



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

The Family Circle

The material herein was originally written by Leslie Diestelkamp [1911-1995] as a series of articles in *Truth Magazine*, and published in booklet form by the Cogdill Foundation in 1979. A second edition was published in 1987 by the Guardian of Truth Foundation as part of their *Truth in Life Adult Workbook* series with questions written by Karl Diestelkamp added for each lesson.

This series of lessons and the questions have been slightly edited by Al Diestelkamp to remove references which would now be inaccurate or would needlessly date the material. For instance, a reference to the Sears Tower being the world's tallest building.

Congregations which follow a strict 13-week curriculum may choose to pick out thirteen lessons, or use the lessons for two quarters. Some of the lessons can easily take more than one class period to cover 26 weeks.

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Crisis At The Crossroads

From the apartment building where I live in the suburbs of Chicago, it is about thirty-five miles to the Sears Tower, one of the world's tallest buildings. On a clear day or night it can be seen from this building. But between here and there, and throughout the whole city, lies a vast jungle—a sprawling mass of humanity compacted together in mansions and shacks, in neat rows of clean houses and in rat-infested tenements, in townhouses and condominiums, in skyscrapers and flats.

In 1954 when I first moved to Chicagoland the city had a reputation for wickedness, but I felt quite safe walking in its parks alone or on its streets even at night. But things have changed here, and such activities are now very dangerous. Yet it may be no worse here in proportion to the population than in other areas of the country. The fact is now well-known that the crisis in America is not in Chicago alone, but it reaches to the very crossroads of this great nation. Crime reaches into the lonely rural areas; violence reaches even the small towns; safety seems to be almost nowhere. People fled the cities a few years ago to rear their children in the security of the countryside, but now there is no use to run—there is no secure place.

Rebellion At Home

The moral crisis of which I write may indeed have been escalated by improper behavior by high officials of government, and it may have been implemented by various social changes in the national scene. Liberal interpretation of law, reckless abandonment of authority and lawlessness in high places have all contributed to moral decay in the nation. But the real crisis is still at the crossroads! The family has always been the bedrock foundation of society, and out of family circles have always come the men and the morals that were to determine the destinies of people. And when the family circle has deteriorated, then the stalwart fabric and fiber of society has been destroyed. And *that* is the crisis we face today in Chicagoland and in every highway and byway, every town and hamlet, every state and city of the nation.

These words should not be misunderstood. I am not a prophet of doom nor a pessimist who sees no good anywhere. I do not believe the whole country has “gone to the dogs.” I believe most people are good, law-abiding folk. A relatively small minority have become so corrupt that they make it look bad for everyone. Yet, in this vast mass of law-abiding people, this “majority” who are basically good people, the family circle is usually a broken circle; the home is insecure and an attitude of despair prevails. Husbands become fugitives; wives seek “fulfillment” outside the home; children go home only when everything else is closed!

Most importantly, Christians are being swept up in this storm of rebellion against God-given directives for the family. Husbands, wives, parents, children—the whole family structure—seem to accept the new way of life as inevitable. The joy and peace, the tranquility and serenity that should characterize the family circle have been replaced by fear and dread, by anxiety and depression. Feelings of helplessness and despair prevail. The home, which God designed to be the cradle of civilization and which, historically, has always been the bulwark of the nations, has been neglected by husbands, deserted by wives and despised by children. Our society may be on the brink of disaster because the family circle, the foundation of that society, has crumbled beneath the weight of prosperity, materialism and worldliness.

In the very same way that the nation prospers economically but falters morally, the Lord's church grows

in our generation as it has seldom done before, yet it constantly loses doctrinal and moral vitality. If this loss of internal strength is not halted the church may follow the historical path of denominationalism: that is, the church may lose its identity as the “pillar and ground of the truth” and it may cease to be the spiritual house that is portrayed in God’s Word (see 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). If the spiritual crisis that is now obviously imminent is not averted, the impact of the church may be little more than a social and cultural power.

Indeed, the crisis at the crossroads will determine the *destiny* of the nation, for “righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). Most of all, the crisis at the crossroads will determine the *quality* of the church, for no church can rise above the level of quality that characterizes the families that constitute the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:16,17). God said to Solomon, “If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sins, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). If God’s people will be faithful today, then surely God will bless us and our land and His church. Our faithfulness certainly must include devotion to the Word and to the church—fidelity in doctrine and in religious activity. But it must also include righteousness and holiness that prevails in, and emanates from the family circle. If these lessons can serve to help in some small way, at least, to halt the deterioration of home life, then our time will have been well-spent. Let us study, in succeeding lessons ways to bring greater joy and success, as we meet the challenge of the crisis at the crossroads.

QUESTIONS

Rom. 3:23; 2 Tim. 3:13; 1 Jn. 2:15

1. What is the major problem facing those trying to raise a family today?
2. Why is it that conditions in the world are not getting better?
3. Are things really any different now than in the first century?

2 Tim. 3:1-5

4. In what kind of time do we now live?
5. List those things mentioned that would particularly affect the family.
6. If our society is on the brink of disaster, what may well be the cause?

2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5; Prov. 14:34; 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 2 Chron. 7:14

7. What danger is there for the church in time of national moral crisis?
8. What does the church stand to lose in the spiritual crisis?
9. What exalts a nation? And what bring shame to any people?
10. How does the quality of the family affect the quality of the church?
11. What does God promise “His people”?
12. List some of the ways we demonstrate faithfulness to God in time of crisis.



The Family Circle

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Broken Circles

A broken circle is not a circle at all and a broken home is only a poor substitute for what it could have been, and is not at all what God intended it to be. Yet the divorce rate is climbing so rapidly that it is almost vain for me to try to give statistics for they will be obsolete before this material is published. I can remember when a divorced person was a disgraced person, but now divorce is often a joke, an advertisement of permissiveness, a very common experience for multitudes and an expected end of about half the marriages in our land.

For the first one hundred seventy-five years of our nation's history, state laws made divorce difficult. Restrictions imposed by most states forbade "quickie divorces" and, consequently, prevented some. More recently, laws have been liberalized and restrictions have been removed until divorce is now very easy to secure. Almost any "cause" is sufficient now and "no fault" divorce is being advocated (that is, nothing more would be specified than that the parties each agree to the divorce).

Undoubtedly the high divorce rate has contributed to at least the following evils in our society:

1. Promiscuousness is all too common among married people. Fidelity is considered old-fashioned. Husbands and wives hardly frown upon the immoral escapades of their companions.
2. Marriage itself seems to be about to become outdated. People live together without a wedding vow and satisfy their fleshly passions in a relationship that proposes little more permanency than the animals of the field and the forest.
3. Children are frequently treated like pawns on a chess board. They become the objects of barter and trade, and their "parents" are determined by litigation and law-suit. The parental love that should have bound the real parents together has been pushed aside in favor of unbridled lust. The secure home life that should have brought the children to real emotional maturity has been replaced by fear and frustration. The treatment of children is often comparable to that of the fat cattle in the feed-lot—they are provided with food and shelter *if they will help themselves to it*, but there is no guiding hand to lead them, no motivation to direct them.

Historically, when divorce has prevailed, the home has become degraded and morality has been abandoned, the nation has crumbled. We cannot expect God's blessings upon us if we disregard His moral principles and if we allow the foundation of our society to crumble. But for the sake of a small remnant God may indeed bless the nation. It is the obligation of Christians to provide that remnant! Regardless of what the world may do, God's people must maintain fidelity to the moral principles of the Word. Preachers must teach the truth on marriage and divorce, and that without compromise. Elders must feed the faltering flock of God the spiritual food that will sustain the homes and maintain the sanctity of marriage. Parents must teach the children, even from infancy, and persistently through adolescence and youth, the necessity of fidelity to the marriage bond until death brings a separation.

Cracks Inside the Circle

But, bad as it is, divorce is not the only thing that is wrong with the homes of America. Many, many family circles are broken circles even while husbands and wives live under the same roof. They may remain legally married for economic reasons or for the sake of the children, but they become almost totally estranged emotion-

ally and the bond that made them partners is worn thread-bare, so much so that it barely keeps the marriage from falling apart.

Happy indeed is the couple whose responses to each other are automatic, natural, and involuntary. Sad is the circumstance when such responses must be made reluctantly, with reservation. The spontaneous partnership in marital associations—in every happiness and every heartache, in every success and every failure—strengthens the marriage bond and assures trust and tranquility. Conversely, the grudging, indifferent responses of many spouses produce anxiety and frustration.

It may be quite safe to say that the family that prays together, stays together, but we definitely cannot say that the family that stays together, prays together. In other words, *people may live under the same roof but be miles apart as far as their hearts are concerned*. This circumstance makes for instability and insecurity on the part of all concerned ones. To use accommodative language, we may say that the outside of the family circle is sometimes unbroken, but the inside of that circle is splintered and torn. The purpose of this series of chapters is to try to mend some circles, prevent some from being torn and contribute in any way possible to greater total togetherness of husbands and wives, of parents and children. To that end let us press on to specific matters in other chapters.

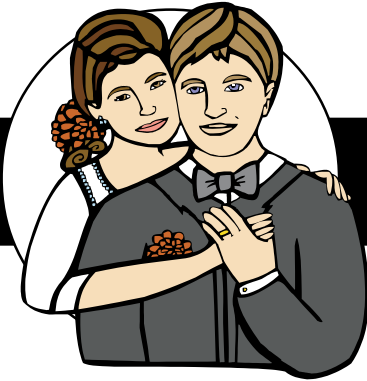
QUESTIONS

Matt. 5:32; 19:9; Isa. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:18,19

- 1.Can any divorce take place without sin on the part of someone involved?
- 2.Give some reasons why divorce is no longer considered a shame.
- 3.List three evils in society to which divorce has contributed.
- 4.How will some try to get Christians to compromise moral principles regarding marriage and divorce?

Acts 20:20,26-28; 2 Tim. 2:2; 4:1-4; Gal. 1:8,9; Amos 3:3

- 5.To what extent are preachers required to preach about marriage and divorce?
- 6.What responsibility do elders have in regard to the flock concerning marriage and divorce?
- 7.What must *every* Christian demand regarding all teaching done on marriage and divorce?
- 8.What important principle must parents emphasize in teaching children about marriage?
- 9.Name at least one thing that is necessary to make any marriage and home what they ought to be?



The Family Circle

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Together Forever

Paul wrote, “The woman which hath a husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth” (Rom. 7:2). Of course the same obligation is bound upon the husband. This has always been God’s will or the human race in spite of exceptions granted by Moses and the one exception given by Jesus (Matt. 19:8,9). It is one man for one woman and one woman for one man if we are to truly please God. And since this is true it certainly is wise for both men and women to enter into marriage advisedly. Long before the wedding each one must:

1. *Be absolutely sure that both have a scriptural right to marry.* The only real way to eliminate the curse of divorce and remarriage that blights the nation and the church is to *prevent it!* Indeed, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” So, regardless of *her* failure as a housekeeper, her insolence and arrogance, her unlovable and unlovely characteristics, she cannot be “put away” scripturally except it be for fornication. And only for the same reason can the husband be put away, regardless of his laziness and unconcern, his hateful and mean ways, or his disappointing characteristics. That is, in each case neither party can scripturally qualify for remarriage unless the companion is guilty of fornication.

2. *Be fully determined to keep your companion.* Trial marriage will not do. To enter the marriage bond with reservations is almost sure to produce failure. Each must realize that the relationship and companionship will not always be perfect. Trials may come in the form of poverty or even in the form of wealth. There may be problems with the children or with the in-laws; there may prove to be vital incompatibilities that must be rectified and overcome. *But patience and perseverance will win out, not because they were perfectly mated or totally suited to each other at the beginning, but because they were both determined to have a good marriage.*

3. *Be prepared, each of you, to give your heart, your body and your life to your companion.* Remember that Paul wrote, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife . . .” (Eph. 5:31). This does not mean you should forget your parents or that you may neglect them, but it does mean that you now recognize a greater responsibility to your marriage companion than to any other person in the world. Too many marriages have failed because one partner failed to cut the apron strings of father and mother. Make your association with your companion the highlight of every day, the release from every tension, the healing for your hurts, the joy of your heart, and the source of true peace of mind. Reciprocate every tender caress, cherish every gentle word, extend every kindness and excuse every weakness.

If you are a Christian, you will need the companionship of one who is of like precious faith. Together you can supplement the strength of each other. If you live a life of love and peace together, Satan’s darts will be quite impotent against you. It cannot be very wrong to say that families that pray together stay together! If you are both Christians it will help you to live together happily and it will enable you to die without that terrifying horror of eternal separation.

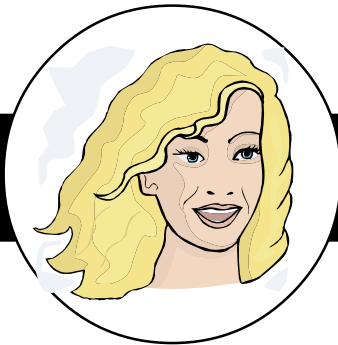
But do not develop a false security. Success is not guaranteed just because you marry a Christian. Being Christians does not automatically make the two of you totally compatible. Each human will must bend a little, many personal traits must be modified and true love must battle courageously against envy, jealousy, selfishness, self-will and pride. Total Christ-likeness would certainly make for certain success, but none of us are perfectly Christ-like! Even the best of men and women, the most faithful to the Lord, may have personal characteristics that

make them somewhat unlovable. Yes, our mutual faithfulness to God is essential, but that *alone* does not assure joyful togetherness. But when both are Christians and both are faithful to each other, then wise and dedicated devotion to each other will guarantee lasting success and continuing happiness.

QUESTIONS

Rom. 7:2; Matt. 19:8,9; Eph. 5:31; Rev. 2:20

- 1.How long did God intend for a marriage to last?
- 2.When did God's law regarding marriage begin?
- 3.Has God ever changed His attitude toward the design of marriage?
- 4.Why is there need to make certain both persons in a marriage have a scriptural right to marry?
- 5.Why wouldn't "legal right" be enough in all cases where divorce is sought?
- 6.What do the Scriptures teach about the relationships with parents after a couple has married?
- 7.Who should a Christian marry and why?
- 8.List some things a Christian brings to a marriage that a companion who is not a Christian would have difficulty understanding and appreciating in regard to convictions?
- 9.Why can one not assume that marrying a Christian will automatically mean a successful marriage and home?
- 10.Discuss how teaching error on divorce and remarriage could be teaching the Lord's people to commit fornication.



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The Weaker Vessel

In very generic terms Peter admonishes husbands regarding their treatment of wives. He says, “Ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). Paul very specifically states that “the head of the woman is the man” (1 Cor. 11:3). This is God’s arrangement. It was not imposed upon humanity by some despotic ruler nor by some backward society. Neither was it imposed by some religious system. Indeed it is clear that “neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Cor. 11:9). In God’s infinite wisdom He arranged that “the husband is the head of the wife” (Eph. 5:23).

But before some modern women are completely “turned off” by the above remarks, let us be reminded that “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:11). God’s arrangements for man and woman are not arbitrary or one-sided. It is His desire that our relationship be bilateral, that is, reciprocal. So we can briefly outline the husband’s duty as follows:

1. *The husband is the head of the family circle and must not neglect nor decline his responsibility.* Let him think of this arrangement as an assignment of duty, not just a grant of power. He must not rule his house as an autocrat, a dictator, or a tyrant, but he is to rule by guiding, by giving direction to the family, by good stewardship of his opportunity. He should exercise exemplary and dynamic leadership in the home: that is, he should guide his household by his own model behavior and with enthusiasm.

2. *In his treatment of his wife he will recognize that she is indeed physically weaker than he.* He will therefore not impose undue hardship upon her that would unnecessarily burden or break her body. Thus, he will nurse her when she is sick, he will shield her before and after childbirth and he will guard and protect her against evil people and wicked ways. He will treat her as a tender and fragile plant, as a delicate and precious flower. He will give her strength to lean upon and courage to imitate. He will try to satisfy her every emotional need and will not withhold from her the joys and satisfactions that are a very real part of the marriage relationship (see 1 Cor. 7:3-5).

3. *The husband will recognize that he and his wife may share the most precious relationship of all: their mutual fellowship with God.* They are “heirs together of the grace of life.” He is not superior to her in God’s sight. For her Jesus died, as well as for him. They have an equal hope for eternity. Their God-given responsibilities are not identical, their physical capacities are different and their functions in the family circle are definite and distinguishable. But in a very real and significant sense they are truly equal. They are full partners in God’s design for human development and happiness. Neither is superior nor inferior; neither is better nor worse; neither is more nor less important. They are equal beneficiaries of God’s grace of life and equal participants in His plan for humanity.

Christ: The Husband’s Example

Yes, Christ is married, too (Rom. 7:4). The church is the bride of Christ, and He loved the bride so much that He gave Himself for her (Eph. 5:25). Paul says that husbands should love their wives even as Christ loved the church. But some may say that wives are not always so lovable. It is true. In fact, they are so much like husbands in that respect! Indeed, we are all human beings, and often hard to love because we become quite unlovable. But

Christ loved all of us, even though we are human and even when we deserved no love. In spite of our unlovely natures, He loved us, so surely we can love our companions even with their imperfections, and especially when we realize we have so many imperfections ourselves.

If husbands would love their wives as wholeheartedly and as totally as Christ loved the church, this attitude alone would probably solve most of the difficulties in family circles. Out of his love, for her, and as a consequence of his devotion to her, would probably come a reciprocal affection from her. Thus, both would demonstrate mutual love, and not merely declare it; thus, peace and joy would be reflected in the home. The parade to the divorce courts could be significantly decreased, I believe, if each companion would nourish and cherish the affection of the other instead of taking it for granted.

Most discontented husbands who complain of too little attention from their wives and who yearn for more affection from their companions would probably not need to see a lawyer if they would recognize the principles of this chapter and would give cheerful response to these ideals. Just as he desires his wife to continue to be attractive to him and to charm him with affection, romance and love, he must respond to her needs and appeal to her emotions with gentleness, kindness and with expressions of appreciation for her. If a husband counts his marriage precious, then he will not be wasting time when he frequently shows the same tenderness in later years that he did on the honeymoon. One woman expressed it like this:

**“I know your love is greater now,
Than ever in our courtship days:
Somehow you show it in a thousand different ways:
But sometimes I think wistfully,
Of how nice it was when you loved me less,
And told me so more frequently.”**

In our next chapter we shall consider some pitfalls that vex many families and that thus become very real factors in the crisis at the crossroads.

QUESTIONS

1 Pet. 3:7; 1 Cor. 11:3,9,11; Eph. 5:23,25; Rom. 7:4

- 1.How is the word “vessel” used in reference to wives? (Compare: 2 Cor. 4:7; Acts 9:15.)
- 2.In what way is the Holy Spirit saying that woman is “weaker”?
- 3.List God’s order of headship and explain how this applies to husbands, wives and families.
- 4.What is the significance of the statement “heirs together of the grace of life”?
- 5.Explain the phrase “neither is the man without the woman.”
- 6.How do the God-given roles of husbands and wives differ?
- 7.How does Christ serve as an example to husbands?
- 8.List some things that promote “mutual, reciprocal love” between husbands and wives.
- 9.List some things that will show that a husband is treating his wife as “the weaker vessel.”



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Home Wreckers

In each of the past two years, there were more than a million divorces in America. Of all those who marry today, as many as half will end in divorce. This chapter will be devoted to discussion of some things that cause divorce or that otherwise wreck marriages. Of course we can only consider a few such causes, but it is hoped that at least a few people will be better prepared to withstand the prevailing trends so that a few more marriages may indeed endure. These items of destruction we shall mention need to be recognized *before marriage* and also afterward. “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” Dangers must be recognized before they materialize into explosive weapons of destruction in family circles.

1. *Accumulative quarreling.* Virtually every marriage is characterized by some disagreements; some of these differences eventuate in arguments or quarrels. But such arguments do not usually bring separations. Certainly they need not cause serious trouble. But *accumulative quarreling* may destroy the marriage. This is the kind of argument in which one or both may keep bringing up old differences, adding one quarrel upon another. In such cases old wounds never have time to heal but are opened with fresh irritation again and again. We must forgive and forget! Let bygones be bygones! If you must argue today, do not look back upon the last quarrel. Let every hasty, angry word of yesterday be forgotten. Let no burning embers remain in your heart from yesterday’s argument. In other words, do not add fuel to an old flame!

2. *Unwise familiarity.* The social and economic structure of our society, especially that which has developed since World War II, provides too much temptation to too many people. Because men and women work together in very close proximity, those associations that should be only casual often become intimate and frequently lead to overwhelming temptation and also to jealousies. It has been said that “familiarity breeds contempt” and in this case familiarity becomes too intimate and that intimacy leads to passion and lust. This has led to tragic immoral corruption. Almost every town has been rocked by such scandals, and every city contains great numbers of people who have thus fallen. The crude, vulgar jokes about executives and their secretaries are not amusing to good people, but the sordid pictures they paint are too often true-to-life regarding many people in all kinds of occupations. And the special point I want to make here is to urge every reader who counts his marriage precious to be absolutely sure that regardless of his work and the necessary proximity to others working with him that he does not permit himself the luxury of intimacy! It will be much better to have been considered cool and aloof than to have been made another victim of too much familiarity.

3. *Unfulfilled emotional needs.* Paul admonished, “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be by consent for a time. . . that Satan tempt ye not” (1 Cor. 7:5). Yet many marriage counselors tell us unsatisfied emotions is a major cause of separation and divorce. One partner may think only in terms of *receiving* emotional satisfaction and of fulfilling *his own* passionate desires. But, without taking either for granted, each must give real consideration to the needs of the other, and this must be done freely, even enthusiastically, and certainly not reluctantly. In fact, therein (that is, in satisfying the companion) lies one of the greatest joys of the marriage relationship.

If quarrels are settled and the matter is dropped, if each spouse conducts himself (or herself) in such a way, at all times—at work and at play, at home and away—so as to deserve the trust and confidence of the companion, and if each wholeheartedly participates in every marriage relationship so as to please and satisfy the other, then

most other troubles and problems will be overcome. And remember, when there is a joyful home life, other things will usually be all right. Solomon said, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

Solomon also said, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" and I am convinced that the wife that finds a good husband has not done all that bad either! We are made for each other and it is God's intent that we share the most precious and the most rewarding of all human relationships. But God's intent can only be fully realized when each can face the other with a clear conscience, a clean heart and a pure body.

Furthermore, the greatest success cannot be attained in the marriage companionship merely because of romantic appeal, emotional release or even because of a passive fidelity that precludes unfaithfulness to the spouse. Rather, to assure success, each partner must live every day by a solemn commitment that we made before the wedding and that we reiterate constantly thereafter. This determination must include tolerance for the faults of a companion, patience with the other's weaknesses and compassionate kindness for one another. Satan tries constantly to wreck your marriage, you know, and he is wise to all the subtle temptations and all the aggravating frustrations which the world can cast in your pathway. The devil will be happy if he can make you unworthy of the love and trust of your companion, and he will be just as glad if he can make you unwilling to forgive an unworthy spouse! He wants to destroy the real sanctity of your home and the peace and harmony you should have there, and he does not care how he does it. Besides that, he knows that you are the only one that can prevent that destruction. Do not let him get a foothold in your family circle! Watch out for the little things that can become home wreckers!

QUESTIONS

Eph. 4:26,31,32; Mk. 11:25,26; 1 Cor. 15:33; 1 Cor. 7:3-5; 10:12

1. How is every Christian to handle anger and wrath?
2. If we expect God to forgive us, what must we be willing to do?
3. How would the instruction about bitterness apply to the family?
4. What warnings should even be given to strong Christians regarding associations with people of the world? Is there also a warning regarding too intimate a friendship developing among friends in Christ?
5. What responsibility does the husband have to the wife (and the wife to the husband) in matters relating to the sexual relationship of marriage?
6. List some things you can do to promote the trust and confidence of your companion in you.
7. Name some positive things that each partner must do to promote and keep the commitment to make a marriage successful.



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Stop the Clock

Undoubtedly Americans, including many of God's very own people here, are rushing madly and blindly into hell. Besides that, we are often guilty of so abusing the twenty four hours of each day that we get very little real satisfaction in this life and actually fill our days and nights so full of events that are really quite inconsequential that we cannot even appreciate the beauty of living. For instance:

1. When we had to travel several miles in a horse drawn vehicle, gospel meetings usually lasted two or three weeks and were attended by multitudes. Now we travel in fast automobiles, reaching our meeting place in a few minutes of very comfortable travel, but we have time for only five or six nights of meetings and that is rapidly being reduced to two or three nights. Today the farmer's cows are milked by a machine, the bookkeeper's tabulations are done by calculator and/or computer, the mechanic does not repair a faulty part—he just replaces it with a new one, the housewife's dishes are washed by a machine and the laundry that used to take all day now is done in two hours or less. We are surrounded by "time saving" devices for the home, the factory, the farm, yet we seem to have less and less time to devote to people—call it "people time," if you will!

2. Husbands and wives do not spend enough time together. Even the little time they do have together is frequently shared with other people so that the marriage partners still have little real communication with each other. In consultations with couples I am often amazed to notice how little husbands and wives know of each other's desire, activities or even whereabouts. Businessmen frequently pursue success so avidly that they lose contact with the family. Wives become so devoted to soap operas, card parties, club meetings, bargain sales, etc. that homemaking is neglected. (At this point it may be well to admonish preachers. Of course we must go everywhere preaching the Word. We must be true to this commitment we have made. But, for the sake of our marriages, to assure the love and respect of our companions, to prevent temptation and jealousy, we must save time to be with our companions. Remember, there are all kinds of ways and circumstances to preach the gospel, far and near, but there is only one woman for you! You need her and she needs you. You will not have made the fruitful use of your life if you are gone from—separated from your wife—almost all the time and then lose your marriage!)

3. Parents frequently spend too little time with their children, especially in a private, family-circle atmosphere. The following story is lifted from *Saturday Evening Post* magazine, and though it was meant as a joke, it represents a serious circumstance: At the dinner table the wife of the inveterate golfer said, "Junior told me that he caddied for you this morning!" "That's it!" exclaimed the golf addict, "I knew I'd seen that kid somewhere before!"

If you are interested in the security of your family circle, then give it more time—that is, deliberately apportion more of your time to the activities of the family. And I do not mean you should just sit in the same room looking at the same television programs, but I mean really live together: work, play, sing, pray and talk together.

Husbands and wives need to *stop the clock* long enough to get acquainted *again* (and the same thing applies to parents and children). And by this figurative expression I mean we need to *make time stand still*—that is, we need to withdraw somewhat from the "rat race"—from the pent-up turmoil of our high-speed way of life today in order to provide a home atmosphere that is in harmony with God's intent for us.

Of course I am aware that the business structure, the educational system, the recreational emphasis and the

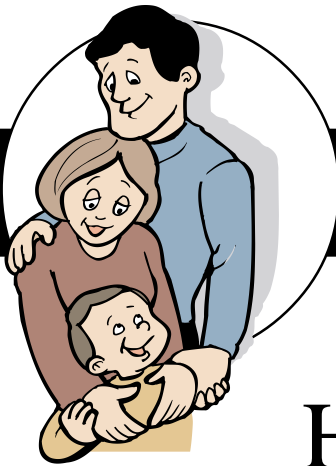
way of life in the home all demand our own participation to the fullest extent and with the maximum of time for each. But we must gladly refuse those demands! Any business, any employment, any vocation that demands so much of our time that we must neglect the family should be rejected or at least minimized somewhat. Any school arrangement that does not allow time for home life is not a good educational venture. Any recreation that isolates us from the family circle, whether we are participants or spectators in the sports, is excessive for our benefit. Any social system that invades the private home life of a family should be abandoned.

The togetherness that is needed in the homes of America and in the family circles of God's people may require that we figuratively hang out a sign on our front door, "Do Not Disturb." It may demand that we pull the electric plug on the TV set, cut the cord on the telephone, reduce our demands for more and more money, sell the "second" car, and generally reduce the tensions, frustrations and excessive demands on our time that keep the family apart. (These specifics are symbolic, you understand, but they represent a real, and actual need for self-discipline for the entire family.) The old saying suggests that "Time heals many wounds." In this case I suggest that "time *together*" will heal much what ails the families of our land and of the Lord's people. Take time to live and to love in the family circle—for your joy and for God's glory.

QUESTIONS

Eph. 5:15,16; Col. 4:5; Ps. 90:12; Eccl. 12:1

1. What is involved in "redeeming the time"? How can this be applied to the marriage relationship?
2. Why do people seem to have less time for one another today?
3. Why do families spend less and less time doing things together?
4. List some things that the family can do together that will promote family togetherness and harmony.
5. Why is "time together alone" so important to a married couple when there are so many people to be with and things to do?
6. List some things that "*family* time together alone" will accomplish for the entire *family* circle.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Home Security

An abundance of mutual love is the greatest safeguard for the marriage. This is not a small, superficial love that flies out the window as soon as poverty comes in the door, nor is it so weak that it is pushed aside even when wealth comes to husband and wife. But it is a deep, abiding love that overcomes every obstacle and that prevails over every problem. It contributes to understanding, it assures patience, and it rises above envy and jealousy.

This love of which I now write must be mutual if it is to be a major factor in success. Too many wives have given themselves to a lifetime of devotion to a man who could hardly have cared less. And some men may have spent a lifetime serving a woman who loved everything in the world except her husband. Rejected love and/or neglected love may indeed turn cold, so a one-sided love is not an assurance of success at all, for it may soon be a marriage without any love at all.

Understand what I say: do not assume that your own love alone will suffice, for if your spouse does not reciprocate with a meaningful and responsive love for you, then your own love may actually become tired and sick and may die. Let each companion nurture, cultivate and shield his own love, and also that of the spouse. Never take love for granted, for we are told that it is only a fine line which separates love and hate, and that love lost may soon be hatred. If you do not believe this, please observe those who now demonstrate real hatred for those whom they loved so much only a short time ago.

Factors

Love is like a roaring lion that will drive away the enemies of peace and tranquility, but at the same time it is like a delicate orchid that can be crushed with one blow and that can hardly survive neglect. Love will survive quarrels and arguments, if genuine peace is made afterward. Indeed, love will endure offenses, if humble apologies are offered and if actual reconciliation is achieved. Remember, there is no ointment that will heal so well the wounds that come to every marriage as the healing balm of a sincere “I’m sorry.”

But successful marriages must overcome the devastating blight of materialism. Dollars and cents, farms and factories, houses and bank accounts, cars and furniture—these and many other material things become stumbling blocks over which many marriages trip. The obsession to get, to have, to keep, to spend, to use and to flaunt drive some husbands to disaster and some wives to ruin. When the wife will not be content with the husband’s support, when she nags him for more and more and more, when she spends more than he can pay and when she drives him out to work two jobs, etc., she may indeed be driving a wedge in the family circle. Likewise, when the husband spends for foolish and hurtful things—for drink, for gambling, for too many cars that are too fancy, and for many other unnecessary items that deprive the family of important things, he thus may be signing the death certificate for his home life.

The precious marriage joys cannot be bought with money nor can they be maintained with the things money can buy. But obsession for money and for its purchasing power may indeed buy failure. The country is full of people whose marriages were wrecked by neglect which resulted from materialistic pursuits. It would be safe to assume that a high percentage of marriage failures are among those who are successful financially, but whose success resulted from undue devotion to money-making with its consequent neglect of family “togetherness.”

Careers

Occasionally we hear of a marriage that was saved because someone gave up a lucrative, attractive and/or desirable career. But more frequently we hear of marriages that were wrecked because someone would not give up such aspirations. Home is often sacrificed on the altar of fame and prominence. Souls are cast adrift, without the chart and compass that good home circumstances should provide, all because someone determined to maintain a career at all cost.

Any career that separates the husband and wife too much— or, for that matter, the parents from the children—is not a wise career to pursue. It can, at best, bring only worldly success that soon vanishes away, and at worst it can bring eternal ruin in hell because it has ruined the marriage, the home, and even the character.

Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mt. 6:33). Paul said, “...seek those things which are above...Set your affections on things above” (Col. 3:1,2). For husbands and wives and for fathers and mothers, devotion to the highest ideals of the family circle is one way of seeking “the things which are above.”

Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” (Mt. 16:26). We could safely say, “What is a man profited (or a woman either) if he gains the whole world and loses his family?” He will have lost most of life’s satisfactions, and most of all, he will have placed his eternal soul in jeopardy.

QUESTIONS

1 Pet. 1:22; 1 Jn. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Heb. 13:5; Luke 12:15; Col. 3:1,2; Matt. 16:26

1. Relate “unfeigned love” and “love...with a pure heart fervently” as they apply to brethren; to the family.
2. List some ways love may be “rejected” without outright unfaithfulness.
3. How “fragile” is love? Discuss the dangers of “neglect” to love.
4. How can loving the things of the world destroy “home security”?
5. What lesson do all family members need to learn about the “security” of material possessions?
6. How does the “desire to be rich” destroy many people, and thus many families?
7. Discuss how the desire for “independence, freedom and a separating career” on the part of many wives and mothers affect the family unit.
8. How is putting marriage and family above a career and financial security one way of “seeking things above”?
9. How might one “gain” to provide for financial security and still “lose”?
10. Discuss the danger of our possessions “possessing” us.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Fathers of Our Flesh

From the very beginning God ordained that the husband should be the head of the house and, in that position, he should exercise responsibility in guiding the entire family. His duty in such does not include harsh dictatorial rule but it does include diligent dedication to the tasks of oversight. Even Paul admonished, “Fathers provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Thus Paul established three principles of fatherhood:

1. Generally it is the father, not the mother, who should shoulder the responsibilities of oversight. Fathers are to set the course of action for the whole family. They are to chart the direction of family behavior. Fathers cannot please God if they relinquish their rights nor if they try to shift their obligations. Neither mothers, school teachers, preachers nor any others can replace the father as custodian of family life.

2. But fathers are to direct their families with discretion and wisdom, lest they be provoked to wrath. Decisions must be studied and wise, fair and just. The father’s conduct and character must be such that he deserves respect and that his word is honored in the family circle. With kindness and humility, yet with resolution and firmness he must exercise patient, loving leadership in the home that will inspire the children to follow and to obey without rebellion or malice.

3. The nurturing that children must receive is to be provided by the father—that is, he must conduct the family affairs in such a manner that the total impact of family life will be spiritually beneficial. Everything that relates to the development of the child is included in “nurturing,” and the emphasis is to be “in the Lord,” that is in learning, appreciating and applying the will of God. Over and above his duty as a provider for the physical necessities of the family, the father is to be the provider of spiritual nourishment and exercise.

Heb. 12:8,9 (“We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence”) suggests proper action for the father and at the same time proper response by the children. But the “reverence” or respect that is suggested must be earned by the father through the integrity, honesty, justice and consistency of the correction he administers. And perhaps most failures in this regard are not from lack of ability but from lack of devotion to the duties of fatherhood.

Edgar A. Guest said, “There are fathers who are busy and so weighted down with cares, that they haven’t time to listen to a little child’s affairs.” Indeed, undoubtedly the greatest weakness of modern fatherhood is the unwillingness to look upon the responsibilities with sufficient seriousness and devotion. Parental neglect must rank as the blight of our society today, the greatest cause of delinquency, the source of rebellion and the cause of failure in the family circle. Fathers curse the times in which we live, blame the government, accuse the school system and look everywhere for an alibi for failure, yet, the cause of their parental failures lies in their own hearts, their own lives, and their own conduct.

We do not know what kind of life Enoch lived before he became a father, but afterward the Bible tells us “And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah...” (Gen. 5:22). Joshua demonstrated the proper attitude and the determination to lead his family when he said to the people, “Choose you this day whom you will serve . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh. 24:15). Likewise, Cornelius “...feared God with all his house” (Acts 10:2), showing that his duties as a Roman officer did not prevent fulfillment of his responsibility to his family.

The purpose of this chapter is not to try to list all the big and little things that are involved in proper fatherhood, not to spell out every detail of specific obligations, for these vary from one father to another and even from one child to another, and none of us knows all the answers. But the purpose of this chapter is to try to get fathers to realize their God-given obligations. I believe such men will then be fully capable of discharging their duties—if they can just be challenged to devote themselves to the task. Fathers who really want to guide, lead and nurture their children *will find the right way!* Sincerity of purpose is much more important than a familiarity with all the books men may write on the subject of parenthood.

As we look to the future of our country and especially to the future of the Lord's church, we must look to the parents—not to the children as so many would have us believe. Indeed,

*The lambs will follow the sheep, you know,
Wherever the sheep may stray,
When the sheep go wrong, it will not be long,
Till the lambs are as wrong as they.
And so for the sheep we earnestly plead,
For the sake of the lambs, today,
If the sheep are lost, what a terrible cost,
The lambs will have to pay.*

—Anonymous

Say not, my friend, that our children hold the future in their hands. Rather let us acknowledge that we, the parents, do indeed hold in our hands the earthly and eternal destinies of our children. If they (the children) are the men and women of tomorrow, we (the parents) are determining what those men and women will be.

QUESTIONS

Gen 18:18,19; Deut. 6:7; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; Heb. 12:8,9; Gen 5:22; Josh. 24:15; Acts 10:2

1. What did God say Abraham would do, as a father, in rearing his children?
2. According to the law of Moses, what did God require parents to do in teaching their children His laws?
3. In the family, who is specifically charged with the responsibility of bringing up the child?
4. What does “nurture and admonition of the Lord” involve?
5. How might a child be “provoked to anger” and thereby become discouraged?
6. What will cause a child to “reverence” his or her father?
7. Discuss the significance of Enoch's “walking with God” after he begat Methuselah.
8. What decision did Joshua make for his family?
9. What was the result of the influence of Cornelius on his family?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Mother: The Heart of the Family

As surely as Paul declared that the husband is *the head* of the wife, and thus that he is indeed the head of the family circle, we must also agree that the wife (and mother) is *the heart* of the family. The poet said it so well when he wrote: “*The hand that rocks the cradle, Is the hand that rules the world.*”

Nations rise and fall, empires prosper or crumble, and men are stirred to greatest accomplishments or they are driven to shameful failure, depending upon the influence of wives and mothers. Perhaps it is correct to say that no human being stoops so low as the immoral, base, promiscuous mother. Jezebel, the wife of Ahab (1 Ki. 19:2) is recognized as symbolic of all that is evil—of deceit, mischief, lying, malice and injustice. Delilah destroyed a strong man with her deceit; Solomon’s great wisdom did not survive the subtle and evil ways of women. Someone has correctly said, “Solomon didn’t have a thousand wives; a thousand wives had him.”

Evil women who stoop so low are put in contrast to those who rise so high! Perhaps no one rises to such a high plane of moral goodness, compassionate loyalty and dynamic influence as does the godly mother. Mary accompanied her Son all the way to persecution, rejection and to the cross. Hannah molded the life of an infant into a lad who was then possessed with the character to make him one of the greatest prophets of all time (1 Sam. 1:27,28). Some author, unknown to me, said,

*Paint her as you see her, artist, Let the lines and wrinkles show,
And the silver hair that crowns her, Like a halo’s beautiful glow.
Can you picture on your canvas, All the years of sacrifice,
How she tended well her household, Ever counting naught the price?
Let your brushes tell the story, Of her patient love and care,
Mingle love with joy and sorrow, Just as life has put them there.
Blend your colors softly, artist, Face her toward the setting sun,
Smiling, calm, serene and peaceful, For her task is almost done.
Call the portrait simply, “Mother,” All the world will understand,
Nations thrive and empires prosper, Guided by her gentle hand.*

Motherhood is a great privilege—the crowning joy, the maximum happiness, the sublime fulfillment—for most women. Read the song of Hannah, rejoicing in motherhood (1 Sam. 2:1- 10). And perhaps the greatest privilege of motherhood is that of willing, voluntary and enthusiastic *sharing*. No human being is able to share with others as does a mother; she shares her body with another in order that she might conceive; she shares again, most significantly, with her unborn child, and then she shares her time, her energy, her talent—even her very heart—as she weeps and laughs, as she sorrows and rejoices with her child through the months and years of infancy, adolescence and youthfulness.

But motherhood also involves *obligation* as well as privilege. No task on earth requires more dedication, greater skill or fuller commitment. The responsibilities of motherhood are not fulfilled passively but they demand devotion to the highest ideals and patient perseverance over long years of time. Yet, especially today, in our sophisticated society, many mothers lack the will and the courage to face the realities of the family circle, and many falter and fail, not because of inability, but because of lack of endeavor. Edgar A. Guest said: “*There are*

Mothers who imagine, Life could give them if it would, Something richer, something better, Than the joys of motherhood.”

Perhaps it is safe to say that there is no human obligation that is less adaptable to substitution than motherhood. By that I mean that you can substitute for the teacher, the ball player, the policeman, the governor and almost anyone else, but no one has found an adequate substitute for mother’s love! (Foster parents do great work and are deserving of much praise, but no one knows better than they that they can never achieve every aspect of parenthood that belongs exclusively to the natural mother.)

The greatest writers and speakers of the ages have tried to capture the fullness of glory, the opportunity and the duty of motherhood, and all have failed to maximize it. Naturally, then it is utterly impossible for me to do so, and I shall not even try. So in this chapter, I am not trying to specify every minute detail of duty that comes to mothers, nor am I trying to spell out the intricate items that separate between success and failure, between joy and sorrow. I am simply trying herein to arouse mothers to their God-given duties and to challenge them to respond to the teaching of God’s Word regarding their responsibilities.

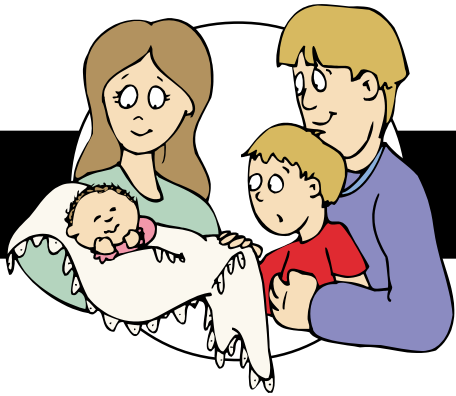
Study with me two vivid contrasts: We read, “Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother’s name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counselor to do wickedly” (2 Chron. 22:2,3). But for a complete contrast, notice: “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded in thee also” (2 Tim. 1:5).

Happy are we, and happy the home, when we find a dedicated father and a devoted mother living, loving and laboring *in unison* to fulfill the duties and to enjoy the opportunities of parenthood.

QUESTIONS

1 Tim. 5:14; 1 Sam. 1:27,28; 2:1-10; 2 Chron. 22:2,3; 2 Tim. 1:5

1. What is meant by “guide the house”?
2. Discuss how this differs from being the “head of the house.”
3. What impact do you feel mothers have on the world?
4. List some reasons why some women fail at the responsibilities of motherhood.
5. List some of the God-given duties of motherhood.
6. How does the counsel of a wicked mother affect the child?
7. What had Timothy’s mother and grandmother done for him in raising him?
8. Discuss the differences in the roles of the mother to that of the father, as God has ordained in His word.
9. List some things mothers must do to aid their children in becoming children of God.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Children: An Heritage of the Lord

Our children did not ask to be born—they did not have the privilege of choosing whether or not they would enter this earthly pilgrimage. Since they are here by our choice, not theirs, this not only provides us with joyful opportunities and pleasant associations, but it also imposes upon us grave and enduring obligations.

The Psalmist said, “Children are an heritage of the Lord.” If I understand this passage it means that we receive our children as an inheritance from God. He gave us the natural processes for reproduction and, furthermore, He gives to each human child that immortal spirit that separates it from the animals of the earth and enables it to function in His prearranged design. Remember, there is a little bit of God in each one of us; it is this quality that constitutes us the beloved of God and that enables us to accomplish His purposes. Our children are also possessed of this quality, and thus they are the gift of God to all parents.

This does not mean that every human being must necessarily become a parent in order to please God. Both Jesus and Paul pleased the Lord but were not parents. And at this point I must mention two false concepts regarding motherhood that are drawn from a mistaken interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:15 (“... she shall be saved in childbearing”):

1. Some seem to believe that if a woman bears children she must certainly be pleasing to God, but of course this is not so. He may indeed be very displeased with some who bear children by sinful means. In and of itself, child-bearing does not bring God’s favor.
2. Others say that child-bearing alone does not bring God’s favor, but that it is one requirement for women who would please the Lord. But it is significant that Peter did *not* say, “You men must repent and be baptized, but you women must repent and be baptized and bear children.” Furthermore, Peter did *not* say, “You men must add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity, but you women must also add motherhood.” So, 1 Timothy 2:15 must mean (if I understand it) that God did recognize the woman’s guilt in the first sin (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:14) and He decreed that she—that is all women or women in general—would thereafter bear an additional burden which of course the man did not have to bear (from another view, though, he gave her a significant privilege which the man cannot have—her unique joy which is summed up in the word “motherhood” and which has a much more intimate meaning than “fatherhood”). Because the burdens of child-bearing were placed upon womankind, God placed no other requirement more than for men. Paul definitely showed that a woman does not have to bear children in order to please God (1 Cor. 7:36-38).

Reciprocal Honor

The family circle, ideally, includes various parts that each reflects honor upon the others. Grand-parents revel in the glory their grandchildren bring to them. Certainly in the proper home atmosphere the children bring honor to their parents, and conversely, the parents are a source of honor for the children (study Prov. 17:6; Mal. 1:6). It is a pity that many parents seem to look upon their children as a curse, or at least a nuisance (Isa. 49:15); it is equally pitiable that many, many children look with scorn and contempt upon their parents.

In spite of the permissiveness that prevails in family life in general today, it is possible for parents to command the respect of their children. I do not mean that they can simply order the children to respect them, but

they can establish and maintain their own character as well as a total family circum-stance that will most certainly secure mutual and reciprocal respect throughout the household.

It is unfair of parents to bring children into this world and then throw up their arms in surrender to the evil forces that would alienate the children and destroy the security of the house. The attitude of helplessness that prevails among parents is without justification. Just as parents would gladly fight for the lives of the children, let them, with equal vigor and determination, fight for the respect of their children and for morals and character. Consider the following important principles (these are suggestions for parents who consider their children as the gifts of God and who want to have and hold the respect of those children):

1. *Be neither conceited nor demeaning of yourself.* That is, do not exalt yourself to your children, for they know very well that you are pretending to be that which you are not. At the same time, do not cast unnecessary reflections upon yourself, for the children will be disillusioned and may imagine a fault that you do not even have.

2. *By the same token you should not exalt the child, nor cast aspersions upon him either.* You can easily make of your child a conceited egotist with a repulsive personality, or, conversely, you can make of him a withdrawn, maladjusted introvert who may become bitter and depressed. Your child needs to know that you respect him, that you consider him a real person, not just a tax deduction, and that you love him so much that you will try to direct him in right ways even when such direction does not please him.

3. *Parents are to require obedience of their children.* Paul said they should obey (1) because it is right; (2) that it may be well with the child and (3) that he might live long on the earth (see Eph. 6:1-3). God established the family arrangement so that the children might benefit from the experiences of the parents. By obedience to them the journey through life will not always be pleasant or safe, but it will be better than in disobedience and safer than any other way. It is very important that parents not only require obedience, but that they teach the children, even from infancy, the reasons for such obedience. Every demand of the parents should be understood by the child as being right and not just arbitrary.

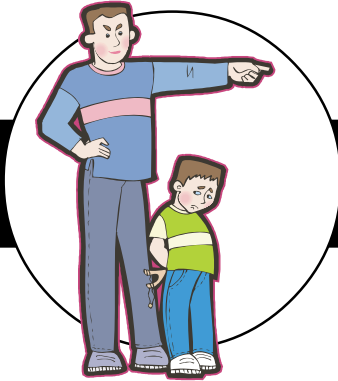
Some parents may say, "Why did God give me such a rebellious child?" No, God did not give you a rebellious child, but you may have built a character that does rebel. Your child is like a tender plant and you are cultivating, grooming and directing the development of that plant (child) every day. He will become what you make of him. Someone said, "*I took a piece of plastic clay, And gently fashioned it one day, And as my fingers pressed it still, It bent and yielded to my will. I came again when days were past, the bit of clay was hard at last, The form I gave it, still it bore, And I could change it nevermore. I took a piece of living clay, And gently formed it day by day, and fashioned with my power and art, A young child's soft and yielding heart. I came again when days were gone, It was a man I looked upon; He still that early impress wore, And I could change it nevermore.*"

Your child may be a piece of gold that you can make into a valuable coin, or he may be a tender orchid bulb that you can make into a beautiful flower. Make him into something that will bring glory to God and honor and joy to you.

QUESTIONS

Psalm 127:3; 1 Tim. 2:14,15; 1 Cor. 7:36-38; Rom. 1:28-32; Eph. 6:1-3

1. Define the word "heritage."
2. Must one become a parent in order to please God? Discuss 1 Tim. 2:15 and 1 Cor. 7:36-38.
3. What word (or phrase) in Rom. 1:31 fits those who look upon their children as a nuisance?
4. Give three reasons (listed in Eph. 6:1-3) that provide motivation for parents to require obedience of their children.
5. What is the difference between teaching a child the "reasons" for obedience and just being "arbitrary" as a parent?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

To Spank or Not to Spank

That parental discipline is necessary is so obvious that it need not be argued in this book. When Paul said to train up a child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, he certainly included giving direction to the younger lives. Without discipline a young dog or a young horse would develop into a useless, unruly animal. Unless someone gives direction to its development, a grape vine may produce much foliage and little fruit. Only by rigid discipline of its growth is the delicate orchid brought to maximum beauty. Almost everything must be disciplined!

So, without arguing the need for discipline, let us proceed to consider ways and means that are good and bad, that are productive or counterproductive. And even in this very personal, intimate family problem the Bible becomes our guiding light:

1. First, consider some negatives: Solomon said, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: and “A child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 13:24; 29:15). Many parents may have loved their children much, but they may have loved them unwisely. Some seem to think they show their love by permitting almost anything the child desires and by granting almost every request. They seem to think that love for the child requires that the parent overlook all wrong-doing and ignore every misdemeanor. But in God’s sight, such parental conduct is a demonstration of hatred for the child, not love.

2. Next let us consider some positives: Again Solomon said, “He that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Prov. 13:24). “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying” (Prov. 19:18). Then he said, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). We must not decline our obligation to correct the course of a child’s life.

We have passed through a permissive time in which many tried to avoid strict discipline for children, both in the home and in the school, especially anything resembling spanking. But it seems there may indeed be a change of attitude today—at least there are signs that a change may be coming. Not only has the Bible continually taught us the proper attitude in this regard, but surely we will have seen the havoc wrought by the permissiveness of the last three decades. Rebellion against fathers, rejection of mothers, hatred of home and disregard for all authority is demonstrated everywhere. Many of the youth have become obsessed with selfishness, arrogance and mad-at-the-world attitude.

Application Principles

Punishment, including spanking, is not very beneficial, in and of itself, unless it is administered with the right attitude and accompanies with the right action by the parents. For instance:

1. *Punishment should be, as nearly as possible, immediate.* A child, especially a small one, will not benefit by a delayed action. It is quite vain to delay the punishment and expect the child to get the lesson just because you remind him of what it is for.

2. *Punishment needs to be certain.* That is, a child needs to know what to expect if he is disobedient. If the parent is vacillating, sometimes punishing and sometimes ignoring the matter, then the real benefits of discipline are mostly lost. A spirit of risk—or the thrill or risking—may indeed develop if the child thinks he may disobey without punishment.

3. *Of course punishment must be fair and reasonable.* A child may be “provoked to wrath” (Eph. 6:4) if

he is punished unjustly and if he is abused. I hasten to add *he needs to be hurt*. If he is laughing all the while, you have failed to punish at all. But this hurt must not be cruel, inhumane treatment.. Most of all, he must be made to see that he deserves such punishment!

4. *Yes, if he is disobedient, spank him, good!* It ought to hurt him worse than it does you! Then, do not apologize for what you have done. Rather, let him have time to cry—and to submit. Then, when he shows remorse, as he surely will if he has been trained properly, smile with him or cry with him if the circumstance demands such, and take him into your arms in reconciliation.

We must recognize that each child is an individual and each one must be handled in the wisest way *for him*. We have all heard of the mother who told the teacher, “Don’t spank my child; spank the child next to mine and mine will get the lesson!” But that will not work. Among children in a family, while still recognizing individual natures, fairness demands that all be treated equally. What a pity it is to see several children grow up with excellent guidance and then see the last child, the baby, spoiled rotten! And sometimes when this occurs, even the older ones are “turned off” by the pampering of the baby brother or sister.

Finally, remember that *an ounce of punishment is worth a pound of threats*. Actually, threats only serve to harden the children and to instigate more trouble. I can remember when my children were young and the family traveled long distances, sometimes they became too noisy or quarrelsome while confined to such close quarters so long. Then I would say, “If you don’t get quiet, I’ll let you walk a while.” Of course they knew that I would not put them out on the highway! So my threat was an empty, useless one. Usually it was better to get them involved in some travel game or otherwise divert their attention from the little problem that caused the turmoil.

Meaningless Rules

Every discerning parent knows that there must be some rules in every family circle. And parents must have the ability and the wisdom to make the rules and to enforce them. But rules that are made but not enforced become counter-productive—they do harm, not good. If you tell Johnny, “No, you can’t watch that horror show on T. V.,” you should be prepared to require his obedience. If he can throw a tantrum and get by with it, and turn the T. V. on while you cry and whine and scold, you have lost that much of his respect. *Do not make rules you do not intend to enforce.*

Love your children; love them with a pure heart, but with a strong will that does not yield to childish rebellion. With sincere love, bind up the wounds in their bodies and in their hearts. Love them instantly and constantly, love them openly and affectionately, and then love them with the integrity and strength that will produce the kind of children that will be altogether lovable even long after they are no longer toddlers beneath your feet.

QUESTIONS

Prov. 29:15; 13:24; 19:18; 22:6; 23:14; 1 Sam. 3:13; Heb. 12:8,9; Eph. 6:4; Eccl. 8:11

1. List some things some parents mistakenly consider to be expressions of love.
- 2 What does the Holy Spirit call correction that is withheld?
3. What is a child called that is left to himself? Discuss parental neglect.
4. When should approval and reconciliation take place between parent and child.
5. What kind of child does permissiveness and lack of restraint produce?
6. Discuss “threats” and unenforced rules.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Goals and Priorities

We are all aware that today's children expect to "do their own thing;" that is, they want to exercise much more independence than that which characterized some other generations. Yet we also recognize that most parents do indeed have considerable influence regarding the aspirations and destinies of their offspring. First of all, many parents today are too busy to be bothered with concerns about the future of their children, so they actually help to determine what that future may be by their neglect. They allow others—teachers, associates, recruiters, etc. to woo their children into various activities and vocations without much home influence. But others do consider the matter seriously, yet fail just as miserably, because they set the wrong goals for their children.

It is not my intent to suggest that parents should choose the very occupation their children follow, but I do mean parents should so direct the character of the children that whatever occupation they have in later life will be an honorable one and will be pursued with fidelity to God. In choosing their occupation, children need to be taught that "any honest occupation is honorable" so long as it does not involve them or others in immorality.

But because many parents have been deprived in their childhood, they are determined to provide every luxury for their own children, and to do so they spoil the child and neglect him as well. In order to provide more "things" for their children—houses, cabins, automobiles, televisions, recreation rooms, pool tables, motorcycles, etc.—many times both parents are gone from home most of the time, working so hard and so long that personal attention is neglected and character building is forgotten. How many times have we heard it said, "I gave my kid everything he wanted and as soon as he was big enough he left home in rebellion."

Sources of Rebellion

It is not possible for me to suggest all the reasons for the prevalent rebellion we see among today's youth, but of one thing we can be sure: during childhood the parents did not provide a secure family circle! Materialism may have prevailed in the home. Parents must remember that love, respect and honor cannot be bought with money nor provided by the things that money may buy. A child's loyalty to the home and to the principles learned there will not be secured by supplying large sums of money or every worldly thing that money can purchase for the youngster. In fact, love, respect and loyalty usually come quite naturally in children who learn to share frugal living with their parents and who are guided by parents who think more of the family circle than they do of the almighty (?) dollar.

However, other parents go to another extreme that causes some rebellion. They may deprive their children of things which the children really need just so the parents may spend the money for their own materialistic pursuits. In other words, the family may be neglected as the parents pursue other attainments for themselves.

Educational matters may become a source of rebellion. Some parents may be so obsessed with desire for higher education for the children that they *make education a god*. Some children may have been relegated to "second class" because they did not want a college education. Furthermore, many youth are lost to the family and to the principles the parents desired because the children have not been properly prepared in heart and mind for the exposure to carnality, worldliness and infidelity which confronts them in most colleges and universities.

Pursuing the Objectives

It is one thing to set some goals for your children, and it is quite another thing to diligently pursue those objectives. Some parents simply wish their children may attain certain accomplishments. Other parents, more realistically, give their attention, time and talents in training the children to reach the desired goals. Let us enumerate some necessary steps and procedures for parents in their pursuit of success with their children:

1. Children must be trained while very young to demonstrate respect. This begins with respect for the parents, but also includes respect for other family members, for friends, for the police, for the teacher, for the unfortunate, for decency, etc. Other people's rights and property must be respected.
 2. Especially the children must be trained in respect for the Lord, the Bible, and the church. For instance, they must learn to respect special occasions. They must know how to behave in the Bible class and the assemblies of the saints. One reason some children give so much trouble in church services is that they have never been trained to sit! At home and at school, they constantly move as they may choose; thus, it is then difficult to get them to sit still in services. I am convinced that parents should set aside a period each day in which the family comes together, reads from the Bible and prays together. Besides the significant edifying benefit for all, the children will learn to sit still for 15 or 20 minutes, and they will soon be able to do the same in church services.
 3. Teach the children to be honest, and *why* they should be honest. Train them in modesty and teach them why they should be modest. Teach them to be kind and considerate, and why. Warn them of drink, drugs, fornication, sodomy and cigarettes, and show them *why* these things are wrong and why they should be avoided. Help them to see the great danger in "little thing"—little white lies, just one drink, etc.
 4. Take time to see the good in your child—and offer generous praise for every desirable quality and action. If he is a good boy, let him know you are aware of it, and that you appreciate it—and that you trust him to continue so.
 5. When he faces moral or spiritual conflicts in school, be firm in insisting that he do right and that you will defend him with school officials as he resists and refuses to be involved in dancing, near nudity and school programs that interfere with this religious life. In spite of evils that are increasingly prevalent in the public schools, I believe that faithful parents and well-trained children can overcome *if they will* and that they can do so in such a way as to usually win the respect of others and certainly to be able to have a happy school experience.
- Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Make that the cornerstone of the foundation in the life of your children. Let the words of Christ not only be your goal for yourself and for the children, but help the children to make those same words their objective in life also.

QUESTIONS

Luke 12:15; Matt. 22:37,28; Eccl. 12:13,14; 1 Thess. 4:11,12; Matt 6:33; Col. 3:16

1. How can parents guide their children in choosing an "honorable" occupation without actually choosing it for them?
2. What principle should parents teach their children about material things being regarded as a "goal" in life?
3. Discuss how some parent's "educational goals" for their children promote rebellion.
4. List several things children must be taught to respect.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Parenthood and Patterns

Perhaps no one will argue with me when I say that there is no power you can have over your children that is equal to the influence of your example. Yet it may be that it is in this respect the greatest failures occur. We may expect our children to be directed by what we say, yet, we may fail miserably to establish a strong influence over them because we do not “practice what we preach.” Actually, what we do speaks so loudly that they may not be able to hear what we say!

It has been said that “you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time.” Parents need to remember that one can hardly deceive his children at all. They may be better able to detect hypocrisy than can the neighbors and, in fact, though they may not understand the details of wrongdoing, they will usually know if something is wrong—if one is not what he claims to be.

But aside from the fact that children are often “turned off” by the hypocrisy they observe, we need to remember that they may indeed be greatly influenced for good by the example the parents set. Please note the significant words written by Herbert Fraser:

*To get his goodnight kiss, he stood beside my chair one night,
And raised his eager face to me, a face with love alight.
And as I gathered in my arms the son God gave to me,
I thanked the lad for being good, and hoped he'd always be.
His little arms crept 'round my neck, and then I heard him say,
Four simple words I shan't forget; four words that made me pray.
They turned a mirror on my soul, on secrets no one knew,
They startled me, I hear them yet—he said, “I'll be like you.”*

How well do I remember a cold day in 1945 or 1946 when I lived in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. My second son, Al, who was then just under school age, had gone with me to the Post Office. We crossed the wet street and stepped up on the dry sidewalk. Soon Al dropped behind me and then he said, “Daddy, do you know what I am doing?” I said, “No, what are you doing?” He replied, “I am walking in your steps.” You see, the soles of my shoes were wet and they left a dark imprint on the dry sidewalk. He was stretching his little legs as much as possible to try to step in each track I left. The incident left a deep impression on me. I thought, as I go down this street today, and down the pathway of life in the days and years to come, here is a little boy following me. He will go where I go, do what I do and be what I am! Ever since then I have been pleading with parents to recognize the power of their example. Somebody is following you. It is probably your son or daughter!

Children must see Christ-likeness in us in moral purity, in devotion to God, in faithfulness in worship, in love for the church, in unselfishness, generosity, kindness and in love for truth.

Parents, please ask yourselves, “How important will religious matters be to my children if they acquire the very same devotion that I have demonstrated before them?” Do they see that you put God first *all the time* (Matt. 6:33)? Does your example show them that your greatest concern is to reach heaven yourself and to help them and others reach that place too (Col. 3:1,2)?

I am sure fathers and mothers will find the right way to set a proper example before their children if those parents can just be very deeply impressed with the importance of such example. The following poem by some unknown author is used here to try to make such parents see more clearly:

*“Walk a little plainer, Daddy,” said a little boy so frail,
“I’m following in your footsteps, and I don’t want to fail.
Sometimes your steps are very plain, sometimes they are hard to see,
So walk a little plainer, Daddy, for you are leading me.”
“I know that once you walked this way, many, many years ago,
And what you did along the way, I’d really like to know.
For sometimes when I’m tempted, I don’t know what to do.
So walk a little plainer, Daddy, for I must follow you.”
“Some day when I will have grown up, you are like I want to be,
Than I will have a little boy, who will want to follow me.
And I would want to lead him right, and help him to be true,
So walk a little plainer, Daddy, for we must follow you.”*

Let every hour of every day be lived in such a manner that every word and every deed will lead some child in the right way. Parents, awake! Into your hands has been given those who are not only precious to you, but who are also very precious to God. Their eternal destinies are being determined right now—not by the school teachers, not by the police, not by the neighborhood in which they live, *but by you!* The kind of character you demonstrated before them will probably be the very kind they exhibit before the all-seeing eye of God. With all the wisdom you can acquire, teach them well. But most of all, lead them by your example: say the kind of pure words you want them to say; do the kind of deeds you want them to do; manifest the kind of attitude you want them to have. Yes, live the kind of joyful, enthusiastic, happy life of righteousness and holiness you want to see in them.

God bless all of you.

QUESTIONS

Rom. 2:21-24; Matt. 23:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:21; Phil. 3:17; Matt. 6:33; Col 3:1,2

1. If we are going to be one who “teaches another” (in this case, our children) what must we do first?
2. Discuss “consistency” and inconsistency” as it relates to that which parents “preach and teach” and what they practice.
3. How does “inconsistency” affect the spiritual development of the child?
4. Discuss the effect upon children of one teaching the child “right things” and therefore knowing right but not practicing them ourselves.
5. Whom should Christians set first as an example to follow? How can we apply this in the family unit?
6. Discuss Paul’s example to other Christians and how parents can benefit from such instruction.
7. Discuss how parents putting the “kingdom of God” *first* will help in establishing proper patterns in the family.
8. How does “seeking things above” fit into the establishing of scriptural patterns for the home.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Crisis Psychology

There is usually an atmosphere of crisis almost everywhere today. Pick up the daily paper and notice the headline. It is intended to stir deep interest as it appeals to consideration of some crisis. Watch the news on television and there will be an appeal to the dramatic, the sensational, and the alarming. Our behavior is largely, or at least significantly, influenced by the crisis attitude. Danger lurks about us, misfortune may befall us, trouble is prevalent; war, famine, pestilence, riot and disaster are everywhere. This is the crisis psychology we have learned to expect. Even in the advertising world the same tactics are used. We are told in screaming headlines and banner announcements that we have the opportunity of the “sale of the century” or “once-in-a-lifetime event” or that it is “Now or never!”

We may indeed tire of the kind of emphasis mentioned above, and we may actually become hardened and calloused against it so much so that we do not readily respond to it. For this reason we may need to deliberately project our minds into consideration of the spiritual and moral crisis that is the subject of consideration for this entire series of essays on “The Family Circle.” In other words, one of the gravest features of this very real crisis may be that most people, even most Christians, do not really recognize the nature and the extent of this crisis. Forgetting the various forms of crises that prevail in the secular world—political, economic, social—we do need to be motivated to react with excitement, with haste and with strength, to the deplorable conditions that do really constitute a crisis at the crossroads.

As long as hearts were broken by divorce, it did not prevail significantly, but now that it has become an accepted and rather normal pattern of life, and now that it is viewed without much alarm, it is destroying the very fabric of the family circle. Furthermore, as long as parents were shamed by rebellious children, permissiveness was uncommon. Now that rebellion is everywhere, parents have given up and have yielded to disobedience. Such conduct no longer constitutes a crisis to many parents!

Wake Up

But there is indeed a crisis, whether you realize it or not! We could well appropriate the words of Paul when he said, “It is high time to awake out of sleep” (Rom. 13:11). Beginning in the home, and then reaching out into the community, into school life and social affairs, as well as into spiritual activities, parents must realize the significance of the emergency that does exist and that may determine the eternal destiny of many.

The family circle must be made secure against separation. Perhaps no one factor can disturb the maturing process in children more significantly than the fear they may have that their parents may separate. It is not enough to simply endure each other and stay together. For the serenity the children need and deserve, they must lie down at night without fear that one parent will be gone tomorrow. There used to be a comic strip that portrayed the father and mother frequently engaged in quarrels, and the little child would say, “Papa love Mama?” (or was it, “Mama love Papa?”). And that is what every little child deserves: parents who do indeed love each other.

Children need the sense of security that can come only through exercise of proper oversight, direction and discipline by the parents. Permissiveness never produces security! A quivering, vacillating attitude on the part of the parents will produce only fear, uncertainty and/or distrust on the part of the children. Children need to know who is in command!

But children need affection, too. I am not enthused about the idea of fathers becoming buddies to their sons or mothers being pals to their daughters. I doubt that fathers should act like brothers to their sons or that mothers should act like sisters to their daughters. The fondness of a child for his parents should be of a different nature and quality than that which he has toward his brothers and sisters. And this attitude which I now describe and which I like to see in children may be cultivated by the parents through careful, wise and effective oversight of the children, and through a demonstration of love that includes firmness with kindness, perseverance with patience, reproof with humility, rebuke with gentleness and punishment with justice.

In the secular world around about us people may be quite complacent unless they are aroused by some sense of urgency, but in times of crisis they may respond enthusiastically and aggressively. Today, in the spiritual and moral realm, God's people must be made aware of the crisis conditions that usually exist. We are engaged in a life and death struggle—a warfare that is much more important than that which would destroy human lives, for in this effort we deal with immortal souls! And, most importantly, this warfare is not being waged on some far away field of battle, but right there in your own family circle— or right there where your family should constitute a real circle!

QUESTIONS

Heb. 3:13; Eph. 4:19,20; Prov. 13:34; 1 Pet. 5:8,9

1. How does living in a crisis-tension-prone society sometimes harden us to the moral and spiritual crisis facing the family circle?
2. What part does the “deceitfulness of sin” play in this lack of concern for the real problems facing the family?
3. When man is no longer sensitive to the divine pattern for all things, to what will he turn?
4. List three things that will lessen the “fear crisis” for children in the home.
5. Parental oversight should include:
 - a. Firmness with _____.
 - b. Perseverance with _____.
 - c. Reproof with _____.
 - d. Rebuke with _____.
 - e. Punishment with _____.
6. How does Satan gain by the failure of parents to recognize the spiritual and moral crisis facing families?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Home, the Vestibule to Heaven

In this long series of essays on the general subject of “The Family Circle” we have tried to show that the home is the cradle of civilization and the bulwark of the church. That is, nations rise and fall, prosper or fail, depending largely upon the quality of character those nations have as that character is represented in the family circles of the country. Likewise, churches grow and accomplish great service to God, or else they stalemate and fail in fruitfulness, depending upon the quality of righteousness that emanates from the family circles in the congregations.

But the purpose of this essay is to try to impress upon all of us that the home is the greatest influence to determine the eternal population of heaven. Of course, I hasten to stress that no one will reach heaven who has become accountable to God unless he has been led by the precious Word of God and, in an obedient faith has come into the body of Christ, the church of the Living God (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:17; 6:3,4,17,18; 1 Tim. 3:15; 1 Pet. 2:5). Remember, this essay is not intended to minimize the influence of the Word of God, nor the necessity of the church for which Christ died. But my purpose is to show that few indeed will receive the Word or obey the Lord aside from proper influence from the family circle, and for that reason I say the home is the vestibule to heaven.

Seedbeds

Parents are constantly preparing seedbeds in which the seed of the kingdom (Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23), the saving gospel, may be planted. In order to accomplish this preparation for fruitful harvest, parents must instill *three* dynamic principles into the minds of the children:

1. From infancy, children must be taught and trained in respect for authority. They must learn to respect the policeman, the teacher, the president, their parents, the law of the land and the law of God. By word and by example, parents must help the children to learn to give responsive and responsible honor to whom honor is due.
2. Parents must also train their offspring in basic and fundamental honesty. Of course this includes honesty with money, but far beyond that, it must include honesty with words, with people, with principles, with practice and with self. Deception and hypocrisy must be abhorred and avoided.
3. In the family circle the children must learn the God-given and eternal principles of morality. By the wise words and the pure deeds of their parents the children must be lifted far above the coarse, vulgar, profane language of the world. At the same time they must be led into brave and courageous action that may set them apart from the sinful conduct of the community.

Of course, parents who have the eternal welfare of their children at heart will teach them the stories and lessons of the Bible. But such Bible teaching will fall upon deaf ears if they are not first and foremost trained in the three basic principles enumerated in the numbered paragraphs above. And, significantly, sometimes our neighbors who are not real Christians may do a better job training their children than do many Christians. Even if they cannot teach them the gospel, if they train them in respect for authority, real honesty and morality, then when the youth hears the gospel his mind will be a proper seedbed, and he may certainly be receptive. Conversely, even if Christians teach their children to say the names of the apostles and the books of the Bible, and if they take them to Bible class regularly, but if they do not train them in those basic principles of respect for authority, honesty and morality, then there will be no fertile seeded and little likelihood of response.

Of course it is true that a few people rise above the bad environment in which they grew up and turn to God with fidelity. They rebel against the fighting, corruption and permissiveness of the early home life, and deliberately accept truth and righteousness. But this is the exception not the rule. Generally speaking, it is still true that, “as the twig is bent, so will it grow.” To say it another way, only occasionally may a poor seedbed be changed into a good one, but usually the quality of the harvest depends upon the preparation of the soil. In other words, usually eternal destinies are settled in the training received in infancy, adolescence and youth.

Adults Also

It is not my intention to suggest that children are the only ones who are influenced regarding eternal destinies by the family circle. Every one of us, male and female, young and old, is greatly influenced by circumstances at home. In the many years of living and working in the remote and barren fields of the world, I have always said, “I can fight the old devil himself if everything is well at home.” And I have known many strong men who have been overcome by Satan, either morally or doctrinally, because they found no solace, no consolation, no encouragement, no sanctuary in the family circle. Of course the same thing is true of women—that is, they need a place of refuge just as much so as do the men. Home must be good, wholesome, and uplifting for the young and the old, for children and parents.

The population of heaven will be composed of *three* kinds of people: (1) those who died without guilt; (2) those who were able to overcome evil influences of the home and (3) the multitudes who were fortunate enough to have a part in a family circle that provided love, loyalty, respect and fidelity and thus provided the basic foundation for faith and obedience to God.

Husbands, wives, parents, and children, do not take home for granted! Do not expect God to make your home a sanctuary. Do not expect an accident to happen that will transform a house into a real home or that will change a den of iniquity into a house of prayer. But do not be discouraged! Love will cast out hate! Purity will overcome evil! Obedience from the heart will bear fruit in a conscience void of offense. Faithfulness to the Lord will pay dividends even in this life in consolation and assurance.

Home life will not be perfect, for homes consist of people, and people are always faulty. But home life can be good if the people in the home will make it so, and that good life can find expression in happiness, usually, and in holiness for sure! Peter said, “The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers . . . And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good” (1 Pet. 3:12,13). “Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20,21).

QUESTIONS

Eccl. 12:13; 1 John 5:3; Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:21- 23; 1 Pet. 3:1,2; 1 Cor. 7:16

1. What three principles must be instilled into the minds of children if they are to be receptive to Bible teaching?
2. How can the behavior of one or more family members cause some to become receptive to the gospel and thus save their souls?
3. Discuss the need for determined action on the part of family members to make home a true sanctuary from the evil of the world.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Senior Citizenship

Since there is only one way to escape old age, and that is to die young, most people expend every effort to try to live out many years of senior citizenship. In fact, some become obsessed with ambitions for longevity. We have all heard many say, “I won’t be satisfied unless I reach one hundred years.” Probably though, such ambitions are neither wise nor scriptural, and actually demonstrate too much love for this world and not enough interest in the eternity to come—where days, weeks, months and years will be unknown and unnumbered, where there will be no flesh and bones to deteriorate and where all the physical things that we associate with the passing of time will be nonexistent.

The real disciple of Christ does not dread death, though he may certainly dread the ordeal of dying. Also, because of circumstances and obligations to others, he may not want to leave various loved ones without his help and presence. But if he has fought a good fight, and has kept the faith (see 2 Tim. 4:7), he does not dread life after death, but joyously anticipates it. Paul exemplified such righteous desire for heaven but for the sake of others he gladly continued with them for their “furtherance and joy of faith” (Phil. 1:21-26).

Anticipating Retirement

A very large segment of American citizens are now retired, and another great segment of our people are actually counting the days and weeks and months until they reach retirement age. Indeed, many people desire retirement from secular occupations so that they may devote themselves more completely to spiritual objectives. I know several Christians who retired from their vocation and then devoted their whole time to preaching, teaching and to humanitarian work. Such people are to be highly commended for wisdom they have demonstrated. I do not think I have known such a person who was unhappy about the choice he had made.

Many other people seem to anticipate retirement only so it may enable them to rest. They think in terms of doing nothing at all, or if not that, of doing only that which gratifies their own physical desires. Frequently we see such people move off to some remote sanctuary to “get away from it all.” Soon they begin to miss assemblies of the saints “because it is too far” (which they knew when they arranged the location). Others settle down to a life consisting of a minimum of activity—doing as little as possible—and are usually unhappy and soon unhealthy.

It seems strange to me that people would be careful to make it practical to attend services of a faithful church for several decades and then at retirement make an arrangement that causes difficulty or even precludes such faithfulness. Instead of thinking of a nice, quiet place “away from it all,” why not be concerned for a place where one can readily be most useful to the cause of Christ and most actively engaged in work and worship with other faithful ones.

Challenging Opportunities

It has become quite usual for many preachers to retire to some locality where they can serve in a small church that really needs their services and their maturity. This is great. However, it would be equally great for many others to do the same—those who are not preachers. Instead of settling down in the midst of a big group of strong Christians who really do not need you and where your impact will be minimal, why not choose a place where the brethren are few, the cause weak and where your influence will be immeasurably great?

It is not my desire to discuss the many complexities of senior citizenship in the physical, economic and social areas of life. In fact, for the purposes of this essay, I only desire to plead for faithfulness and fidelity in those sunset years. Jesus said, “He that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Matt. 10:22). There is no promise for those who served the Lord faithfully for forty or fifty years and then quit! Neither is there promise for those who lived in godliness for many years and then succumbed to corruption.

Finally, let us not become weary in well doing. We must contend for the faith to the very end. Younger preachers sometimes accuse older ones of “mellowing” so much that they become “soft” doctrinally. Perhaps it is true that most older preachers do mellow somewhat. They do not manifest the same brashness and dogmatism of their youthful years. I do not lament this fact of life. However, it is pitiable when an old soldier of the cross puts down his sword and makes peace with the enemies of truth. And this sometimes happens to those who were not preachers also. Paul “the aged” was still enduring persecutions and was setting an example in steadfastness to the very end. Let us use our years of senior citizenship to produce the greatest possible impact upon the kingdom of Christ—for the strengthening of the weak, the encouragement of the strong, the saving of the lost and for our own eternal security.

QUESTIONS

Eph. 6:1-3; Psa. 90:10; Luke 12:15; Matt. 26:36-39; 2 Pet. 1:12,13; Heb. 4:1-11; Rev. 2:10

1. What are the young told to do to promote longer life?
2. Discuss how anxiety for “long life” may violate biblical teaching.
3. What warning is given concerning the value of material things which are stored up?
4. Discuss the difference between dread of death and dreading the process of dying.
5. What did the apostle Peter say he would continue to do as long as he lived?
6. From what “work” can the Christian seek “rest”?
7. Discuss some things those retired from secular work can do to insure not “retiring” from service to God.
8. As we grow older, how can we keep from growing “weary” in doing what is right?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Single Again

When a companion is snatched away by death, whether after a very few years of marriage or after several decades, the surviving spouse is thrust into a condition of shock at first, of loneliness a little later, and of frustration finally. The intent of this chapter is to be helpful to such troubled people *and* to also help all of us in our association with such lonely and frustrated ones. This is obviously a sensitive subject and any recommendation that is made is necessarily drawn at least partly from personal experiences and individual ideals. Thus such recommendations would vary from one advisor to another. Consequently, I shall limit myself to general ideals and to Bible principles.

Finances

Most preachers have not had sufficient training or experience in significant financial matters to equip them to advise people in this area. But the following advice is surely wise, yet may be in areas often overlooked and forgotten by those who become widows and widowers: (1) Do not be hasty to settle all financial matters. Give yourself a little time—some weeks or months to reach decisions; (2) Seek a competent and reliable financial advisor if you are not already skilled yourself; (3) Especially, give yourself some time to adjust to the new lifestyle before changing residence and/or selling a home.

To Marry or Not to Marry

It is impossible to advise “yes” or “no” in this regard without a full consideration of the many variables from one case to another. But again there are some fundamental principles that can be suggested that really should help each person to determine his or her action: (1) It is assumed that every Christian will recognize that he or she is free to marry (Rom. 7:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:39); (2) One does not show disrespect to his first companion when he consummates a second marriage, being guided by righteous principles; (3) Yet, if there is a significant burden imposed by present conditions that would be escalated and aggravated by a second marriage, then Paul advises one to remain single (1 Cor. 7:40). Thus, one’s health, age, finances, children, work and such matters must all be considered. But I believe the most significant factor in deciding whether or not to remarry is: Do you really want another companion? Or the questions may be: Do you need a companion? Obviously, some men and perhaps many women have no emotional need for a second companion. But most people probably do have that need, for it is a basic characteristic of human beings. Therefore, a second marriage may be wise because of the very same reasons for any marriage at all (1 Cor. 7:2,8,9). How pitiable it is when some have lived chaste lives throughout a first marriage, and then when they find themselves “single again” they decline marriage and live in sin—sin that brings shame, disgrace and eternal ruin.

If You Marry Again

It is assumed that Christians recognize that they must marry a companion who is faithful to the Lord, if they marry at all (1 Cor. 7:39). Paul chose to remain single for the sake of the gospel, but he said he had a right to have a wife who was a believer (1 Cor. 9:5). Please think how harmful it would have been for him to have led about a wife who did not share his faith.

When young people marry there are adjustments to be made, but these come quite naturally, usually. However, in later life such adjustments are much more significant. We may have each become quite “set in our ways.” And at these later ages we do not bend as easily as we did when we were young! So, let us enumerate a few principles (again) that are important to success in a *second* marriage: (1) Marry a Christian—and to assure this, do not even consider any other—do not even date or otherwise become closely associated with one who is not a child of God; (2) But remember, this alone will not guarantee success. Even Christians are not always just naturally compatible. Evaluate in yourself and in the prospective companion: (a) flexibility in attitude, (b) joyful, pleasant disposition, (c) mutual likes and dislikes, (d) emotional stability, etc.; (3) Enter your second marriage with even more resolution than you did the first one. Remember, this one may not have all the magic that usually accompanies the easygoing emotions and passions of youth.

Finally, expect your second marriage to be good. It can provide a needed companionship, a happy association, a joyful participation, a realistic security, a fruitful partnership as two lives blend in mutual devotion to God and in unselfish sharing with each other—a sharing of joys, sorrows and goals—a sharing of lives that are lived with hope and assurance and trust.

Addendum

Because of the scarcity of prospective companions for widows, great care should be exercised lest in a desperate attempt to find companionship and/or security, scriptural and logical considerations may be cast aside and a very unwise marriage may result. Conversely, since suitable companions are so readily available for widowers, they too must exercise great care lest they be pursued by the least desirable ones and be led to the most unsuitable choice. And I hasten to add: not one of the points I have made in this article is inconsequential. It is a serious matter and, for the sake of all who need these words, I have treated the subject with strict seriousness.

QUESTIONS

Rom. 7:-3; 1 Cor. 7:39,40; 7:2; 9:5

1. Why is great care especially needed and to be taken in all matters by one who has recently lost a loved one?
2. What is necessary for one to be “free” to marry again, looking at it from the viewpoint of an “ideal” first relationship?
3. Name some circumstances that might keep one from exercising the “right” to remarry.
4. List some major factors that might make a second marriage “wise” or “unwise” even though one was “free” to marry.
5. *Who* does a Christian, who has lost a companion, have a “right” to marry?
6. Discuss the significance and importance of Paul’s words “a sister” in 1 Cor. 9:5.
7. Why might more extensive care be needed in forming a second marriage than the first?
8. Discuss the matters and pitfalls relating to “available choices” for a “second mate.”



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Tragedy in the Home

Sooner or later, and sometimes repeatedly, tragedy must come to every family circle. The attitudes that prevail then— under the stress and the emotional impact of emergency conditions—may very well determine the course of the future for many and even the eternal destiny of all who are concerned and involved.

Of course there are so many events that occur in our homes that seem, to us, to be real tragedies. But in these brief articles I shall not try to even mention most such things. Suffice it to say, that if one is able to cope with any great crisis, he may be able to also respond properly to every such calamity. Therefore, for this study, let us consider four common tragedies that often occur:

Financial Ruin

Usually this is not a great problem for people who have always been very poor. The greater problem comes to people who have had plenty and then find themselves nearly destitute. For many otherwise good people who have lived in luxury, when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out the window. The husband may become dejected, melancholy and even bitter. Blaming himself as a failure, he adds to the woes that are imposed by poverty by becoming sad, down-at-the-mouth, mad-at-the-world. Likewise the wife may become a neurotic recluse because she is so embarrassed and humiliated.

But financial troubles should not cause serious family problems. In fact, with proper attitudes, families may be drawn closer together as they struggle to overcome such disaster. Money is not evil, but “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). And, love for money may manifest itself in greed, selfishness and materialistic pride.

One of the hardest lessons some Christians may have to learn in these affluent times is that “godliness with contentment is great gain” and that having food and clothing, we should be therewith content (1 Tim. 6:6,8). The best admonition I can give to any of God’s people upon whom financial disaster has come is to read Matt. 6:19-34. Jesus directs that we lay up treasures in heaven, that we put our trust in God instead of material things, that we consider the lilies of the field and the fowls of the air (and God’s care for them), and that we “seek first the kingdom.”

Financial ruin will certainly cause inconvenience and it may indeed require great sacrifice. But it is not the greatest calamity that can befall a family and with scriptural attitudes that include faith in God, hope for heaven, love for companions and humility of heart, families can survive such material failures and press on in a joyful bond of togetherness and happy devotion to the greater objectives of spiritual accomplishments in Christ. (Warning: Sometimes wealth, not poverty may be the greater disaster. I do not doubt that prosperity may have wrecked more homes than has poverty. We must be wary of Satan’s devices to use the lack of money or the abundance of it to destroy our family circles.)

Going Home From The Cemetery

Some will say that the trip home from the graveyard is the greatest tragedy of all, but as I shall point out in the next chapter, I do not believe it. Yet death is a terrifying word and an empty chair in the family circle is cause

for a natural and proper sorrow. To small children who lose a parent and to a husband or wife who lose a companion, there are no words that can dry every tear and no consolation that can soothe every ache in the heart. But we must not become morbid, sullen, bitter people. Most of all we must not blame God for our misfortune. God is not killing people today—He does not kill our children, our companions or our parents. He does allow the incidental circumstances of life to take their toll. He does not prevent death when those earthly conditions combine to bring the grim reaper to our door.

The Christian who is a parent and is left without a companion certainly has additional obligations, but not impossible ones. In this case it is not fair to the children to assume that failure is inevitable. A one-parent family can indeed overcome the natural obstacles and can be a truly great family, characterized by joy and righteousness. The death of a spouse will leave a void that will never be filled, entirely. But the surviving spouse can overcome despair by: (1) *Looking back* upon precious memories—they can be as ointment upon a wound; (2) *Looking forward* to opportunities to help others, to determined efforts to keep the faith and to keen anticipation of a home in heaven.

In such times of sadness, to *look inward* with self pity brings despair, but to *look outward* with unselfish interest in others brings satisfaction and serenity. And remember, there are worse tragedies than death and we shall consider two of them in the next chapter.

QUESTIONS

**Matt. 6:30; 1 Tim. 6:10; Heb. 13:5; 1 Tim. 6:6-8,17; Matt. 6:19-34;
Matt. 16:24-26; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Rev. 14:13; Psa. 116:15**

1. What is needed to face every threat and every tragedy befalling the child of God (including those affecting the family unit)?
2. How can a sense of “loss” and “failure” wreck some homes and cause eternal damage in some that are not actually wrecked?
3. Give two ways that “love of money” destroys homes and souls.
4. List some ways the “love of money” makes itself known in the family circle, including both rich and poor families.
5. What consolation does the child of God have regarding the lack and/or loss of material possessions?
6. How can there be greater tragedies than death? List some of these.
7. How can we answer those who “blame God” for the death of a loved one?
8. What consolation is there for a surviving family member of one who died a faithful Christian?
9. What can those who survive look *back* to for comfort and to what should they look *forward*?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

The Two Greatest Tragedies

Of course this may be a matter of opinion, but in the previous chapter regarding tragedies in the home, I discussed financial ruin and death, and I mentioned that other greater calamities would be discussed in this chapter. So, without minimizing the terribleness of those two emergencies, let us consider others, as follows:

Catastrophic Disease

Previously, I said there are worse things than death and *this* may be one of them. When a companion is undergoing tests and the sober doctor takes you aside and whispers “cancer,” it is like an arrow in your heart and like a numbing blow to your brain. To see a loved one slowly but steadily becoming blind, or to watch the crippling grip of arthritis, or especially to witness serious mental deterioration—all of these (or any of them) plus many other similar tragedies bring deep, long-lasting grief to loved ones who must stand by and watch in near helplessness.

We dread these calamities so much, not because of duties they impose upon us in caring for our loved ones, for such care becomes a labor of love to be cherished, but we dread these because of the suffering we must see, and yet, which we cannot share. When we have done all that medical science can do, when we vainly but sincerely wish we could take the suffering for our own to relieve our loved one and when there is nothing left to do except to pray, we must yet bear this burden of grief without bitterness and even with a cheerful, uplifting sympathy.

We have not manifested the Spirit of Christ if we deny those who suffer *the privilege of grief* nor have we been most helpful to them if we refuse to shed the sympathizing tear. However, when we “weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15) we must not weep with despair. We must sympathetically share their sorrow so that we may also inspire them with confidence, courage and enduring fortitude.

Sin In The Family Circle

But to me the most terrifying word is not “cancer” or “death,” etc., but it is “sin.” I believe the greatest tragedy that can befall a family may be described by no other word than “sin.” Compacted into that three-letter word is all the anguish of heart, the sorrow of spirit, and the bitter depths of grief that can come to the sincere child of God whose heart bleeds for the loved one who has fallen. A few people turn their backs upon the sinful. Many others defend the sinful, even to deny wrongdoing itself. The faithful follower of Christ will surely recognize the sin, hate it with all his might, but look upon the sinner with compassion and pity.

When there is a deep, abiding love in the family, and when there are scriptural attitudes, tragic sinfulness need not destroy the home. Sin must be denounced. The sinner must be made to see this sinfulness. By firm counseling, he must be brought to repentance and then, by compassionate sympathy, he must be brought to courageously “go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

Many family circles would not have been broken if those “who have no sin” would have “cast the first stone.” That is, a family that is broken by sin is not necessarily broken by the sin of one person alone! Sometimes the most unforgiving person is one who is also guilty!

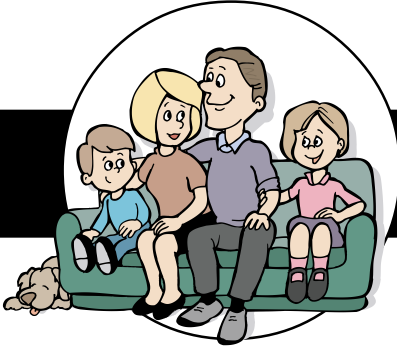
Of course, the impenitent sinner must be treated with firmness and sometimes such impenitence may actually be cause for dissolution of the union. For instance, it seems unreasonable that a pure, undefiled spouse should continue a marital relationship with a companion who continues persistently and without remorse in adultery. Likewise, a wife who would shield and protect a dishonest husband would seem to be a partaker in his evil deeds. However, many homes are broken because one companion is seeking a way out—is glad to pounce upon the one who stumbled and kick him into the gutter, instead of snatching him out of it.

So, to the erring, wandering, wayward ones we need to admonish repentance. In humble contrition, turn from sin and confess to God and to those you have offended. Contemplate the terror of eternal destruction if you continue in sin and take advantage of amazing grace for your forgiveness if you return to God and to your family. And to those who have the opportunity to save a family circle by forgiving a companion, we plead for forgiveness in behalf of those who need you now as never before, and in behalf of a family relationship that may thus be salvaged for happiness for all concerned.

QUESTIONS

1 Pet. 5:7-10; 1 Cor. 12:26; 2 Cor. 12:10; Rom. 6:23; Rom. 2:9; Rom. 12:15; Prov. 13:15; John 8:11

1. What should the Christian (who is faced with a tragedy) do to maintain confidence and faith?
2. How can your tragedy affect someone else in the family circle?
3. How should we act toward another who is suffering?
4. How should the Christian react to his own physical suffering?
5. When the tragedy of *sin* strikes the family circle, what should be our first concern?
6. What is the final tragedy of sin not repented of?
7. What does the Bible say about consequences, in this life, for the impenitent sinner?
8. What is required of other members of the family when the offending member repents and asks forgiveness?
9. Discuss how one deals with the resulting shame felt by innocent family members.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

The Family Room

That room in a considerable percentage of new houses that has been designated “The Family Room” is of relatively recent origin. At least it has come to a maximum of popularity in the last two or three decades. Sometimes it is furnished much more comfortably and realistically than other rooms, and it is designed as a place of maximum relaxation and as a facility for ideal family association. Under these relatively ideal circumstances there is certainly opportunity for a joyful and rewarding togetherness of husbands and wives and of parents and children. The deep, soft carpets, the various comfort chairs, the clean paneled walls, suitable pictures on the walls—all of these plus other facilities—produce a circumstance and an atmosphere that is altogether conducive to pleasant, happy days and nights of family circle events.

Face The Facts

But let us take inventory. What has happened to the average family since the advent of the popular family room? Indeed, it has been a one-way street, a constant deteriorating process, a seemingly irreversible trend *away from* a close family association. Why should this be true? With much better facilities and with much greater opportunities, why has the family so frequently fallen apart? Why is there now so much more alienation of husbands and wives and of parents and children? Perhaps it may be well to consider some reasons for such failures:

1. In many households, the family room may have become a substitute for a family circle. In other words, men may have built family rooms to substitute for the care and concern, the devotion and dedication, the love and loyalty that they really owe their families. *It may have seemed easier to provide facilities than to supply family leadership.* But we need to remember that all the facilities we may buy with money, even indoor swimming pools, game rooms, etc., will never take the place of love and affection nor will such facilities replace direction and discipline.
2. The family room can sometimes provide the setting for togetherness physically but complete separation emotionally, mentally and spiritually. This is what I mean: we may sit in the same room for hours, almost unaware of each other while our attention is glued to a television program. And we may be naive enough to believe we are providing a situation of “togetherness.” Indeed, we may all be able to recite the names of all the actors on the Hollywood stages, while at the same time we may barely know the nature, the desire, the longing of each other!
3. We may become involved in a family room lifestyle that defeats the very intended purpose of that facility. When TV dinners are eaten on TV trays so that no one will miss “the show,” then we have missed the greater opportunity for significant togetherness when we should have all sat around the same dining table at the same time. When junior refuses to come to the table because he will not leave the TV and when family “communication” (conversation) is sacrificed at the altar of entertainment, then the family room is a curse, not a blessing as it should have been.

Doing Together

In these affluent times when money is so plentiful, it may usually be easier to provide “things” for our family than to supply association among ourselves. And this may be the real cause of the undoing of the family

structure that is so vital to happiness and success. This inclination to pay the price in money instead of in attention and care has been exploited by the toy industry, so much so that many families spend hundreds of dollars annually for those superduper toys that are intended to entertain the children and spare the parents that responsibility.

So, some may ask, “What can we do together?” Well, if your children are already addicted to the expensive toys and if they are already caught up in the permissive self sufficiency that rebels against parental guidance, it may be exceedingly difficult to do anything that will salvage the family circle. But if you still have time—if your children are small or still unspoiled by the affluence of our times, there are many things you can do to promote a happy, healthy family relationship. For instance:

Go *together!* Go hiking or cycling *together*. Go picnicking *together*. Go camping *together*. Go, *together*, to any decent kinds of recreation and entertainment. Find a private place and go swimming *together*. Work *together*, play *together*, read *together*, and especially worship *together*. And remember, every one of these items and dozens of others can provide a real base for closeness and communication, a real foundation for like-mindedness and mutual joyfulness.

But also, stay home *together*. Make your home a sanctuary! Let your house be a haven for the whole family—a place of refuge from the ugly and vile things of the world outside, a place of security from the violent and turbulent affairs even nearby. Let it be a shelter from the storms of life. Most of all, let the home be a place of release from tensions, a quiet resort, a jubilant group action of people mutually devoted to the same ideals and to each other.

The family circumstance that I have tried to portray can be a happy, secure, serene association even while living in a shack by the side of the road, in a humble cottage or a crowded apartment. If attitudes are right, the house and its facilities make little difference. If attitudes are wrong, all the facilities in the world will not make a happy, successful family circle. If your family room consists of the kitchen, the living room or the front porch, or if it is indeed a luxurious special room, you can make it a source of satisfaction for the family and of approval by God. Do it today, for the sake of all those souls involved at your house!

QUESTIONS

Prov. 11:28; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 1:22; Phil 2:3,4; Prov. 22:1; 1 Tim. 6:17

1. What do many people substitute for family leadership, love and mutual concern?
2. What constitutes real “togetherness” for the family unit?
3. List some things about other family circle members that we need to know, understand and respond to.
4. How can one deal with a family member who selfishly refuses participation in any activity except those that he or she chooses or likes?
5. What significant effect do the living quarters and its facilities have on real family togetherness?
6. How can a parent cope with the pressure brought about by friends, neighbors, and brethren who have “more” and provide “more” material things for their children than we might be able or *willing* to provide for our own children?
7. Discuss what constitutes proper attitudes for the family unit to promote real unity, support and love.



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Me and My House

When Joshua challenged the people to “Choose you this day whom you will serve,” he punctuated that challenge with a strong declaration of his own determination when he said, “As for me and my and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Judging from the response of the people (see Josh. 24:15,16) they obviously recognized that Joshua had the leadership capability to not only lead their armies in battle, but to also lead his own household in devotion to God.

In an altogether different circumstance, we read of a “great woman” who prevailed upon her husband to assist a prophet of God. Wherein her husband did not recognize and appreciate the need, she did not hesitate to plead for cooperation with the servant of the Lord. Her zeal for spiritual matters was such that the very expression “that Shunammite” came to mean devotion to God (see 2 Kings 4:8-25).

Today, even in these modern times, fathers and mothers must not fail to demonstrate family leadership comparable to that of Joshua and the Shunammite woman. We cannot relinquish our responsibility to the government, the school or even the church. Success in the family cannot be attributed to others, and likewise, failure cannot be blamed upon them.

In leading the family in religious activities, and in producing proper religious attitudes in the whole family, certain very deliberate and definite steps must be taken and some principles must be pursued steadfastly and aggressively.

1. Spiritual values must predominate the activities of the home. The Bible must be respected. Children must learn to read it, and parents must read it with the children. Their questions should be answered and their inquisitive minds should be encouraged to search for its truth.

2. The Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, must be honored in every family circumstance. Their names must be held in reverence and the parents must demonstrate love for God and for the Savior

3. Children must learn from the parents to have due respect for the church. Too many times about all the children hear their parents say about the church is criticism. They hear mothers and fathers say, “The church is unfriendly” or “I don’t like the way *they* do things,” etc. Then those same parents wonder why their children do not want to “go to church.”

4. Attendance at services of the church, and active participation in those activities should be regular and steadfast. Under the best conditions, attendance will become almost habitual. Under ideal circumstances the question, “Are we going today?” will not even be asked.

Hard Questions

When I am discussing these matters, some parent is sure to ask, “What shall I do if Junior refuses to go to services?” Well, that depends. If Junior is yet a lad, he should be given no choice. But if Junior is almost a man, I do not know how to answer the question. I am sure there must be much prayer, much reasoning with him, patient perseverance and genuine devotion. If he is a reasonable young man, it will probably be wise to confess to him the mistakes you have made and to try to help him see the better judgment you are now expressing.

But we must remember that once a twig is bent it may be very difficult to straighten it. This is not written as a mere criticism of those who have failed, but it is intended as a constructive suggestion to those who still have

opportunity. Undoubtedly the only real cure for rebellion is to prevent it. By that I mean, bend that twig in the proper way to begin with— do not let it get bent in the wrong way.

It has always been true that we cannot force religion upon anyone. There is no way you can force your children to love God or to obey His Word. Success is accomplished, not by force, but by teaching, by example, by guiding, by leading. And success is greatly increased when parents begin to train and guide that tender plant even the very first day you take it home from the hospital. If you wait one week the child may be a spoiled baby and become a spoiled brat! If you wait a year you have imposed a much more difficult task upon yourself. If you wait five years, you have probably lost the fight already.

Character is formed and life-long attitudes are developed very early in life. A few exceptional people voluntarily make a radical change in their character and their attitude in later life, but most people become and remain basically what they have been trained to be in childhood (as far as character and attitude is concerned).

I would like to make a fervent appeal to parents, especially to young parents. You are naturally careful that you do not neglect your children in physical things, because you love them and even because you know that child neglect is a violation of the law of the land. But, with even much greater care you should make sure you do not neglect the spiritual welfare of your children because you love them so much and because you know that such neglect is a violation of the law of Christ (Eph. 6:4).

If your baby is old enough to be taken to the doctor's office it is old enough to be taken to church services. Do not fail to take it then, and take it every time the church meets through all those formative years. You say you have a headache, a stomachache, a toothache? Go anyway, and take the child! For your own good, and for his good, go, and never excuse yourself from going if you can possibly go, for the child will remember your excuses and imitate them. If you will go, and go joyfully, and if you will go regularly through those impressionable years, and then if you will practice the same fidelity in daily life, your child will not refuse to go in later life. "When he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

QUESTIONS

Psa. 119:105; Rom. 1:16; 2 Pet. 1:21; Eccl. 12:13; 1 Jn. 4:19; 1 Pet. 1:8; Col. 1:14-19; Heb 10:25.

1. What commitment should we make for our families, regarding service to God, in spite of what others may choose to do?
2. What lesson can be learned from the story of the Shunammite woman that will benefit the family?
3. What should we teach our family *about the book* called "the Bible"? List some ways to *teach the book* to the family.
4. How may we teach our family to "fear God" properly?
5. How can we teach our families about the *essential nature* of Christ's church when so much of the religious world denies the importance of a church "patterned after the New Testament example"?
6. How can we best teach other family members the importance of attending worship assemblies?
7. Who has the responsibility to see to it that scriptural truth is taught and carried out?



The Family Circle

By **LESLIE DIESTELKAMP**

Grace in the Garden

When Adam and Eve walked innocently in the Garden of Eden they represented and demonstrated God's first grace and the greatest of God's temporal gifts to humanity. In creating them altogether suited to each other, and in establishing the family arrangement, God had elevated humanity to a much higher level than all the other created beings. In arranging that each man should thereafter have his own wife and each woman should have her own husband, God provided the maximum in earthly possessions for us and supplied the ultimate in human satisfactions.

So much of the world that God created for our good has been abused by mankind, and this is most significantly true of the family. The beautiful rivers and lakes have been contaminated by man's pollutants. The grandeur of the mountains has been scarred by the engineering feats of man. Even our atmosphere has been polluted by the industry man has devised. So it should not surprise us to discern that the family, God's greatest gift to us, has also been defiled.

It was God's intent that each man and each woman should be able to enjoy the companionship and benefit from the relationship that is the natural result of marriage. Likewise it was God's design that each child should be born into the sheltered circumstance that only the family circle can provide. But God did not put a great banner high in the sky, where all could see, telling each man to take his own wife and each woman to receive her own husband. Instead, He instilled in the mind and body of man an instinctive and altogether natural desire for each other. There are and always have been significant exceptions to this principle (those who have no need and/or no desire for marriage and its relationships). Likewise, there have always been and still are perversions and abuses of God's law regarding the family relationships (fornication, homosexuality, divorce, etc.).

The High Ideal

Even in these modern times when materialistic pursuits seem to prevail, when humanity seems to seek first the pleasures of this world, when the love of money is so great and the minds and bodies of the people seem to be given over to sensualism, there still remains the lovely, the beautiful and the pure that is reached only to the fullest extent in the sanctuary of the family circle.

The ideal in romantic love is perhaps demonstrated best by the story of Jacob's love for Rachel (see Gen. 29:15-20). Notice that the Bible says, "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her." In the Song of Solomon we have the beautiful story of the love of the maiden and her humble sweetheart, a love that prevailed over the ardent wooing of King Solomon who wanted the maiden for his own. (Note: I do not pretend to know all the involved principles in this story and I decline to speculate on its application, as some would, to Christ and the church. But, whether it is a true story or a symbolic one, the romantic features of it are beautiful and meaningful.)

My appeal in this essay is to Christians. We must not take marriage and parenthood for granted. We have the opportunity in these times to maximize the high ideal that God intended. We can, if we will, exemplify righteousness coupled with joy, holiness combined with happiness. We can have the greatest of life's satisfactions while escaping the most terrifying of life's tragedies. We can provide peace and tranquility at home that will enable us to face the carnal, materialistic world about us without fear.

Some may say I have over-simplified the matter and made it appear too easy. No, indeed, I have not said these ideals were always easy to reach. I have simply said they are possible! And I urge us to remember that they are worth the effort!

Thirty-five years ago a soldier came to me and admitted that he had strayed from “the straight and narrow.” But he said, “There was always one thing that kept me from going too far, and that always brought me back to the right way.” He did not tell me of great preachers he had heard in his youthful days in Oklahoma, nor of great churches he had attended, but he told me of the family circle “at home.” He told me that he could never forget that every night before bedtime his father would gather the whole family together and they would read the Bible and pray. The impact of that experience throughout his childhood saved him, he suggested, from complete departure. I think he later became a gospel preacher.

Where The Power Is

We are told that one great journalist of the previous century had been to Washington but was stranded in a small community en route to his home. There he participated in a family worship (devotional) in the humble home where he spent the night. Then he began to write a series of articles about our national capitol. He said, “I have been to the capitol of the U.S., but it is not in Washington, but in the homes of America where the Bible is read and where prayer is offer to God.” How true!

More significantly, I believe that if one wants to see the real kingdom of God today, that is, if he would observe the Spirit of God working through the instrumentality of the living Word, then he must go, not to the great cathedrals or even to the humble meeting houses where faithful saints meet, but to the firesides, to the family circles where devoted Christians live and love in joyful togetherness with each other and in sweet communion with God.

“Home, home, sweet, sweet home. Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.” Thank God for His grace in giving us home, sweet home!

QUESTIONS

Gen. 2:18, 21-25; 1 Cor. 7:2-5; 6:18; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-20

1. In what way, in addition to giving man a living soul, did God elevate humanity above the rest of His creation?
2. What has been God’s plan from the beginning for the formation of a family unit?
3. Review the purposes achieved in the family unit as God would have it.
4. Review the consequences of violating God’s revealed order.
5. Where has God placed the major part of the responsibility for seeing to it that the family is what it is supposed to be?
6. Review God’s established order relating to authority in all matters including the family unit.
7. What major factor must be present in the husband/wife, mother/father, parent/child relationships for them to be what God intends?
8. *Review:* List as many features as you can that will promote a happy, healthy, strong and faithful family circle.