
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-believers,

In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy gets back to her home state of Kansas by clicking her shoes together three times and saying, "There's no place like home. There's no place like home." Her statement is supposed to make us realize that there simply is no place as sweet and as wonderful as our own home and family. Sadly this is not the case for far too many people. After years of misguided information by "family experts" on what a family is and how a family should operate, these same misguided experts are telling us the family is in trouble and we must do something to fix it. But what should we do? Should we listen to these same experts? There's an old saying, "Fool me once and shame on you. Fool me twice and shame on me!"

There are many books and seminars available now on how to build a solid marriage and family, but something very important is missing from many of them: a consistent dose of biblical truth mixed with God-given wisdom. David said it best many years ago:

Unless the LORD builds the house they labor in vain who build it. (Psalm 127:1 NKJV)

And then also in Psalm 128,

*Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD,
Who walks in His ways.*

When you eat the labor of your hands,

*You shall be happy, and it shall be well
with you.*

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine

In the very heart of your house,

Your children like olive plants

All around your table.

Behold, thus how the man shall be blessed

Who fears the Lord. (v. 1-4)

If we truly want to do more than just dream of a happy family life both in our natural families, as well as in the larger family of God, we will need to sink our teeth into the meat of God's Word. Our greatest need in every area of life, including marriage and the family, is fresh insight from the ever-relevant Word of God. In a day when countless demands and attacks are made on the family, it is essential that we hear God's voice on this matter and act accordingly.

Just before Israel was about to go into the Promised Land, Moses set before the people the foundational uniqueness of their faith, and four guiding commands that would keep their families strong. These commands will keep both the family of God and our immediate families

strong and vital. The first command is for us to hear the truth continually.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The first thing we need to do is "Hear" the Word of the Lord. And the first great truth is that our God is one. He is one in essence, in being. He is unlike any and all other supposed deities. Families are strong when they acknowledge God's presence, His uniqueness, and His right to rule over us. We must seek His will and encourage one another to remember that our God is a righteous and faithful and reliable God. This is bedrock truth to build on. The second command is to love the Lord fervently.

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (vs. 5)

The repetition of the word "all" in this verse emphasizes total devotion. Our love for God must not be partial, or casual. It must be seen in all we say and do. Our total devotion to God should be the basis for all of our decisions and actions. It is almost impossible for us to instill into our children or other believers a principle we do not practice. Modeling the truth far outweighs preaching it any day of the week! The third command is teach diligently.

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (v. 6, 7)

The job of training children to walk in the ways of the Lord is the responsibility of the home first and foremost. The church can help and augment, but God's desire is that there be a conscious and purposeful transfer of truth from parents to children. There are ample opportunities when you sit in your house, or walk, etc. to teach God's Word. And the same is

true for the larger family of God. Mature believers should work one-on-one with new believers showing them, through personal example, how to live the Christian life. Christianity is not just a Sunday religion. It's a daily relationship with God, and each day will bring new lessons to learn. The fourth and final command is fear the Lord greatly.

"You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him...You shall not go after other gods". (13, 14)

At the heart of this command is our own well being. God knows that often our hearts are prone to wander. And we are surrounded by gods today even as Israel was. Materialism, money, the opinions of neighbors, selfishness, pride, popularity, fears, angers, and so on, are still idols we sometimes worship to our own hurt. We need to fear God! We need to have a reverence for His holy name and a deep respect for His sovereign will. Our reverent fear and obedience is a key to family strength and stability.

In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and His children will have a place of refuge. The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death. (Proverbs 14:26, 27)

May God bless you and your family as you do His will.

Chuck LaMattina

The Family of God

by John Saunders
Guernie, Illinois

God designed people to live in families. From the moment a baby draws its first breath, it is part of a family. Due to sin, relationships may be marred or broken, but God's design was that every person would have a family in which to live, to love to belong, to give, and to grow. Christ's church is a family.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. (Ephesians 2:19) [All Scripture unless otherwise noted is from NKJV.]

God has welcomed us into His household, and called us His children.

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God!...Beloved, now we are the children of God. (1 John 3:1a,2a)

Each born again believer is part of a large household, a large family, which includes every other born again believer. Our call is to walk in love towards our Father, edifying one another, and reaching out to others to help the family grow.

Often, the word "family" first brings to mind a picture of two parents with a child or two. The reality of the "family" is bigger. I like to think of a family reunion. My mother's family was a sociable lot, and between her four brothers, three sisters, their spouses and children, my grandparents, a few great-aunts and great-uncles, our family, and maybe a few extra friends, our family reunions were always quite lively. There was enough food to feed three times the attendees, and children zooming in and out among clustered adult conversations. From a babe in arms to young children to teenagers, to college students to young singles

to newly married to older couples to the ninety-three year old great-aunt, everyone was part of the family, was welcome, was special, was valued. Year by year, people grew and changed; some passed away, others married, children were born. A family is varied, and always changing.

God's family is no different. He has called us to be a part of a great and glorious family, made up of unique individuals, bound together by a common love and a common Father. In order to help explain this relationship, He uses the analogy of a human body.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body, " is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were ehearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye can not say to the hand, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having giving greater honor to that part which lacks it,

that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually. (1 Cor. 12: 12-27)

Each member of God's family is unique, special and needed. We are bound together by the Spirit of God which lives within us, the seed of our Father. In order to help us live together God gives us instruction as to how to live life as a believer: First and foremost, He gives us instruction on how to get born again. Then He teaches us how to commit our lives to Him; how to walk in love toward each other. This is the foundation. It's pointless to be concerned with the details of Christian marriage if you haven't attempted the basics of unselfishness, forgiveness, renewed mind and encouragement. How can you walk as a single believer without a renewed mind, self-control and the love of God? But, having this foundation, specific instruction can help us enjoy richer relationships, avoid temptations and contribute in ways that befit our particular abilities and stage in life.

But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not given to slander, not given to much wine, teachers of good things – that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an

opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (Titus 2:1-8)

The family of God is a dynamic crew. Individuals are always growing and changing – changing individually and in their relationships with one another. It's not a matter of one kind of relationship being more "spiritual" than another; it's living for God in whatever state we find ourselves.

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches. Was anyone called while circumcised? Let him not become uncircumcised. Was anyone called while uncircumcised? Let him not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that state in which he was called. Now concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give judgment as one whom the Lord in His mercy has made trustworthy. I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress—that it is good for a man to remain as he is: Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But even if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. (1 Cor. 7:17ff)

The Greek word for "remain" is also frequently translated "abide" or "dwell." Verse 24 makes the intent clear: "let each one remain (abide, dwell) with God in that calling in which he was called." No matter what state we happen

to be in, we are to focus on dwelling with God, and as the changes happen, we are to continue to abide with God.

Not only do we need to understand our own roles, we need to understand each other. As a husband, I not only need to understand what I should do as a husband, but I need to understand what the Word says about being a wife, so that I know what to expect. Then I can help and encourage my wife to be her best. Even if I'm not married, I need to know what the Word says about serving as a single person, to teach and help and encourage that single believer to stand for Christ.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col.3:16)

We walk in love today, helping one another, and looking forward to our great "family reunion."

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-13)

[John Saunders works at Abbott Labs as a Systems Analyst and Product Manager. He and his wife Mary Ellen have four children.]

Husbands, Love Your Wives

By Chuck LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

A number of years ago there was a humorous article in The Saturday Evening Post titled, "The Seven Stages of the Married Cold." The article compared the state of marriage to the reaction of a husband to his wife's colds during seven years of marriage:

First year: "Sugar dumpling! I'm worried about my baby girl. You've got a bad sniffle and there's no telling about these things with all this strep around. I'm putting you in the hospital this afternoon for a general check up and a good rest. I know the food is lousy, but I'll bring you food from Rossini's...I've got it all arranged."

Second year: "Listen darling, I don't like the sound of that cough. I've called Dr. Miller to rush over here. Now you go to bed like a good girl. Please?"

Third year: "Maybe you better lay down, honey; nothing like a little rest when you feel bad. I'll bring you something to eat. Have we got any soup?"

Fourth year: "Look dear, be sensible. After you feed the kids and get the dishes washed, you'd better hit the sack."

Fifth year: "Why don't you get yourself a couple of aspirin?"

Sixth year: "Why don't you just gargle or something, instead of sitting around barking like a seal?"

And finally, the seventh year: "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing! What are you trying to do, give me pneumonia?!"

Now, even though this is comical, it happens all too often that husbands can be like this with their wives in a number of ways. But this is a far cry from the standard set forth for husbands in God's Word in Ephesians 5. The apostle Paul writes,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (v. 25 NKJV)

This divine command for marital love is a bare knuckled punch at much of what the world sets forth as a standard for husbands. Taken to heart, this command is staggering and the punch that it delivers flattens so many men because we often fall so far short. As husbands, we are commanded to love our wives with a willingness to sacrifice ourselves, even unto death! At first this may seem frightening, but it is also extremely beautiful, because when we love like this, we experience the death of our selfish old man, and the vibrant life of Christ!

This kind of love for our wives is a giving of not only all we have, but more importantly, all that we are. This is not a command to be a doormat. But it is a call to die to our own legitimate and supposed rights, to die to our own wishes and needs, and to live for the benefit of our wives. And this kind of love, and sacrifice is manly and liberating, and truly heroic, for it is according to the pattern set by Jesus Christ. Speaking to his disciples Jesus said,

"...you know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45)

What Christ has done for the church, we are to do for our wives.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but

that she should be holy and without blemish. (v. 25-27)

Husbands should love their wives in the same unreserved, selfless and sacrificial love that Christ loved the church. And we should do this that we might present our wives to ourselves as a glorious wife! This means that we must share the Word of God with our spouse on a regular basis comforting them and confronting them, and especially to inspire them with a vision of whom they are in Christ.

To love our wives like Christ loves the church also includes praying for them. Speaking about believers and Christ, Hebrews 7:25 says,

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Are we praying for our wives, making intercession for them? We ought to keep a list detailing our wives needs, and desires, fears and concerns, her abilities, and tasks, and we ought to make time each day to pray about these things. We ought to pray that our wives accomplish their God-given roles in the family, the church and the community. In Ephesians 5, Paul continues,

So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church (v. 28, 29)

To love our wives as our own bodies is a grand thing. It means granting her the same importance that we give ourselves. It means that our wife's comfort is our comfort. Her adornment is our adornment. Her well being is our well being. In other words, we are to devote the same time and energy and thought to our wife as we do to our self. In doing this both husband and wife will be secure and happy. A good husband nourishes his wife; he is a conduit of God's love and grace, not a cul-de-sac. He

provides for his wife's growth intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. This will take time, thought and commitment. Here are four practical points on how to give your wife your BEST.

Bless

Edify

Share

Touch

Bless: Speak well of your wife. Never make negative comments about her to anyone. Speak to her with positive, kind and good words, even if her speech is harsh and critical. You have the power to bless your marriage by the words you speak. You can also bless your wife by acts of loving kindness in matters both small and large. If we are to bless those who curse us, and do good to those who hate us (Mt. 5:44), how much more should we bless our wives?

Edify: Here is another biblical term used throughout the New Testament for encouraging and building one another up spiritually. Romans 15:2 states,

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

Men, your wife is your closest neighbor, and she needs personal encouragement from you!

Share: This demands giving of yourself, listening to your wife, sharing experiences and developing a shared vision for your marriage and family. This too is a biblical principle: husbands and wives are to become one flesh! Acts 4:32 says,

Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

If this kind of sharing of purpose and goods can happen within the church, surely it can happen in a marriage. Spend time together.

Have fun together. Serve in the church together. Pray together. And finally,

Touch: God created us with thousands upon thousands of nerve endings in our skin. These are designed to sense and benefit from a loving touch. Many times when Jesus ministered to people he would touch them. You have Christ in you (Col. 1:27). Your touch tells your wife that she is loved and cherished. This will bring her comfort and emotional security.

Concluding the section on marriage in Ephesians 5, Paul writes,

For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself...(v. 30-33)

This is a great mystery – two becoming one flesh! But it portrays an intimacy and a love unknown in so much of our world. It is an intimacy designed for a man and a woman and for the Lord and his church. What a blessing!

How could we ever be more interested in the newspaper's latest report on some government scandal, or in yesterday's sports scores, or in our own hobbies or activities, than the voice and the dreams, and concerns of the person who has just shared our bed, and who will share our life today and tomorrow? It is her voice and her life that promises love and respect and joy. She can provide us with true satisfaction and emotional security.

So let us love our wives sacrificially, and invest in them spiritually and romance them extravagantly, for we are heirs together of the grace of life!

How to Be A Good Wife

Madonna Tideman

Northfield, Illinois

Being a part of a successful Christian marriage relationship requires some advanced preparation and effort. The preparation is having our individual spiritual lives firmly established in the Word of God. The effort comes in with the practical application of becoming one flesh. Few couples have the luxury of being totally prepared prior to marriage, but it is never too late to work this into our lives.

We need to understand the love God has for each of us and how He has set Christ, His Son as the Head of the church of which we are members. Our membership in the Body of Christ is secure. We lovingly submit to his Lordship and he lovingly leads and nourishes us. God called us out before the foundation of the world to be His sons and joint heirs with Christ. A section of Scripture in Deuteronomy 32:10 speaks to how God found many of us,

"...in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye." (all Scripture is from the NKJV)

The apple of the eye is a figure of speech that refers to the pupil of our eye. And just as our body protects this delicate part of our eye, so God closely guards and protects His people from harm. In Matthew 10, Jesus tells us that our Father cares for us so deeply that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered." God's love is what helps us persevere and hang on through trials, pain and suffering. God's love for us does not change. In Deuteronomy 31, Moses says that God,

"...is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed." (vs. 8)

This is simply great encouragement when building a marriage! Our love relationship with God needs to be strong and established in order for us to have a successful relationship with our spouse. We, in our personal spiritual life, must be totally committed to God. Matthew 22:37 commands us saying:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

Our love is to be for God and our trust is in God, because he shall supply all of our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. God's love keeps filling us and strengthening us so we never run out of our capacity to give. We are encouraged by Abraham's believing, who not being weak in faith, wavered not at the promises of God, but was strengthened in his faith, giving glory to God! Abraham was convinced that what God had promised He was able to perform (Romans 4:19-21). God's love never fails.

Knowing that God loves us is the only thing that gives us our identity and our security in this life. Colossians 3:14, 15 says,

But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Romans 15:5 says,

Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus.

When we are totally committed to God, we can love freely and openly. With the comfort of God's love in us, we can love unconditionally.

Our goal as Christians is to have a marriage patterned after the relationship Christ has with the church. Ephesians 5 says for a husband to love his wife just as Christ also loved the church. It also says that just as the church is subject to Christ, let the wife be to her own

husband in everything. How long are we to be committed to one another like this? In Matthew 28:20 Jesus says, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." This is the time frame for our marriage relationships – to the end of the age.

At a recent married couples fellowship in our church someone said that he looks at the word "husband" as a verb. He said that it makes him realize the active responsibilities of the role more clearly. The word "husband" can be used as either a noun or a verb by definition. The word "wife" is only a noun, but perhaps it would help us to think of it as a verb.

To try to describe the word "wife" you need a lot of verbs! There is a lot of "doing" going on. This is not a passive role. This is the effort I mentioned earlier. The basic domestic tasks alone are endless. Marriage, it has been said, just further complicates your life. Be prepared to make huge, sometimes unfairly huge contributions into the common pot of your marriage – freely, generously, joyously, continually and never measuring what your partner puts in. With that said, why does anyone ever get married? Marriage is a wonderful thing for those who have the will to make it work. Genesis 2:18 says,

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him."

Adam reviewed all the cattle, beasts of the field and birds of the air, and did not find a helper comparable to him (Praise the Lord!). God created woman so that man would not be alone. Eve was a helper "comparable" or suitable, or sufficient for Adam. She was to fill in the blank spots in his life. The relationship was meant to take two "ones" and make a new "one." Genesis 2:24 says,

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

Wow, this is a big commitment! God shows us in His Word how to achieve this commitment and one great key is prayer.

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions we asked of Him (1 John 5:14, 15)

We know God wants us to have great marriages. Praying for each other needs to be a part of our daily lives. Our confidence in our marriage comes from the promises of God. God will answer our petitions for a great marriage.

God made the wife to compliment her husband. In our role as a helper comparable to our husbands we need to be thinking through how best to compliment our husbands. We need to think through how to aid them to be their best as the head of the family.

Each marriage is unique, as each partner in the marriage is unique. God will provide us with all the ability, energy, patience and love to be our best if we simply trust and rely upon Him. Wives can lovingly serve and submit when they are confident of God's love, wisdom and power, and are sure that He will reward this behavior (Hebrews 6:10, 11).

[Madonna Tideman and her husband Jeff have two children: Samuel and Madeline. They are in business together in commercial real estate]

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Recommended books on Marriage

Love Life For Every Married Couple, by Ed Wheat, M.D., Published by Zondervan

The Five Love Languages, by Gary Chapman, Published by Northfield Pub.

Different By Design, by John MacArthur, Jr. Published by Victor Books.

Stewards of God's Heritage

by Marilee LaMattina

Chicago, Illinois

Nineteenth century American author, Mark Twain, had a radical philosophy for raising children. It went something like this:

"Things run along pretty smoothly until your kid reaches thirteen. That's the time you need to stick 'em in a barrel, hammer the lid down nice and snug, and feed 'em through the knot hole. And then, about the time he turns sixteen, plug up the knot hole!"

Even though Mark Twain was a creative writer, it doesn't sound to me like he knew very much about raising children. Nor did he have God's perspective on the children of believers.

God's view of our children is stated clearly in Psalm 127.

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)

Our children are a heritage from the Lord. They belong to Him. As parents we are simply stewards given the noble task of raising young boys and girls to be godly men and women. God has given us the assignment of raising our children for Him,

...in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 6:4)

Raising godly children doesn't just happen because they grow up in a Christian home. Raising a child is like building a house. First, we must have a blue print, or vision. We must ask ourselves, "What's my ultimate goal for my children?" Jesus Christ gave us the highest goal when he was asked about the greatest commandment. He said,

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. (Matthew 22:37).

Our goal is to help our children grow into adults who love God above all else. We get the "inside help" to do this by gently leading our children to faith in Jesus Christ. As cuddly and cute as our children are, the cold hard fact is that our children are born with a sin nature. They need to be saved and born again of God's Spirit. You can lead your child to faith in Christ by instruction from God's Word and by personal example.

We must show our children the importance of daily Bible reading and prayer. Songs are also a great way to lead young children to Christ. As you lay the foundation stone of faith in Christ, then you can begin to build brick by brick the great doctrinal truths of the Bible into your child's heart. And it's never too early to start. Writing to his young associate Timothy, the apostle Paul said,

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

From earliest childhood, through adulthood, our job is to teach, reprove and correct our children according to the Scriptures. Our teaching must be consistent and thorough (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). We must teach our children God's Word,

... precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little. (Isaiah 28:9)

A hodgepodge of Bible stories is not enough to enable your children to withstand against the wiles of the devil. Only a finely sharpened "sword of the spirit" (Eph. 6:10-18) can do the job. By helping your children commit many Scripture verses to memory, you will be strengthening their spiritual arsenal.

But teaching our children must also be more than a set of rules and laws. We need to dig deeper in every situation to reach the child's heart. Changing behavior is not the only benchmark of success; we must also deal with issues of underlying attitudes and motivations. Keep your priorities on matters of the heart, striving to build a godly character rather than emphasizing only surface issues of their outward actions and works.

A delicate balance is called for. While we want our children to learn to love and obey God's Word, we don't want to give the impression we love them only when they do the right thing! God's love for us is limit less and endless. We need to be sure that our children understand that our love for them is also unconditional. That's a term that's often repeated but seldom practiced. In our zeal to teach our children God's Word, we can easily give the unspoken message that they're more righteous when they perform well. That's teaching works, not the saving grace of the blood of Jesus Christ!

Maintaining a spiritual atmosphere in our homes is essential. One of the best ways to do this is to establish a daily family worship time. When a family goes through an entire day without acknowledging and praising God together (and a quick prayer before meals is not what I'm talking about here) we're teaching a subtle lesson. We say to our children, "We may talk about God, we may have Bibles around the house, and go to church on Sunday, but He doesn't really affect our everyday lives in any significant way."

Family devotion time need not be intimidating. It can be kept very simple and yet be profoundly powerful. Sing a hymn together, read a chapter from the Bible out loud, let each one read a verse, and then pray together. That's a family worship time. Evening works best for some families, at the morning breakfast table is better for others. One family I read about piles up the supper dishes in the center of the table

after eating, and stays right at the table for their family prayer time. It was the one time of the day that everyone was usually all together. When and where doesn't matter – just choose a time and start! Perhaps read through an entire book of the Bible, one chapter a day, together. Then take the time to discuss the chapter, answer questions your children may have.

Above all, rely on God's holy Spirit working in you to train up His children (Philippians 2:13). Have the courage to show your children that even you can't succeed when relying on your own strengths and abilities. Be humble and open in your prayer times together; expose your heart before God in prayer for your children to hear. It will help them realize in a very powerful way that they, too, must open their hearts to their heavenly Father.

We have been entrusted with great truths from God's Word, we need to ensure that the next generation continues to trust in the Lord, as well as future generations. If we are faithful to do our part as parents God will assuredly be faithful to do His part. As the psalmist said,

But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, And His righteousness to children's children, To such as keep His covenant. And to those who remember His commandments to do them. (Psalm 103:17,18)

As stewards of the most precious of God's possessions, His little lambs, let us be found faithful.

Recommended Books on Children and Family

1. The Five Love Languages For Children, by Gary Chapman, Published by Northfield Pub.
2. Family Life, by Chuck Swindoll, Published by Multnomah Press

Familial Honor

By Elizabeth Saunders

Gurnee, Illinois

Often we seek honor for ourselves, dreaming that through sports, politics, or military excellence our reputation will grow higher than the mountains and vaster than the sea. However, honor is not for us to lust after in our selfish pride, honor is for us to bestow upon others! God commands children to respect their parents.

Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

Though our current society tries to attack this idea by setting traps of distraction and deceit, laying a firm spiritual foundation for their children remains a parent's main purpose. Unfortunately we children often buy into the commercial idea that parents should act as our personal convenience stores that give us what we want and then leave us alone. But then, once we reach the formative age of about ten, we begin pushing away the living, loving human beings that no longer seem convenient enough.

Littering and poisoning the soil from which we sprung with hateful words and unkind actions, we soon begin withering from the lack

of fertile family soil. Jesus Christ declared to the Pharisees that,

...every city or house divided against itself will not stand (Matthew 12:34).

Here lies the answer to why we must honor our mothers and fathers. We cannot stand alone.

So today, we must reverse the trend of disrespect towards mothers and fathers. Today, we must strive to honor them in all we say and do. Today, we must stop demolishing the foundations and start repairing them. Today, we must realize that we can never attain honor for ourselves if we dishonor our parents. Today, we must let the message ring from every mountain and across every sea that children must honor their parents,

...that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. (Eph. 6:2)

[Elizabeth Saunders is currently a Junior in High School and is contemplating a career in journalism]

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Special thanks to Tammera Pewick for help in typing this newsletter.

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Foundation for Translation of Biblical Studies,
Inc.
P.O.Box 473