with our brother. But we may not feel great love or release either. No matter. It is done, and we need to believe that fact.

4. Bless your offender.

Forgiveness, however, is not yet complete. More is required of us. In 1 Peter 3:9 we are told, “Not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” We are called, that is, commanded, to bless those who despitefully use us. That means to pray all manner of good things for the one who hurts us, to invest ourselves in love for his benefit. Romans 12:14–21 says it even more cogently:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We are to overcome evil with good. When evangelists preached to some natives that they were to heap coals of fire on their adversaries’ heads, they gleefully dumped hot coals on them while they slept! They understood that verse as little as most Christians do.

In biblical times, there were no gas or electric ranges or matches. Fire was a precious commodity, scarce because fuel was scarce. Therefore, one man in a village was appointed to keep a fire going all night. In the wee hours he built it up and let it burn down to hot coals. These he scooped into a metal brazier that he set on a wood block on his head. Then he went with tongs from oven to oven so every housewife could have hot coals for her day’s cooking. It became an idiom that “to heap coals of fire on his head” meant to turn a man into a spreader of warmth in the community.

When God desires to reach a man who will not listen, one route to his heart is to allow him to hurt a Christian. That will plunge the Christian through Gethsemane to the cross for himself and the one who hurt him and cause the Christian to pray for that sinner. Now a bridge is open, for the

sinner's heart is engaged with the Christian's, and the Lord has an avenue to walk into the sinner's life.

What did Stephen cry out as they stoned him? "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60). At whose feet were the clothes of the stone throwers laid? Saul's (Acts 7:58). The blood of the martyrs has always been the seed of the church. In our day, Sergei Kourdakov has testified that the Lord struck his heart when an elderly woman prayed for him as he was about to bludgeon her with a club.

Until we complete the process of forgiveness by blessing the other, we have not overcome, and we have not followed through to resurrection life. Life issues forth in life given by blessing. Until we cost ourselves for the other, we have not stepped into the river of love and found life. Blessing the one who hurt us is thus not a nice option for those who can do it; it is an absolute necessity if we would be whole—indeed, if we would continue our walk with Jesus and the family.

Whoever would bless the one who hurts him must learn the same lesson—the flesh cannot do it. If we don't want to, if it does not flow as naturally and easily as a spring of water from a mountainside, then we have an unmistakable sign that the first steps of repentance in Gethsemane and restful receiving at the foot of the cross have not been accomplished in our hearts.

If we say, "Well, I've forgiven him, but I don't have to like him," we are only fooling ourselves. We do not have to like and approve of his behavior, but we do need to come to that point at which our heart hurts and yearns for him and our spirit likes him. If we find ourselves not wanting to be with that person, we may not have accomplished forgiveness. If that person is a family member, there is no "may" about it. With family, we must not allow ourselves to stop until the other is as precious to us as the dearest life we know. If we are wary of the other and are still reticent about being family, we are not yet free. On the other hand, there is a kind of wariness that is a caution of wisdom in love, by which we do not tempt our brother at the point of his known weakness.

Sometimes much of the travail of prayer needs to be accomplished quite apart from our brother. But often the Lord will require that we talk. Herein more Christians have failed the fullness of forgiveness more than at any other point. Perhaps we are timid or afraid or unsure. So long as these are greater than the promptings of love, we have not prayed and acted it

through to completion. Our brother needs to hear our forgiveness, our love, and our blessing.

Wisdom and restraint ought to prevent insensitive boldness in sharing, but fear or unworthy motives must not be allowed to inhibit altogether. We fool ourselves so easily. It may be easy to bless a brother in the privacy of our own home. We may even feel grandly Christian. It is humbling to go and speak words of forgiveness and blessing, and more humiliating to ask the one who hurt you for forgiveness for your part in causing it to happen.

Again, there is no nice option. Failure to complete the process leaves unfinished business that either engenders further hurts or concludes in isolation. And then the whole debt and prison is back on us.

But what a joyous grace He has given us. Paula and I have counseled non-Christians and people of other religions and mark in them above all else the absence of the grace of Jesus to restore what is amiss. What five minutes of prayer restores to better than what was originally takes years apart from Jesus only to begin to get back to less than what was. Hurts remain irreparable outside of Jesus. How revealing of the wonderful love of Jesus for us that He continues to pay the price daily that we might be restored in joy to each other. St. Paul wrote that we should be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). Here is the final key for forgiveness, for what will propel us to continue through the entire process to fullness of forgiveness? Not the flesh. Not human love alone. Not will power, but the desire of our hearts to bless Jesus by allowing Him to cleanse our hearts and not to grieve His loving heart any more than we have to.

Whoever loves Jesus cannot abide a grudge in his heart, for he knows it wounds His heart and grieves His Spirit.



EAGLE CHRISTIANS

Yet those who wait for the LORD will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.

—ISAIAH 40:31

WHAT IS THE END PRODUCT OF CHRISTIAN FAMILY LIVING? We have spoken of death; now let us speak of rebirth. God wants to raise us up from the ashes of our families to become His own eagle Christians. Families are launching pads for eagle Christians.

Eagle Christians are a distinct breed. They are swift (2 Sam. 1:23); they comprehend quickly and fly to do His bidding. Gifts of counsel, insight, and vision are theirs (Isa. 11:2–3). When others see only problems and rivet their eyes to circumstances, they see beyond to the joy set before them, and despising the shame, they endure whatever cross must be borne (Heb. 12:2). They see by the Spirit into the very deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10), trusting Him in all things to work for their good (Rom. 8:28).

They “mount up with wings like eagles” (Isa. 40:31). When storms approach, with wind and thunder and lightning, lesser fowl head for cover, but the mighty eagle spreads his wings and with a great cry mounts upon the very winds that drove the lesser to cover. Storms are a joy to him, for on their mighty updrafts he soars to heights of glory. And he does it effortlessly, letting the wind carry him where lesser birds must beat with frantic wings to stay aloft. Just so, the eagle Christian sees behind the storm the surging, moving power of the Holy Spirit of God and rises on wings of faith to rest in God’s carrying power far above harm and destruction. He does not have to pump up his faith and talk himself into ephemeral moods of fleeting courage. He abides, restfully trusting the current of God’s love,

moving not by striving but by the soaring currents of God. The Lord Himself bears him up. Others who see try to huff and puff to his heights and cannot understand his restful, easy soaring, ascribing it to the eagle rather than the winds of God's love. But the eagle knows the currents and turns here and there to catch the rising flow of life.

"They... shall renew their strength" (Isa. 40:31, KJV). Every so often, some say every seven years or so, an eagle must renew itself. Its mighty wing feathers become laden with oil and dirt, cracked and worn with use. Beak and talons become calcified and brittle. Then it is that the eagle retires to a cave or hiding place high beyond the reach of predators. There he begins an arduous process of renewal. With his great beak he pulls out the mighty wing feathers one by one. And then each talon, claw by claw. Until at last, having neither talons nor feathers, he is defenseless except for his great beak, which he then begins to bash against the rocks, until it too is broken off, piece by piece. There he trusts and waits until beak, talons, and feathers have regrown.

EAGLE CHRISTIANS ARE FLEXIBLE

Above all, eagle Christians have learned flexibility of mind and heart. They have teachable spirits. As St. Paul said in Philippians 3, they count all things as refuse, pulling off old feathers and claws and breaking their beaks. Old feathers are old understandings and insights by which we have soared into experiences. Old talons are the old ways in which we rose to do battle. For example, we have always put on the armor (Eph. 6:11) and pled the blood before exorcisms, but we used to do this as if these rituals, in and of themselves, were our protection. When we learned the better way of the shield of faith, that He is our shield and buckler (Ps. 91:4), like St. Paul we "did away with childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11). We tore off those old talons; a new and better way to fight had come. Eagle Christians are flexible. They do not hang on to the old. Like the chambered nautilus of Oliver Wendell Holmes, they are always ready to "build thee more stately mansions, O my soul."¹ Old beaks are accustomed ways of perceiving and feeding on the Word. Eagle Christians seek fresh bread from the oven of God's love, knowing that yesterday's manna is filled with worms. They break off the old ways of perceiving what God has said, ready to see something new in

the familiar passages of the Word. Eagle Christians keep the solid stable bones of doctrine and Word and pluck off whatever will not keep them soaring on the fresh winds of God's storms. They renew their strength.

Note that eagles are not like sheep that must be sheared of the old. They take the initiative. They renew themselves. How often God must wear some Christians out with warnings and the ministrations of brothers before they take heed and let Him take away the old way! But eagle Christians know by the Spirit within when there is need to renew. It is not that they will not let others help, but they take the initiative to enlist that aid. They do not have to be badgered by others to get at it. They are already alert to see what needs to die and willing to be at it quickly while the Lord is near (Isa. 55:6).

EAGLE CHRISTIANS ARE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

The Lord wants families who promote rather than frustrate the formation of eagles. Overprotective families produce chickens. Critical, hypertensive families create vultures. Maudlin, soft, and sentimental families produce pigeons that strut and coo and overcomfort, who run for shelter in the storms. Ambitious, worldly families bring forth peacocks full of pride and flashy dress. Flippant families to whom life is a succession of parties spawn sparrows who flit here and there chattering meaninglessly. Overbusy, work-oriented families send out woodpeckers to bang away noisily at life, redheaded with embarrassment when there is no new crusade to peck away at in self-importance.

But an eagle family is something different. Its aerie is set high upon the rocks of faith or in the topmost branches of the tree of faith. It is exposed to wind and weather and sun. To change the metaphor, God is not raising hothouse tomatoes, cultured and overprotected, but exposed. The Christian family is perched on the solidarity of God's Word, standing against the winds of current fashions and ways. If it is called to stand by a black child new to the neighborhood and take abuse from people with racial prejudice, it stands. If it befriends a Jew, it takes the wind of hate and is strengthened by the standing. When the children complain against fair and proper discipline and parents come to haul a teacher before the board, Christian parents back the teacher. When a child in an eagle home falls and skins his knees, his parents brush him off, love him up, and doctor the wound. On the

other hand, they don't encourage him to wallow in self-pity. Eagle parents demand work and balance it with play.

An eagle mother trains her children to fly by an awesome process. A mother eagle flutters over her nest, demonstrating by sight how to fly. Then comes a day when she gathers an eaglet onto her back and, spreading her wings, flies high—and suddenly swoops out from under! Down and down her chick plummets and perhaps begins to discover what his wings are for, until the mother swoops under him and catches him again on her back. Many times the process is repeated. If the eaglet is slow to learn or cowardly, she returns him to the nest and tries again a few days later, and then perhaps again. But if he will not learn, she begins to tear her nest apart until there is nothing left for the eaglet to cling to.

Today as never before the world needs eagle Christians who have heart. We have found that those families who give love and laughter but do not overprotect call the heart forth. Men and women with natural hearts can stand the breaking and the crushing that produces saints. Those from other kinds of families, if they get there at all, do so over a much longer and harder route. God wants aeries for eagles.



THE FAMILY OF GOD

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

—EPHESIANS 4:11–16

THE PRODUCTION OF EAGLE CHRISTIANS IS NOT THE END BUT the beginning. God gives them as gifts to the church. They are pivotal to His plan, for through them God designs to edify the church until *all* come to the unity of the faith and to such maturity that, no longer tossed to and fro, we stand as that perfected Zion that upbuilds itself in love and becomes God’s demonstration to all the principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10—“This is how I created life to be!”)

The Holy Spirit has now poured forth His latter rain upon the earth (Joel 2:28–29). God is moving to restore the unity of His church. At present we have the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). But God intends to move us into unity of the faith—something far greater (v. 13)! And the key to that is eagle Christians—the fivefold ministry of apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors (v. 11). Eagles are known for their ability to soar alone to their heights, but they do it to see far for food for the young. Christian eagles exist for the family of God to establish the corporate life of the body of Christ. When St. Paul prayed for individual Christians to have power to

comprehend with all the saints the height and length and depth and breadth of the love of God that they might come into all His fullness, he set the prayer into the context of “from whom every *family* in heaven and on earth derives its name” (Eph. 3:15, emphasis added).

God is working out a mystery of individuation and union in corporate life. He is leading on to the marriage feast of the bride and the Lamb. Lone individuals who can never become one with the family will find neither place nor joy there. On the other hand, those who would cop out from their own life to become and do whatever sells them to the company will find fear and trepidation there. Paradoxically, only those who know how to soar high on their wings will be able to fly in tandem with others. And only those who have ridden on the back of mother church will have learned to soar lone and free to the heights. God wants whole people who, because they can stand alone, can submit also to others, and because they can submit to others, they can fly alone.

It is in the natural family that God builds that capacity to enter the larger human family. If the family is a bow, what is the mark? Corporate life in the kingdom of God, the brotherhood of mankind, and the fellowship of His creatures are the mark. Sin is to miss that mark.

From the womb a child first learns dependency and at birth begins his pilgrimage to independence. That pattern is repeated over and over as a pupil studies and graduates, woos and weds, forms and serves his own family, gives birth and instructs, only to release again. In and out, the dance of life commands that each partner learn to insist and resist, lead and follow, learn and teach, give and take, receive and give out. All the movements of life demand an inner core of tough, resilient bone and outer flexes of feathers and tendons.

God can build corporate life only where strength has produced meekness and men are as unwilling to override another as to be overridden. The family of God comes into unity where none dominate and none would allow a Hitler anyway.

That flex of give and take that builds families up can only happen in love. That love of God among men can only happen where the river of God’s love has firm banks of character in which to flow. Firm character is built only in families founded upon the rock of God’s Word.

Love and forgiveness are the power and guarantee of strength and flexibility without which men cannot join hand in hand to build. God

restores the family of mankind in order to restore Earth to liberty from its bondage to decay and to the fullness of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21).

The cross is therefore central to all God's planning. For without continuance of death of sinful ways, the new cannot be resurrected. Rigidity must set in to thwart the new where prayer does not haul the old to the body of the Son on the tree.

The Holy Spirit would sing a mighty chorus of praise not only through all the redeemed family of man but also through every bird and beast. "And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever'" (Rev. 5:13, emphasis added).

The end product, therefore, is the whole family of all creation, reunited and singing glory to God the Father and the Son—but it starts with Jesus in the local human family, setting free each individual to become.

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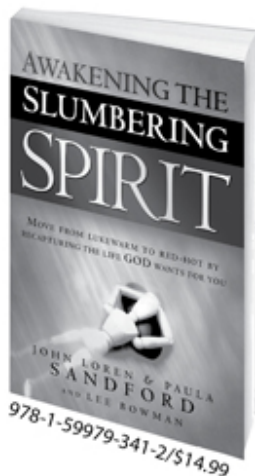
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