

Foundation of Faith

THE PERFECT FAMILY?

Imperfect but Perfectly Fine!
Grandparents—Their Role In the Family
The Gift of Being Single
What If I Failed as a Parent?

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Editorial

Dear Reader,

The Lord Jesus told His disciples, “You shall be witnesses to Me” (Acts 1:8) and commanded, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 19–20).

Our aim for this publication is to proclaim the glorious gospel as witnesses to Jesus Christ, as we have been doing through monthly articles and features for some years. However, to echo the author of Hebrews, we do not intend to limit our writing to “the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ [and] the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms”; instead, we mean to “go on to perfection” (see Hebrews 6: 1–2). In the Sermon on the Mount, the Son of God tells us, “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5: 48).

Perfect like the Father in Heaven? Clearly, Jesus knows that only God is perfect in His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. We, by contrast, make frequent mistakes, forget things we should know, and cannot always measure up, no matter how hard we try. So, how can we be perfect?

The answer can be found in Matthew 5: 38–48, where we read for example, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” By following these instructions, we can become perfect in love and mercy.

From an earthly perspective, perfection can mean many things, from high grades at school, to superior service in a restaurant, to an excellent performance review at work. Yet biblical perfection is something else entirely. As the Apostle Paul exhorts the Philippians, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2: 5).

In 1 Peter 2: 21–24, Peter offers some insight into this mindset, explaining that

- Jesus set an example for us;
- we are called to follow in His footsteps;
- He did not scold or make threats; and
- He sacrificed His life for all of us out of love and mercy.

Let us all ask the Lord to help us lead a life to His glory.

H. D. Nimz

When *Children Pretend* To Be the Parents

A locksmith named Fritz Lehmann sat in his poorly furnished parlor in a back building of a large city. He had taken sick leave. The doctor had diagnosed chronic tracheitis with a possibility of influenza. Lehmann had deliberately kept quiet about how this illness had developed. Once again, he had been out drink-

ing for hours and had become severely intoxicated and then had lain in the rain for hours.

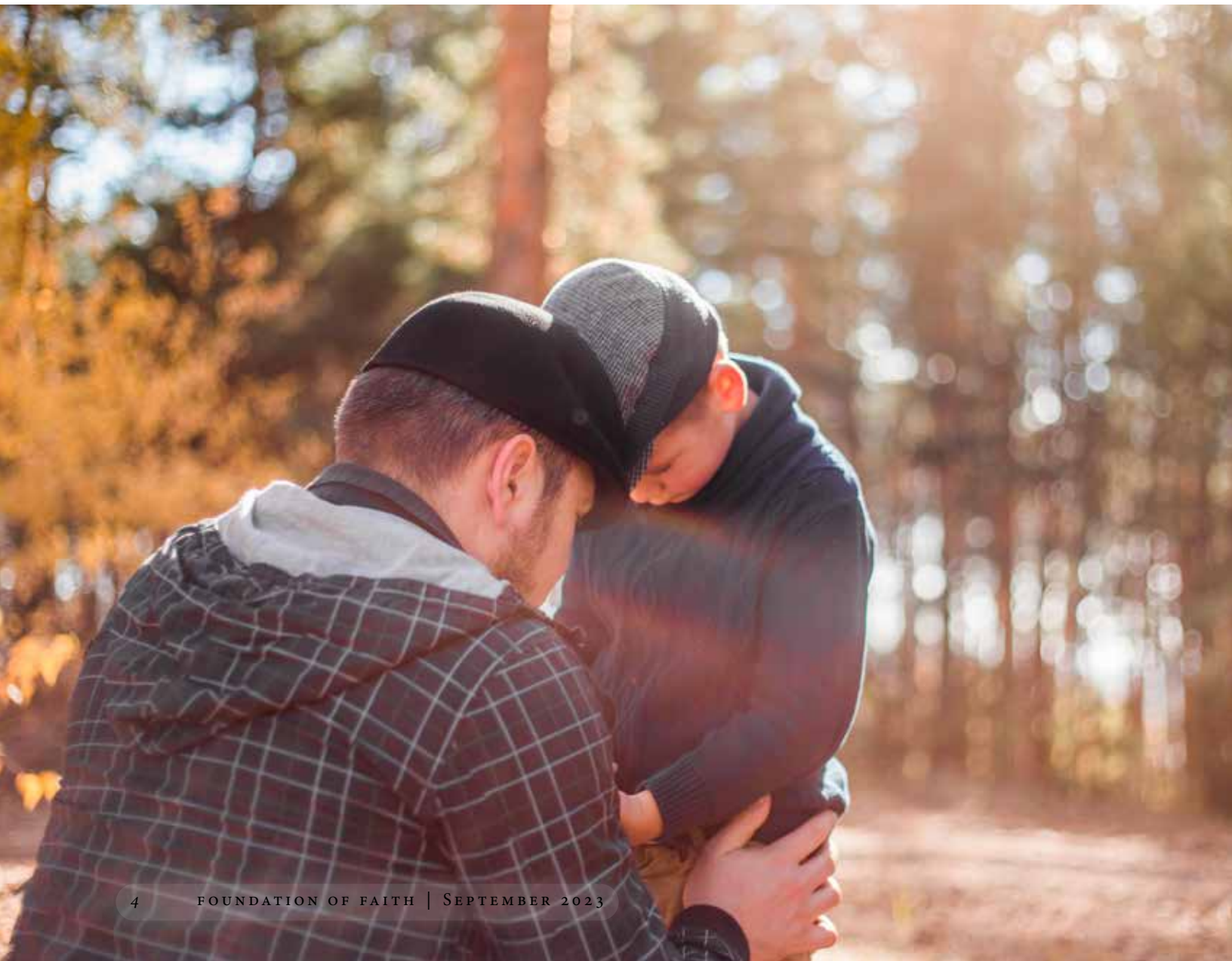
Now he sat brooding in a wobbly chair while his wife worked in the kitchen. He was dissatisfied with himself and with everything else. He felt so unhappy, but didn't want to admit to himself what the root of his unhappiness was.

All of a sudden, he heard his five-year-old son outside saying to his four-year-old sister, Marie, "Come on, let's play!"

"Yes, what should we play?"

"We'll play father and mother. I'll be the father, you be the mother. I'll come home drunk."

"Oh no, Fritz, that's not nice. Then you'll hit me like Dad hits



Mom. And then I'll have to cry like Mom does!"

"Oh no, I'm only pretending. Because otherwise you would have to lie sick in bed as long as Mom does, and then I would have no one to play with. You pray for Dad just like Mom does, and I'll stumble around just like Dad."

Hearing every word inside the parlor, Fritz wanted to jump up; instead, he sat transfixed in the chair, the color of his face becoming alternately pale and red. That was how far gone he was! He felt as if his children were suddenly holding up a mirror to his soul.

Fritz shrank back from the image he saw. Finally, he pulled himself together, stepped to the window, and called his children in. They came hesitantly and looked at their father with shy glances. Almost tonelessly these words came over his lips: "Children, you must not continue to play this game."

The children did not answer but only nodded anxiously. There was a pause. At

last, the father asked in a trembling voice, "Does Mother pray and cry so much, Fritz?"

"Yes, Father, she prays a lot, but she only cries when, when . . ."

"Well, when?"

"Yes, when you, when you . . ."

"Well, out with it!" He felt as if he must torture himself to hear his judgment from his child's mouth.

Quietly, with his face turned away, the boy replied, "When you stay out so long and come home drunk."

"What does Mother pray for?" was the toneless question of the man who stood as the accused before his children.

Now Marie answered, "Mother always prays that the Lord Jesus would finally save you so you won't be lost, and that Fritz won't also become a drunkard."

The two little ones were quite surprised when their father suddenly pressed them against him, and even more so when they saw tears in his eyes. "Kids, go into the yard."

Inside the parlor, however, the man was on his knees, no, on his face, weeping and moaning loudly. A hot stream of tears ran from between the man's fingers, and from his tortured chest came, "O God, what has become of me! Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!"

Almost an hour might have passed. The children were playing another game outside. The mother was still busy in the kitchen. Then

the door opened quietly, and the man spoke in a tone that the woman had actually never heard before: "Dear Marie!"

Almost startled, the woman looked around. "Fritz, what is the matter with you?"

"Marie, God has spoken to me. Your prayers have been answered."

Almost stunned, the woman looked into her husband's face, which carried an expression such as she had never seen on him before. Quickly she dried her hands on her apron and wrapped her arms around her husband's neck. "O Fritz, praise God!"

"Will you help me, Marie, to become a decent man again?"

"Yes, Fritz, let us help each other," she said.

"Marie, I have drunk the last drop of the poison that makes us so miserable. From now on, my life, like yours, shall belong to Jesus."

Since then, things have changed completely for the Lehmanns. They no longer know material hardship. Since that day, the skilled, industrious, and now thrifty locksmith has always brought home his weekly wages in full. The Lehmanns have long since lived in a nice apartment that lacks nothing in terms of their comfort. No one in the family has forgotten that momentous morning, not even the children. Again and again they thank God for it, and they will continue to do so eternally. ■

Imperfect but Perfectly Fine!

Does the perfect family exist?

In Deuteronomy 32, we find the song of Moses, in which the fourth verse describes God thusly: “*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.*”

Read verse four again. “*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.*” How wonderful is our God! All praise, honor, worship, and glory belong to Him. You can count on Him because He is the Rock. Even in the wildest storm, when we have trouble standing, the rock is immovable. What He does is perfect. No correction or improvement is necessary. His work is perfect. Justice, truth, and righteousness are part of His character. He is good, through and through. There is nothing to be found in Him that is not good. When we consider the characteristics of God, we are filled with joy. Our lips cannot be silent, and we praise and worship our God.

Moses, the author of this song, was a great man of God, from whom we have much to learn. His faith, his confident trust in God, his patience, and his willingness to sacrifice are traits to be emulated. God revealed Himself to Moses in a special way. Though Moses had many experiences with the Lord, we can also see from his example that even great men and women of God are not perfect. We find flaws in their lives. They sinned and made mistakes. Since the Bible is trustworthy, it does not hide these flaws but shows them for what they are.

We are no different. While reading of God’s characteristics as described in our previous verse, we must not forget that we are human. We are not perfect in the way God is. The serpent enticed Eve telling her she could “be like God.” But through the fall into sin, human imperfection became even more pronounced. Through birth, we have inherited a depraved sin-nature.*

Because we are not perfect, we cannot expect others in our family to be. A family consists of parents and children who are all imperfect. Children will not

always behave the way the parents want them to, and parents do not always make the right choices either. Sometimes we are challenged to maintain our composure and not become agitated. We may become tempted to say something in the heat of the moment which we cannot retract.

For some, this may be difficult to admit, yet it is necessary. When we are aware of our flaws God can work us. Then our expectations of others in the family will be more realistic as well. What do we expect? Do we expect perfection from imperfect human beings? ***Our goal is not to have a perfect family, but to be a family that serves and honors God and submits to His will.***

God does not leave us to our own devices. Since He knows us through and through, there is no point trying to hide anything from Him. He knows “our weaknesses.” Therefore, He is willing to help us. He helps us when we ask Him to. He will supply us with His strength, His love, and His perseverance. He will give us what we need. God’s gift of strength, love, and perseverance is perfect because “His work is perfect.”

God also does not expect us to be satisfied with our condition, and continue as we are. Most significantly, He does not show us our flaws in order to condemn us, because that is not who God is. He has no evil intentions. He is patient with us and wants us to improve. He works in us in order to mold us according to His plan. The Bible uses the symbolism of a potter to describe this. “‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?’ says the LORD. ‘Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!’” (Jeremiah 18:6). God is active in changing our lives. The clay in His hand can be transformed in various ways. Here or there something may need to be removed or added, and some of the rough edges may need to be rounded off.

If the clay is fundamentally correct, sometimes only a few changes are necessary. However, sometimes the potter must take more drastic measures. The goal is to become more like Jesus. If we lose sight of this ideal

or set other examples for ourselves, God may need to intervene a more deeply to correct our lives, and this can be painful.

In doing so, He often uses our spouse and children as tools in His hand. When we realize that it is God Who has given us our children and the spouse we have, then we can understand that God has made them the way they are for a definite purpose. As a family, we are meant to sharpen and help form each other. The Bible says, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17). God uses

our family to form our character in order to become more like Him.

No family is perfect, but that’s okay as long as we can say, “But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

*Stefan Schmelzle
Pforzheim, Germany*

*“Sanctification is identical with Adamic perfection as to heart purity, but in various other aspects Adamic perfection is not attained until glorification at the resurrection.”

R. R. Byrum, Christian Theology

Parenting Honestly

In a bookstore stood a younger woman who was being presented with various items by a clerk, who served her very courteously. The young woman had with her a child about two to three years old, a lively little girl. Of course, the little child did not stay in one spot but skipped to and fro, making it difficult for her mother to concentrate on the books presented while at the same time keeping her little offspring in view.

Suddenly discovering her mother’s shopping basket on the floor, the little girl quickly sat down and tried to open the lid. The mother didn’t want her to, and called to the child, “Leave it alone; there’s a little mouse inside! It’ll jump out!”

A lie! The mother had simply lied to her little child. It went through me like a stab in the heart, and the employee also felt the injustice.

Otherwise, the mother did not make a bad impression, which caused her lie to hit me all the more. She undoubtedly did not give it a second thought, as it was a convenient way to lure her child away from the basket. But why hadn’t she accustomed her child from the beginning to refrain from doing what she forbade and rather to do what she allowed?

You can raise a child to be disobedient, and most disobedient children have been brought up

that way. They may have heard a commandment or a prohibition from their parents’ mouths. In many cases, however, they did not quite know whether it was meant seriously. They were not sure if their parents would be consistent, and true to their word, or shortly allow everything which had just been forbidden.

If children realize that the parents have firm principles, then obeying is not difficult. But when they experience inconsistency, with their parents forbidding this today and that tomorrow rather on a whim, they also make obeying dependent on their own whim. Obedience must be made a habit, and that from an early age. This is not difficult if the parents’ word is always “yes” to that which is yes and “no” to what is no. Then there is no need for lying.

Apart from the fact that lying is a sin, lying corrupts the child. Sooner or later, the child will find out that the parents used lies out of convenience. How destructive this must be to his mind! He then finds it quite convenient to help himself by lying, because why should he not be allowed to do what his parents did so often? The parents’ lies have confused his conscience and have led him astray.

Parents, do not lie to your children. Always be truthful, always be honest! ■

The Value of Relationship in Training our Children

Parenting, training, raising children, relationship—these are keywords that have certainly occupied many families. What is the right way to raise our children? What should our focus be in our families—training and disciplining our children, or building a good relationship with them?

Even the “experts” do not agree completely on this question. The various parenting methods bear witness to this. Among others, the permissive, the authoritarian, the neglectful, and the authoritative parenting styles exist. Each method places a different emphasis and results in a different outcome.

Educational methods and experts change over the years, and often what was seen as absolutely crucial twenty years ago is now considered outdated. People may be deceived, but the one Who is never deceived is our Father in heaven. His Word remains forever and provides reliable guidance even in family matters.

Training

The Bible clearly shows us that the upbringing of children should be an integral part of family life. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). How can we train someone to do something? By educating him. Guide your children and show them the right way. Teach them right values. Equip them for this life and the eternal life to come.

Children Need Effective Rules

Rules serve children like guardrails on a road with cliffs on either side. They give children direction and help them stay on the right path. Rules guide children within their social environment. Rules also give children security because they protect them from foolishness and danger.

If we have a fireplace in the house, one rule for our toddlers will be to not go near and touch it. You do this not to annoy them, but to protect them. Letting your child have “free rein” and “make their own deci-

sions” will find them facing severe consequences very quickly.

Therefore, find sensible rules rather than exaggerated ones for your children, and teach them accordingly.

Personal Training

Each child is unique, and thus we should be personal in our parenting. This is how God deals with us. He provides for us and teaches each one of us personally. This should inspire us to imitate His example.

Our children are so diverse! Ask yourself: What makes my particular child “tick”? What is important to this child, what does he or she respond to, and what doesn’t work at all? Some are quieter and more reserved, others much more energetic. Some are more practical, others more theoretical. Some need praise and recognition, others need attention and tenderness.

The better we know our children, the more purposefully we can respond to them and the more effective our parenting will be.

Parenting by Example

Children learn fastest and easiest from you and your behavior. They acquire your manner, and they imitate you. They are scanning you—unintentionally, casually, and unconsciously—but they are learning from you.

Be an example, as Paul wrote to Timothy, “in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Teach your children the Word of God through action and word. Parenting by example is perhaps the hardest but also the most important part of parenting. Be the person you want your children to be.

Relationship

In parenting and training, we must never forget the need God has instilled in us for healthy relationships. We cannot live without them. Children and even spouses wither and break down without healthy relationships.

What is the foundation of a good relationship? We can best learn that from our Heavenly Father. He knows. The foundation of His relationship with us is

unconditional love, and is based on love and grace. He has shown us this through Jesus Christ. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

Love is the foundation on which a good relationship can be built. It is not the law, it is not authority, it is not reciprocity (giving back what you get), nor is it even good intentions and desires. The foundation must be love.

True love comes from the One Who is love. God is the fountain of love, and when we have an encounter with Him, we are filled with love and are able to pass it on (see Romans 5:5).

Relationship in Practice

So, what does this look like in practice? Where does a good relationship begin in the family? Here is the answer: “Joyful children have joyful parents!”

A good relationship in the family always begins with the parents. If they don’t have a good relationship with each other, how will they build a good relationship with the children?

Do you still have a deep love for your wife? Can you (and do you) still sincerely tell your wife “I love you?” Do you still honor your husband, even after years of marriage, knowing all his weaknesses and strengths? Is he still someone special to you?

If you notice your “love tank” running low, then you should desperately rush to the divine “gas station” and be filled by the fountain of love.

Having a good relationship with your children is the next logical step. Build up a heart-to-heart relationship. Let your children know you are interested in them, not only superficially, not only with words, but that you really care about them.

Relationship—But How?

How can we build a good relationship with our children? This is another area where we can learn from our Heavenly Father. What relationship did He have with His Son while His Son was here on earth? We read how His Father thought about Him, looked upon Him, and the things He spoke to Him:

“You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). This relationship, and the words God the Father expressed, are a powerful model for us.

“*You are My . . . Son.*” This is acceptance. You are my son/my daughter, you belong to me, and I belong

to you. I accept you as you are. This is your home. Here you are understood, even if no one else understands you. Here you are always accepted, even if you are not perfect, even if you don’t do everything right, and even if you don’t always perform at the highest level.

“*You are My beloved Son.*” You are not just a son, a daughter. Here you are not just accepted, but you are loved. This is the next level; this is more. I want to love you as unconditionally as possible.

I know that as a human being I fall short, and I can’t love as unconditionally as my Heavenly Father does. Nevertheless, I want to follow the model of my Heavenly Father. I want to learn from Him and let Him fill me with His love, so I can love my child as He loved me.

“*In whom I am well pleased.*” What is the Heavenly Father actually saying to His Son here? He is saying, “You are accepted and loved, and you please Me.”

How do we talk to our children? Is there primarily blame, criticism, and harshness? Or do our children also hear from us that they are loved, that they are doing something well, and that they please us?

“*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt*” (Colossians 4:6). This is especially true in regard to our children. Because words have incredible power, they should hear good things from us. What you speak does something to you and to your child. Words can destroy or build up, so I urge you: build up! Build a good relationship with your child.

Training your children and guiding their development, or building a relationship with them—which is more important? Should they be balanced with one another? Balance is always a good approach; however, with God, love dominates, and that should be the case with us as well.

Therefore, I recommend the “sandwich tactic”: We take the relationship as a foundation, put the process of training up children on it, along with reason, with Godly discernment, with sound rules and arrangements, and then cover the process of training with relationship and love again, all bathed in consistent prayer.

This is the way the Lord deals with us, so likewise we should deal with it in our families, and God will bless us!

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Family According To God's Plan

God created the universe. Alone the part we can see and perceive reveals perfect divine wisdom. From the order in the countless solar systems to the balanced equilibrium in the smallest cycles on earth, everything teaches us about God's glory. All systems within themselves and among themselves harmonize perfectly, as long as they are subject to God's will.

This harmony is not an end in itself. Rather, it serves first to glorify God, and then it serves the respective system to the greatest possible advantage and to guarantee the continuity within it. But this harmony ends abruptly as soon as the will of man disturbs God's order—the natural state.

Marriage and family are also a divine creation. And God, according to His character, has an ideal way for the family as well—a way that takes into account all the general conditions and individual characteristics of the people involved. We find the description and guidance for this in the Word of God.

God established marriage in paradise, and it should also be a paradise on earth. Yet, how often people disregard the divine order! Life then bears very little resemblance to paradise and often seems like the forecourt of hell for those involved. To prevent this, God's will should be followed from the beginning.

The Bible shows us a beautiful way in Ephesians from 5: 22 to 6: 4. It is true: You look for egalitarianism and permissive parenting there in vain.

But how precious life is for a wife when she is loved by her husband as deeply as Christ loves the church. Every day she experiences his care and pure, selfless love—not simply romantic words and vows of love, but practical actions. Again and again he surprises her by understanding her desires and fulfilling them without her voicing them. He has time for her and her thoughts, worries, and fears, as well as patience and encouragement time and time again.

On the other hand, the husband experiences his wife as a valuable complement and support. She recognizes his task and position and does not try to dominate him. Together they go through life, and each contributes their strengths and abilities. Yes, the husband's love is so strong that he accepts and is pleased that his wife can do and understand many things better than he himself does.

When children are given to such a marriage, they experience love and care from their parents right from the beginning. It is natural for them that the family puts God's will and His work first (Matthew 6:33). This is because they witness their parents loving God and seeking His presence and

will (John 14:21). They experience God's blessing, guidance, and preservation. At first, it is still unconscious. But the older the children become, the more clearly they experience God in everyday life.

Humility and obedience, like love and trust, belong to the divine order of the family. Children observe how their parents live out the commandment to "honor your father and mother" toward their grandparents (Ephesians 6:2). Just as they experience it with their own parents, so they will probably live it out later with regard to their own parents. If their father and mother speak contemptuously about their grandparents, have no time for them, and perhaps push them out of their lives, this behavior will affect them years later.

Children learn obedience by example in their immediate family circle—obedience to God and also to each other through experience and practice, not through fear or punishment. The Bible teaches us how important our obedience is to God. Therefore, it should also be a high priority for parents.

One idea in this current time for families is the idolization of children. It can already start before children arrive. Once they are born, they are treated like royalty. Life in the family, perhaps even in the wider family environment, becomes secondary to the perceived needs of the children. The will of

the child is the command. Although the parents may mean well, they spoil the children's lives. This environment does not develop capable and empathetic adults, but tyrants, people who are not prepared for real life.

But which way does the Bible teach us? The center and head of every family is God. Father and mother serve the Lord. And they honor their parents. In doing so, they open the gate for God's blessing and their parents' blessing. Can we really have happy families without this blessing? If God gives children to the family, they experience proper love and care from the beginning. However, their crib is not a throne, and their utterances are not an expression of wisdom. The family is the place where they grow up, learn, and become resilient and strong, the place where they are morally and spiritually formed according to the biblical order. They learn to deal with "no" and with disappointments, where they learn to choose wisely, and to grow and mature.

God knows what makes you and me truly happy. He wants us to be in harmony with our life purpose and glorify God with our lives. Then He will provide never-ending blessings and full satisfaction. When joyful gratitude will sustain our lives, and we will leave behind a trail of blessings.

Hermann Vogt



The Father and His Son

In every family blessed with children, there may be either sons or daughters. Yet when we think of our Heavenly Father and His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, we need to consider God's relationship with His Son.

The New-Testament gospels predominantly show us the divine relationship between the Father and the Son:

- “the Father loves the Son” (John 3:35)
- “the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself does” (John 5:20)
- He is well pleased with His Son (see Matthew 3:17)

The Son, completely trusting the Father, surrenders in perfect obedience to His Father's will. According to the gospel of John, Jesus declares, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19).

So often, people seek honor and prestige from men. Jesus knew this and said, “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). However, Jesus always sought to honor God the Father.

The scriptures advise all of us, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 6:1–2). Yes, Jesus was in complete submission to the Father, obediently seeking and doing His will.

A thousand years before God sent His Son to earth, He showed King David this: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, ‘Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book *it is* written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law *is* within my heart” (Psalm 40:6–8).

How wonderful are the words, “I delight to do Your will.” This indicates pleasure, not unwilling performance, not with complaint and grumbling, but with gladness! This thought leads us to Gethsemane. We

read there, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, *even* to death. . . . Abba, Father, all things *are* possible for You. Take this cup away from Me,” Jesus says at the end, “Nevertheless, not what I will, but what You *will*” (Mark 14:34–36). What an example for us all!

Therefore, the apostle Paul writes, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5–11).

God's Word also applies to you and me today: “Honor your father and mother.” Yes, we are to be obedient to our parents and honor them. True, there may be exceptions in certain instances, when fathers ask their children to do something that goes against God's Word. In such a case, the child should always obey God rather than their earthly father. But if fathers are serving God with all their heart, they will always seek the best for their children. Then the children

*He wants to
forgive us and
have an intimate
relationship
with us.*

should obey, even if they don't always understand at the time why their father is asking this or that of them.

Undoubtedly, we all have to admit that we have not always been obedient to our parents. I, too, was not always willing to submit. I was disobedient and headstrong; I needed to be punished, because sometimes I went my own way.

But like the prodigal son, we may come to the Father and confess, “I have sinned; please forgive me!” What godly father will not gladly do that?

In the same manner, we may come to our Heavenly Father, confess our guilt, and ask for His forgiveness. He wants to forgive us and have an intimate relationship with us. He wants to be our Father, and we may have the beautiful privilege of being His children!

H. D. Nimz

How You Train up a Child

A young man had applied for a managerial position with a large company. His first interview had gone well, and now he was to meet with the director of the company.

The director had seen from the young man's application that his academic record was excellent. "Did you receive any scholarships for school?" he asked.

The applicant replied, "No, I did not."

"Did your father pay for your tuition fees?"

"My father died when I was one year old. My mother paid for my schooling," he answered.

"Where did your mother work?"

"My mother worked as a laundress."

The director asked the young man to show him his hands. The applicant showed him his smooth, soft hands.

"Did you ever help your mother with the washing?" he questioned.

"Never!" the young man replied. "My mother always wanted me to study and read more books. Besides, my mother can wash clothes a lot faster than I can."

The director then said, "I have a request. When you go home today, I would like you to wash your mother's hands. And then come and see me in the morning."

The young man felt that his chance of getting the job was very slim. When he arrived home, he asked his mother to let him wash her hands. This seemed very strange to her, but she willingly held out her hands to him.

Slowly, the young man washed her hands as tears started forming in his eyes. For the first time, he noticed that his mother's hands were wrinkled and full of bruises. When he touched certain spots, she winced.

As well for the first time, he realized those hands had been washing clothes every day so his tuition fees could be paid. The injuries on his mother's hands were the price she paid for his education and for his future.

When he finished washing his mother's hands, he silently finished washing the rest of the laundry. Later that evening, mother and son had a long conversation.

The next morning, the young man went to the director's office. The director noticed tears in the young man's eyes and asked, "Please tell me what happened yesterday and what you learned at home."

The young man replied, "At your request, I washed my mother's hands and then also the rest of the laundry. Now I understand a little better what gratitude is. Without my mother, I would not be who I am today. By helping her, I realized how hard it can be to accomplish something. And I now appreciate how important and valuable it is to help your own family."

The director responded, "That's what I am looking for in a manager. I want to hire a person who values the work and achievement of others. I am looking for a person who recognizes how difficult it might be for some to do their job. And I am looking for a person whose goal is not only the money. You are hired!"

The young man worked diligently and earned the respect of his co-workers. Everyone worked well together, and the company prospered.

Children who are overly sheltered and always get their own way will develop an "entitlement mentality" and consequently seek their own advantages. They won't even recognize their parents' efforts. Then, when they get a job, they expect everyone to obey them. If they happen to get a managerial position, they may never see the predicament their employees may find themselves in and always blame others. Such people, who have likely received a good education, may also prosper for a certain period of time. But eventually they may end up feeling unsuccessful and, with grumbling and dissatisfaction, look for something else.

If we treat our children like this, are we showing real love as parents, or are we ruining them? You may let the children live in a huge house, provide them with good meals, even let them learn an instrument. But when the lawn needs mowing, make sure they help. After the meal, let them wash the dishes with their siblings, not because you aren't in a position to hire help, but because you really love them! Yet children should understand that prosperity is not a given either, but that it has been worked for. That is why it's so important that children learn early on to help out and work together with others in order to be successful in life.

God's Word teaches us, "Honor your father and mother" (Ephesians 6:2), and "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). ■

The Gift of Being Single

A lone. Who wants to be alone? Remain alone? Be alone for the rest of your life? Even the thought of remaining single can cause us to become anxious. A feeling of panic may arise: “I don’t want to remain alone. I want a husband, a wife, a family.” In despair, many choose to marry someone who doesn’t serve God. Some are even willing to give up their faith just to be married. The most important thing to them is just to have a spouse. What a heavy price to pay! Is this kind of thinking correct? Is a life without a spouse or family worthless? Can I only be truly happy if I have my own family? But God wants us to be married, doesn’t He? Didn’t God say in the Bible that it is not good for man to be alone? Does this mean being single is second best?

Unfortunately, many have this attitude. Many singles struggle with the idea of not being married, or go through an identity crisis: “Why am I even here? What purpose does my life have without a spouse and children?” Some isolate themselves. Perhaps their best friends are all married, and they are the only ones who are still single. They may feel rejected and have low self-esteem. Anxious thoughts arise: “I will grow old alone and die alone. I miss out on so much in life because I have no one to share it with.” Bitterness sets in. Even in the church, everything seems to revolve around marriages, families, and children. Other peoples’ expectations and assumptions are also difficult to deal with; the pressure is intense. Parents, wanting grandchildren, think that being married is the only way to happiness and keep dropping hints. Well-meaning friends think they need to set you up with someone. Then we also put pressure on ourselves because we would like to have our own children.

Why Is God Punishing Me?

What Did I Do to Deserve This Fate?

Is being single a punishment from God? The Bible refutes this idea. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 7:8, “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am.” Paul was also single

and knew what it all entailed. In 1 Corinthians 7:35, Paul writes of the advantage of being single: “that you may serve the Lord without distraction.” According to Paul, being single has its advantages because it allows us to serve God wholeheartedly without distractions. Paul felt that this was the path for him, and he embraced being single without reservations.

Paul did not have an identity crisis. He knew he was an instrument in God’s hands and wanted to live for His glory. His mission was to proclaim the gospel, lead others to Christ, and strengthen the believers. He was not lonely. He had friends, travel companions, and many spiritual brothers and sisters. He had no fear that his life was without purpose. Every day in the service of the Lord was a reward. His heart was free from bitterness. He had a deep assurance that God knew exactly what was best for him.

Spurgeon once said, “Remember this, had any other condition been better for you than the one in which you are, Divine love would have put you there. You are placed by God in the most suitable circumstances . . .”

Of course, it is important for God to give you clarity for your path. Yes, it may take many prayers, struggles, and tears. But if God has determined this path for you, perhaps only temporarily, then He can help you to gratefully accept it. If God wants you to take this path, it can only mean that He wants to use you for specific tasks. You have very different options than a married woman with children or a husband who has obligations to his family. What is your role? You have the freedom to spontaneously visit brothers and sisters or the freedom to take on a particularly time-intensive task in the community, to be absorbed and find fulfillment in it. Have you ever thought about what the Lord expects from you? Or do you think you need to throw yourself into your job or pursue a career? Or to take every opportunity to travel to somehow make up for your “loss”?

When I thought about singlehood in this way, I came across some words I had never consciously noticed before. It says in 1 Corinthians 7:7, “For I wish

that all men were even as I myself. But each one has his own gift from God, one in this manner and another in that." Is being single a punishment from God? This verse says the opposite. Both marriage and being single are a gift, a special gift from God. You may be thinking, "Marriage—yes, that's really a gift from God. It would be so easy for me to say that." Don't speak too hastily. Don't you know of marriages where the spouses are at odds with each other or where neither have time for the cause of God? Do you know what your life would be like if you were married? In contrast, you may know singles who are real role models, committed to God's work. If you need someone, they are there! You can always count on them.

If both happen in the Lord, marriage and being single are a gift of grace. The question is, how do we use this gift? Ultimately, we all live before our God and are accountable to Him. Life on earth passes so quickly. Marriage is also temporal (see Matthew 22:30). Both will stand before their Creator, the married and the single person. There will be no more differences.

Jesus says in Matthew 19:11–12, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept *it*." Jesus states this! Can being single still be

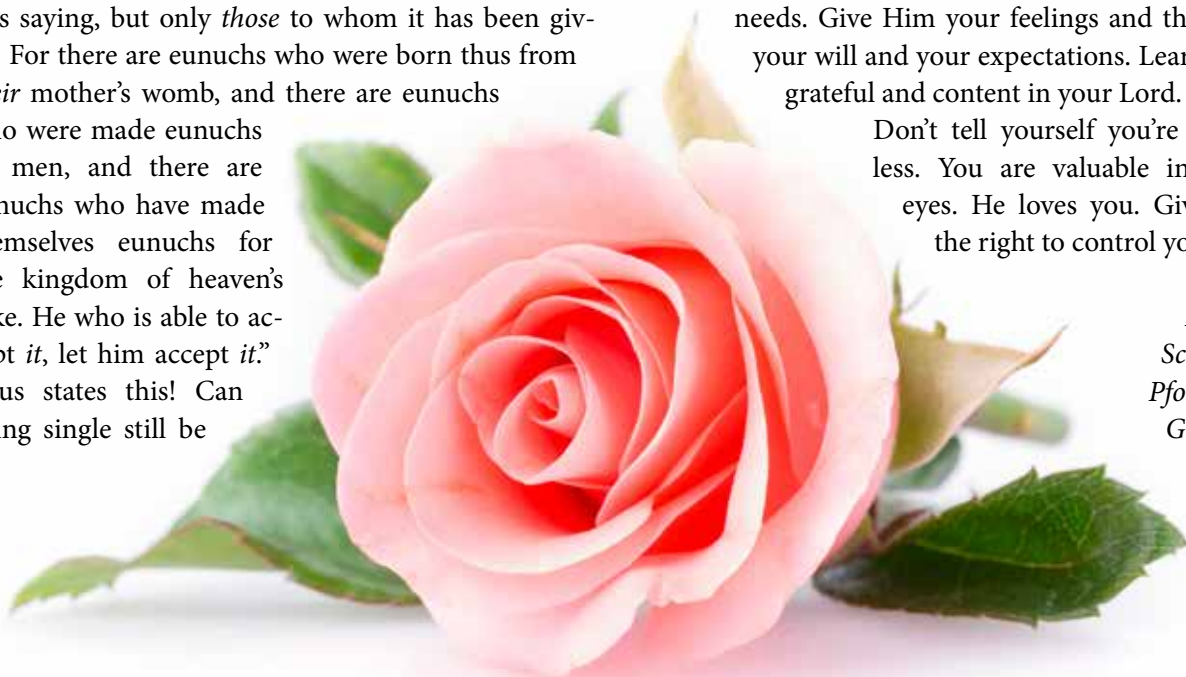
considered a second-class condition? Certainly not! Being single can be the better path because one gives oneself completely to the work in God's heavenly kingdom. This attitude ennobles the state of singleness and makes it something very valuable.

Paul is quite right when he writes in 1 Corinthians 7:32–35, "But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband. And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction."

God wants to use you to build His church. Christ would not want you to withdraw. God wants to use you to serve, to encourage, and to seek to help others. Give your future to God, and He will meet your innermost needs. Give Him your feelings and thoughts, your will and your expectations. Learn to be grateful and content in your Lord.

Don't tell yourself you're worthless. You are valuable in God's eyes. He loves you. Give God the right to control your life.

Markus
Schmelzle
Pforzheim,
Germany





When the Answer

SEEMS OBVIOUS

We know that $1+1=2$. We also know that $5+5=10$. There are many math problems that are simple, and we know the answers. There are other complex math problems that we figure out, and we are sure of the answers. In a similar fashion, there are issues in life that come our way, and we resolve these issues knowing that the resolution is simple. Is it possible, though, that issues present themselves to us and we assume the resolution is simple and act hastily, but later we realize that the resolution was not as simple as we thought?

In Joshua chapter 9, we come upon the Israelites as they are entering and conquering the Promised Land. The Israelites were moving forward, as they had just conquered Jericho and Ai. As they advanced, all the kings in the area were making plans together to fight back against Joshua and the Israelites. All, that is, except the Gibeonites.

The inhabitants of Gibeon realized they could not fight against the Israelites and have victory. Therefore, they came up with a different plan. We read: “they worked craftily” (Joshua 9: 4). The Gibeonites came up with a cunning plan to fool the Israelites into thinking they came from a faraway land. They took old, worn-out sacks, worn-out sandals and old food, and with these things they approached the Israelites. They then lied to them and said that they came from a faraway country. The Israelite leaders, seeing their possessions and hearing their story, believed them. Since the Gibeonites were no threat to them, so they

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
and lean not on your own understanding.”
Proverbs 3:5

thought, the Israelite leaders made a covenant with them.

As the story continues, we read these unfortunate words: “Then the men of Israel took some of their provisions; but they did not ask counsel of the Lord” (Joshua 9: 14). Everything seemed clear to these men. The Gibeonites seemed honest in all their discussions. It was obvious what they should do. It was clear that they could make a covenant with these people, which they then proceeded to do. We read that after three days, they realized that they had been fooled, but the damage had been done.

Has this ever happened to us? Have we ever been in a situation where the answer or the solution was so obvious? Perhaps it was a once-in-a-lifetime situation. Or perhaps we have known people for a long time, and we assume they will be totally honest with us, and we proceed. I think this has happened to all of us. Some solutions seem so right and straightforward that we don’t hesitate to move forward. Or we may give advice that seems so obvious to us. We know that $1+1=2$, and we go ahead.

The Israelites did not seek God when dealing with this issue because the answer was obvious, or so they thought. However, they then had to deal with the consequences of this decision for a long time. What about us? Have we ever made decisions that seemed so obvious to us, and later we realized that we should have asked God for advice? We read in Proverbs 3:5–6 these familiar words: “Trust in the

LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” We have read these verses many times, and perhaps we have memorized them. But do we do what these verses say? When you as a young person are starting out in life and are seeking an educational path, should you ask for God’s input and guidance? When you as a young person are looking for a life partner, should God be involved in the search? In life we also come upon questions of work and where to live. I would encourage you to place everything before God and seek guidance from Him, regardless how obvious some things may seem.

Let us learn to present the big and small issues to God daily. When something comes up in our lives where the solution seems obvious, let’s ask God. Usually we do have a bit of time before making most decisions, and God certainly knows the best solutions for all our issues. Before we go out into the day, we can present our daily plans to God and ask Him to guide us as we go through the day. When we are planning to purchase something, we can also ask for help. When we are making the small decisions in life, we can include God in our decision-making. God is highly interested in the minute details of our lives. I have found that nothing is too small for Him. God doesn’t want to be just a silent observer; He wants to actively accompany us in our daily lives!

Sieg Schuler
Calgary, Alberta

Just One Time

Robert Stein was going to graduate from school soon. His mother had died, and the housekeeper, to whose supervision his father had entrusted him, was not very concerned with how Robert spent his time. He did, however, have a good Sunday School teacher who taught him right from wrong, and whose advice he usually followed.

One evening, some boys asked him to go to the bar “just for fun,” as they said. Robert knew very well that this was not a good place. But the boys tempted and tormented him. When he hesitated, they laughed at him until he gave in. He said to himself, “It’s just this once. I’ll leave early and then I won’t have to go back.” So, Robert went along.

After a few days, his comrades invited him to join them at the bar again. “Ah,” he thought, “it’s not such a bad place after all, and I love to watch the men play pool.” So, he went again. Soon it became his habit to spend his evenings at the bar. The pool players used a manner of speech that initially appalled Robert. But since no one else seemed to care, he gradually got used to it. One day, when one of his classmates angered him, he involuntarily uttered one of the curses he had heard so often in the bar. He was shocked by it, but then he persuaded himself, through Satan’s deception, that it had only happened once and that he would not do it again. Unfortunately, by then Satan had already forged the bonds of habit tighter than he could have imagined. Hardly a day went by without him repeatedly misusing the name of God.

In the bar, they did not allow him to remain just a spectator. They offered him cigarettes. At first, he refused. But he believed he should be allowed to try it once to see if he liked it. It was supposed to be a one-time occurrence. But he had not considered that the archenemy understands multiplication very well

and can soon make a thousand times out of a single time. He gradually acquired a taste for it and became a smoker. A glass of brandy was similarly multiplied in a short time until he became as much of a drinker as a smoker.

Meanwhile, Robert had matured into a young adult and was able to earn his wages. Suddenly, a financial crisis occurred in the business, and he was laid off. Now he missed the money that had been wasted on cigarettes and alcohol. Then a very audacious thought came to him. He pondered how he could sneak into a bank unseen to get to the vault. He only wanted to get enough money to last him until he could get a job again. He did not want to become a thief at all; he just wanted to make one attempt.

And indeed, he managed to make his way into the safe. Carelessly, he left behind an unmistakable trace of himself while he was leaving. Together with his handkerchief, in which he wanted to wrap the stolen money, he also pulled out an empty envelope containing his full address, which fell to the floor unnoticed. When the money was discovered to be missing, the envelope was also found. It didn’t take a long trial to convict Robert Stein as the culprit and put him in prison.

Here was the boy who had believed that going to the bar only once, smoking only once, swearing only once, drinking only once, and finally stealing only once was of no importance. But how great and terrible were the consequences!

Dear readers, let the sad example of the unfortunate Robert serve as a warning to you, and consider that nowhere in His Word does God give us humans permission to do wrong just once. On the path of sin, it does not stop at the “one.” Whoever says “A” will soon have to say “B.” Who can foresee where the matter may end, in this life and then in eternity? ■

*How great
and terrible
were the
consequences!*

A Promise

Karl began working at a sawmill as a young teen. He met several coworkers his age there with whom he was to share a room. He was sad to learn that his coworkers were scoffers who did not want to hear or know anything about God. Karl thought about the evening with worry. What would they say if they saw him kneeling and praying in the evening?

Karl's concern was justified. After he had bowed his knees, his coworkers began to ridicule him and even threw their shoes at him. Karl pleaded to the Lord for help.

The following evening, his coworkers did even worse.

Finally, one of them suggested that they drag Karl to a nearby pond and dunk his head in the water until he promised to stop praying.

All of them immediately agreed. They dragged Karl to the pond. But before they dunked him into the water, Karl said to them seriously and calmly:

"Let me tell you something first. Then you can dunk me if you want to."

"Sure, let him tell!" one of them shouted.

So, Karl began, "I am only fifteen years old. Two weeks ago, my father called me to his deathbed and said:

"Karl, I am going home, and there is nothing left for me but to commit you to God. But you must take care of your mother. That is a big task. Bring me the Bible! Put your hand on it and promise me that morning and evening you will ask God to protect you and keep you from all evil!" I gave him my promise, and now I want to keep it as long as I live.

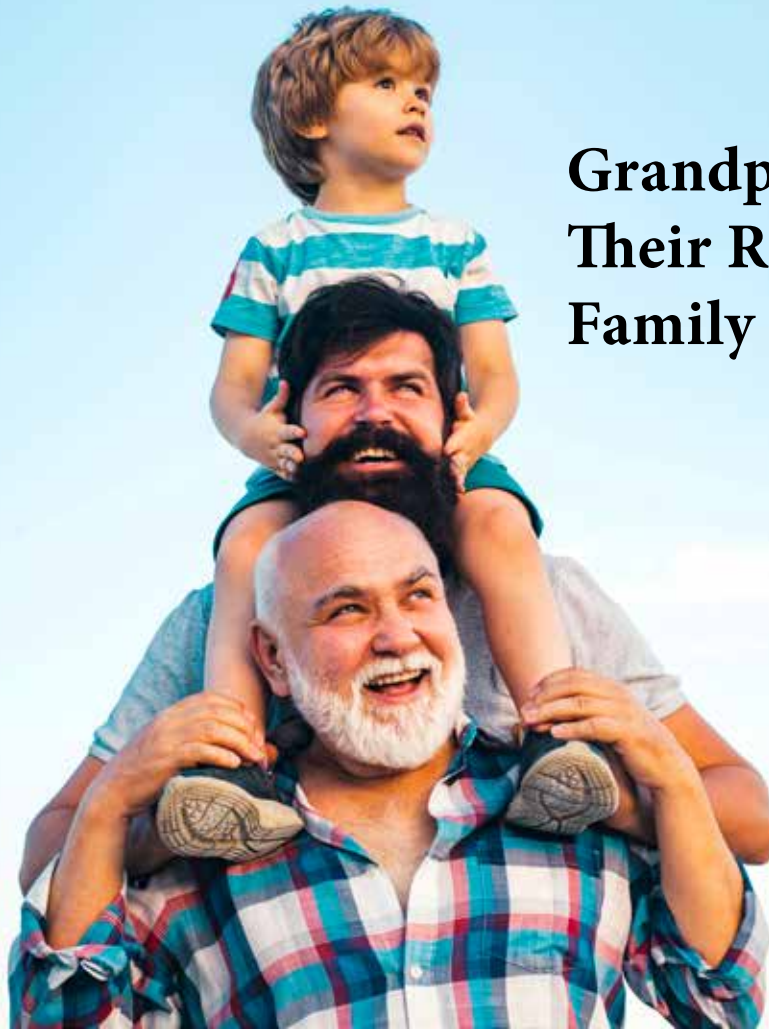
"When I said goodbye to my mother the day before yesterday, she told me that she would pray for me when I am far from home. I am to think of her and her faithful prayers when I am tempted.—This is what I wanted to share with you. Now, go ahead, do what you want and dunk me under water!"

But none of the boys laid a hand on Karl. Embarrassed, they stood around him, until one by one they retreated into the house.

The behavior of this faithful, courageous boy had made a deep impression on his coworkers. He won their souls for the Savior.

O, let us also trust in the Lord from our earliest youth and live according to His Word! ■

Grandparents— Their Role in the Family



About 3000 years ago, a wise man wrote, “To everything *there is* a season” (Ecclesiastes 3:1), followed by a long list of experiences encountered in life. No, we don’t find “grandparenting” on that list. And yet, that also has “its season” and is part of life.

I have had the privilege of experiencing grandparenting from both perspectives. As a child, I grew up with both my grandmothers and grandfather under the same roof and experienced the blessing of such a relationship. Again and again, I remember certain situations, see their actions, their wisdom, and also how they treated us children. The years have passed, and my grandparents have long since gone to be with the Lord.

Now we are “in their shoes” and are grandparents to 6 grandchildren. Our children are grown and have their own families, and we are grandparents. We have experienced raising children and have strived to give our children a good upbringing. With grandchildren, however, it is a little different. This is new territory for

us, and we are trying to find our way to build a positive and blessed relationship with them. We realize that it is not our job to raise our grandchildren. God has “imposed” this task on the parents; they carry the responsibility. And what is our job as grandparents? Are we simply silent spectators, watching patiently on the sidelines, waiting and hoping that everything goes well?

It takes wisdom to find our role. On one hand, we should not interfere in the family matters of our children, but on the other hand, we should not be indifferent. We are faced with questions such as: Should we speak up or rather remain silent? Based on our experience, we may have good advice, but will it be accepted? Is it possible that our views are not relevant today? Still, there are ways to be involved in the upbringing of our grandchildren.

One way to come alongside our children (in their parenting role) is through prayer. We have decided to support our children in their journey of childrearing through intercession. It always fills me with joy when

my wife, Doreen, prays for each child and grandchild by name. We also add the specific needs of each one. We pray that God will give parents much wisdom in parenting. Prayer is sometimes the only thing we can do. However, the value of prayer should never be underestimated, because God answers prayers.

When we are asked for advice, we may be able to help by drawing from our experiences. It is important to listen first, rather than speaking prematurely without really considering what has been said. Empathy, understanding, and compassion are necessary to respond tactfully and thoughtfully. Criticism is usually inappropriate. We should not respond as omniscient grandparents who always know everything better. Sometimes it is better to reply with a question or make suggestions.

We often talk of being a positive influence on our children; that is easier said than done. Yet it is possible to be a role model by our conduct and manner. I believe Paul was thinking of such behavior when he refers to his young co-worker's grandmother in 2 Timothy 1:5: "I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also." Paul speaks decisively of a grandmother's influence on her daughter and also on her grandson, Timothy. The grandmother, Lois, lived her "genuine faith" and thereby influenced not one but two generations.

We often hear about spoiling the grandchildren. What does this really mean? Is it permissible, and is it really advisable? Spoiling means granting the grandchildren more freedom than we gave our children. It is important to understand that the situation and the relationship are quite different, since we do not carry the responsibility for raising the children. Over the years, we have also changed and grown in a positive way. We have become more relaxed and gentler and do not react as hastily or to the extent we used to. We are usually better off financially and can do things for the

grandchildren that we were unable to do for our children. It could also be that we recognize oversights in the upbringing of our children and now want to make amends through our grandchildren.

However, we should be mindful and not take on tasks that are not within our authority. In all our decisions, we should consider the values of the parents. If they would not allow it, we should not permit it either. It must not come to conflict between parents and grandparents. When in doubt, it is advisable to discuss expectations and boundaries with the parents.

We should also consider whether something is for the good of the children. Certain toys, books, or videos could even be harmful. It is important to stay informed in order to make the right choices.

Despite all of this, I believe a certain amount of spoiling occurs naturally because we have more time on our hands as grandparents. We have fewer obligations than their parents and therefore can spend more time with the grandchildren. It gives us the opportunity to participate in their lives, play with them, do things, just be there, or just listen. Children have a lot to tell. Through sharing, they process their thoughts and learn to solve their own problems. Care must be taken not to interrupt or answer hastily, lest they close themselves off to us. By asking questions like, "What do you think should be done?" we can be more helpful than by always telling them what they should do. Only once I have established a foundation of trust can I expect my grandchildren to see me as credible and listen to my advice. All of this requires patience. We use the phrase, "Rome also wasn't built in a day" to express that meaningful things simply require time.

The longer we think about it, the more we realize how significantly our conduct impacts our grandchildren. On the other hand, we become aware of the opportunities God gives us to be a blessing in our extended family.

Harry Semenjuk



Wayward Children

Part 9

Welcomed with a Loving Embrace

M. Schmelzle

The reunion of father and son was not a private moment. In the society of that time, any individual action could bring honor or shame to the village as a whole; as a result, the son's actions had shamed not only his father but everyone else as well. Knowing that so many people had cause to be angry at his son, the father ran toward him as fast as he could, intending to take the burden of his son's shame and of the villagers' anger upon himself. (Luke 15: 11–32.)

Many no doubt expected the father to reject his son. Instead, he rejoiced in his dear son's return, greeting him with welcome rather than rejection and running toward him in a show of extraordinary love. The way can seem long when we walk alone; the father ran to meet his son halfway because he wanted to ease his way as much as possible, and we should be just as willing to meet our children halfway and to show them our love. We should take joy—not only as parents, but also as brothers and sisters in Christ—in every soul that finds its way back to the Father.

In addition to taking joy in their return, we have a duty to watch our own words and actions. A single unwise word can cause great damage, and so much harm has already been done when return-

ing souls were met with pointed words and cold shoulders. Confronted with this rejection, many have turned away again—this time forever. This is a great responsibility for us in the body of Christ. When people seek to return, let us meet them with love, understanding, and a welcoming heart. This will make their way easier—and our hearts lighter. As members of God's family, we should rejoice over every single person who finds the way back.

Through this story, Jesus shows God in a role we may not have expected: a parent who, instead of proudly holding back to wait for his wayward child to sneak in and grovel, lets go of his dignity and runs out to embrace his dirty, disheveled, and deeply ashamed son.

As his father approached, the son began to drop to his knees, intending to show how unworthy he felt by literally falling into the dust at his father's feet. But his father had other ideas, clutching him, drawing him close, and holding him tight. Even his son's humble pleas for pardon were glossed over, just as he ignored the dirt clinging to his clothing and body. Instead, he hugged him and declared a feast in his honor. What would people have said? Surely something similar to Luke 15: 2: "And the Pharisees and scribes com-

“As long as man can still rely on himself, and has hope to be able to help himself
[. . .] he will not relinquish his way.”

plained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’”

The father’s unrestrained welcome to his son is naturally the key to this story. Jesus explained why a feast was going to be held; in broader terms, this also explains the reason to celebrate when people turn from their own ways to God’s. Having hit rock bottom, the young man had nothing left to offer his father or anyone else, whether personally or in terms of possessions, but his father’s words say it all: “For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Luke 15:24).

If ever there was reason to celebrate, this is it! And let us not forget that we were once in the same position. Could our heavenly Father not have said the same of us when we returned home to Him? In Ephesians 2:1, we read, “And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins,” and in verses 4 and 5, “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).”

Since our heavenly Father met us with such love, should we not meet our children the same way if they were lost and have come to be found?

Since He showed such mercy to us, can we not be merciful too? Since He forgave us without harsh words and scolding, should we not treat our children the same way?

As parents, one way we can show our trust in God is by patiently waiting for Him to act. In this story, the father did not chase after the younger of his two sons. He waited patiently, but as soon as he saw his son returning, he ran toward him, embraced him with all his love, and took him back. Despite our pain, we should always be ready to take our lost children in, even if they are not ready to fully return to us and to God. Even a single step in the right direction should be acknowledged. Finally, we should not be shy to express our love for our children, even if they still appear to be lost, since it is not always possible for us to recognize how God is working. Instead, like the guard who waits for the morning, as we read in Psalm 130:6, “My soul *waits* for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning—*yes, more than* those who watch for the morning,” we must always be ready to acknowledge God’s ways and joyfully follow His guidance.

- *To be continued* -

Healing

From the Effects of a Dysfunctional Family

“A dysfunctional family is a family in which conflict, misbehavior, and often child neglect or abuse and sometimes even all of the above on the part of individual parents occur continuously and regularly, leading other members to accommodate such actions.” (Wikipedia)

The Bible does not shrink from describing the reality of depraved lives. Consider the following event portrayed in Matthew 14: 8–11:

“So she, having been prompted by her mother, said, ‘Give me John the Baptist’s head here on a platter.’ And the king was sorry; nevertheless, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he commanded *it* to be given to *her*. So he sent and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought *it* to her mother.”

Have you ever considered what effect this travesty would have had in the life of this young woman? Would she ever again have had a normal life? Would not the events of that awful birthday party have haunted her for the rest of her life? How would she have viewed her mother from that point on? Would she not have not been beset with this trauma again and again during times of stress in her life?

Even God’s people are not spared from many of the tragedies of life, which for some meant having grown up in a dysfunctional family. Whether it was a father or mother who was in bondage to sin, a broken or loveless marriage, never having received love or approval, or even having unspeakable sexual or other abuses perpetrated against them as children, many continue to deal with the psychological and emotional fallout for

the rest of their lives. Even as believers, their battle in dealing with the resulting trauma can consume them and negatively affect marriages and relationships, their ability to provide a healthy, nurturing environment for their own children, their careers, and even their spiritual health. How devastating when the effects of their forefather’s sins perpetuate themselves in generations to follow!

I will be the first to admit that for such a fortunate one as I, having grown up in a loving, Christ-honoring family, being able to truly understand what those coming from a dysfunctional family have gone through and continue to experience, is virtually impossible. Yet from years of having counseled with and trying to help those precious souls deal with such devastation in their lives, I can say without a doubt that their pain is real! I have dealt with young people struggling to break free of the anguish of their past, parents desperate not to pass on their struggles to their children, and even grandparents who were still suffering mentally and emotionally from the pain of their childhood.

How can such dear brothers and sisters be helped? Is there hope? Is there healing? Thank God, the answer is a resounding “yes”! Our God is great enough to deal with any and all such issues. The salvation that Jesus wrought on the cross is sufficient to not only re-



deem broken lives but to give healing and restoration to hearts and lives devastated by sins, wrongs, and hurts. When Jesus said, “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36), He meant that for you and me! How can we be healed of the effects of a dysfunctional family?

1. Let Jesus set you free.

If you’ve tried and tried to overcome the hurts of your past on your own, you’ve probably already come to the realization that your efforts, be they ever so intense, are not enough. But Jesus can set you free of your past, and He gives that remarkable invitation in Matthew

11: 28, “Come to Me, all *you* who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Where all our efforts are insufficient, Jesus has unlimited power to deal with all our woes. Just bring all your hurts, your failures, your feelings of inadequacy and being treated unfairly to the cross and petition the Lord to take them and free you of them! God, as the source of all love, is certainly willing to do so. He longs to do so. He’ll set you free!!

2. Forgive

This can be hard to do when, year after year, you suffer the effects of having come from a dysfunc- ►

tional family. For many who have trials and issues in their life, the natural tendency is to point the finger of blame at others. And while others *are* often to blame in an abusive or dysfunctional family, many such victims allow bitterness to grow in their hearts, rendering them unable, or making it extremely difficult, to forgive. But the fact is that unless we forgive, we will never be free. Harboring bitterness will leave us in bondage.

And what did Jesus have to say about forgiving? The first thing He said after teaching us the Lord's Prayer was, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14–15). Forgiveness is vital! Dr. Erwin Lutzer, in his message *What Your Father Should Have Taught You* said, "What we don't forgive, we pass on." How true are these words! Not only does unforgiveness prevent God's grace from working in our lives, not only does unforgiveness poison us personally, but we also pass that poison on to those around us. How tragic when that cycle repeats itself in the lives of our children!

You may have tried to forgive but the feelings of what you've suffered just well up and smother any attempts you've repeatedly made. Your emotions make you seem powerless to forgive. In such a case you need to realize that forgiveness is first and foremost not a feeling, but a decision. Just let go and ask for God's help, and then commit to treating that person as if nothing had ever happened. As you live that commitment with God's help, real love and happiness will grow! And know that God understands and has compassion for your struggle. Yes, that's how wonderful our loving heavenly Father is!

3. Leave your hurts at the cross

This means bringing them to Jesus and then abandoning them! Your heart and your mind are going to want

to replay the wrongs committed against you again and again, but you need to unequivocally give them up! Yes, bring them to the cross and let them go. To quote Erwin Lutzer once more, "It is like taking a pitcher of water and pouring it out. And you may have to do this more than once." Let me ask you, if you've completely poured out a pitcher of water, how much water will you be taking home again? And yet, maybe your experience has been that your "pitcher" seems to refill itself after a short while. Empty it again!

Leave the past at the cross and never attempt to take it up again, just as God irrevocably forgives our sins. And then guard your heart so the enemy doesn't ensnare you with your past again. Give up your "right" to be a victim and leave it all at the cross.

4. Put your hurts on the altar of sacrifice

Consecrate your all to God and die to self. Ask Him to cleanse the inherited depravity and fill you with His Holy Spirit. Once self is "dead" and consecrated to God, how much power do the hurts of the past still have over us? They should be completely gone, replaced with the power of the Holy Spirit poured out into our hearts by a constant stream of God's love (Romans 5:5). Love such as this can't be contained and spreads to those around us. It is love that sees that those who have wronged us may have struggled with exactly the same struggles that defined us. How wonderful when the power of love and forgiveness in our hearts sets us free to genuinely love and forgive!

If you continue to struggle with the effects of having grown up in a dysfunctional family, why don't you seek out a trusted pastor or spiritual advisor? And let the power of God's love set you free. May His healing power restore your heart so that you can be truly free of a hurtful past. Psalm 147:3 says, "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." He would love to do that for you!

Ron Taron

What if I failed as a parent?

If you feel you have failed as a parent, chances are that you did not. Someone who has failed as a parent will usually not admit or think they are at fault. It is the conscientious parent, whose expectations were not realized, that feels that he or she has failed. Also, failure in the eyes of the world is not failure in the eyes of God. He has different standards regarding success. As a young teacher, I will never forget the advice of my supervisor who said: “The failure of the student is not the failure of the teacher.” The same applies to parenting. A parent can contribute much to a child’s success or failure, but when the children are grown, the responsibility lies with them.

Now, that does not mean that we should gloss over mistakes and wrongs that have been done. The biblical principle applied to trespasses can also be applied to our failings as parents: “Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another” (James 5:16). And if something has come up in the training and raising of our children that needs to be forgiven, then confess it to God because “if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). If you have adult children, keep the lines of communication open. Show unconditional love. When the prodigal son came home, “when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him” (Luke 15:20). At that point the father did not yet know that the son was repentant, yet he showed compassion. Let us have the same.

If your children are still at home and you have wronged your child and caused it unwarranted grief, it is appropriate and necessary to ask for forgiveness. It will take humility to say to a child: “I was wrong and I should not have done that or acted that way. I ask you to please forgive me.” If a wrong has been committed, pretending it never happened will cause our children to lose trust in us. Openness and a sharing relationship fosters growth, both spiritually and emotionally.

When our children are grown and have left home it is important to continue to pray for them. Often children who did not understand their parents when they were young adults later realized the wisdom of their parents and regretted their own shortcomings. Do not compromise your integrity by giving in to something you believe is wrong just to please your children. A godly life, being fair, and not showing favoritism to one child over another is important despite the opinions your children may have. If you are disappointed with the decisions and life choices of your loved ones, remember God is not finished with them yet. He still answers prayer. In 2 Timothy 2:13 it is said of God that even “If we are faithless, He remains faithful.” In like manner, no matter what path our children are taking, let us remain faithful and set a good example. Actions speak louder than words.

As God’s children we have a refuge that the world does not know. Psalm 34:7 tell us that “the angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them.” Because we serve the Lord, Satan is hindered and we are protected from many things. When Satan cannot get at us as he wishes, he sometimes uses our unsaved children or relatives to cause us grief. Jesus hated sin but loved the sinners and even died for us “while we were still sinners” (Romans 5:8). One little girl, when caught doing something wrong said, “Daddy, I know you love me, but you do not like what I did.” How many children do not know that? That is tragic. If they are doing wrong, they must know that we love them anyway. And that is why they are being disciplined. We are not displeased with them, but we oppose the thing they are doing that is sinful or wrong. Whatever relationship we have with our children, whether grown or still at home, let us commit them to the Lord, pray for them, and continue to shower them with love.

Gerry Mielke
Hamilton, Ontario

O Blessed Home

O blessed home, that cheerfully receiveth
Thy visits, Jesus Christ, the soul's true Friend,
That, far beyond all other guests, believeth
It must to Thee its warmest cheer extend;
Where ev'ry heart to Thee is fondly turning,
Where ev'ry eye for Thee with pleasure speaks,
Where all to know Thy will are truly yearning,
And ev'ry one to do it promptly seeks.

O blessed home, where man and wife, united
In Thy true love, have both one heart and mind,
Where both to Thy salvation are invited,
And in Thy doctrine both contentment find;
Where both, to Thee, in truth, forever cleaving
In joy, in grief, make Thee their only stay,
And fondly hope in Thee to be believing,
Both in the good and in the evil day.

O blessed home, where little children tender
Are laid upon Thy heart with hands of prayer,
Thou Friend of children, Who wilt freely render
To them more than a mother's loving care,
Where round Thy feet they gather, to Thee clinging,
And hear Thy loving voice most willingly,
And in their songs, Thy hearty praises ringing,
Rejoice in Thee, O blessed Lord, in Thee.

O blessed home where Thou art not forgotten,
When joy is overflowing, full, and free;
O blessed home where ev'ry wounded spirit
Is brought, O great Physician, unto Thee,
Until at last, when earthly toil is ended,
All meet Thee in the blessed home above,
From whence Thou camest, where Thou hast ascended,
Thine everlasting home of peace and love!

Philipp Spitta

