

BUILDING A HAPPY FAMILY

FIGHTING FAIR IN LOVE AND MARRIAGE • CLOSING
THE GENERATION GAP • RESPECTING EVERYBODY'S
HUMAN POTENTIAL • CHILDREN ARE
PEOPLE TOO! • THE FAMILY THAT EATS TOGETHER



This booklet contains articles on several facets of family life. It is not intended to be a complete guide to solving marital and child-rearing problems, and it does not cover all aspects of the family. However, it is hoped that this material will make the reader more aware of the vital importance of the family as a unit of society—and demonstrate the importance of a happy, stable marriage as the sound basis for a well-integrated family unit. Even in a strong family unit a husband and wife will occasionally have problems. Obviously, any two people living together will. But sometimes there is a tendency to deny such problems rather than face them openly. We feel that it is necessary to face and explore such problems in order to deal with them effectively. Hopefully, the examples and suggestions in this booklet will be of help in that regard. Individuals are made in God's image, and the family relationship is patterned after a much higher type of relationship on a spiritual plane. Father, mother, and children are separate, unique individuals created in the image of God. As such, each of them make a unique contribution to the total family unit, and should be accorded the respect and dignity their contribution deserves. By appreciating each individual's unique role in the family, and by allowing each member a feeling of self-worth and self-esteem, the family unit is strengthened. What happens within the family unit is not only of supreme importance to the future of each of its members, but it affects the way they relate to others in God's family, the church, and to society as a whole.

by David L. Antion

Chapter One

FIGHTING FAIR IN LOVE AND MARRIAGE

It comes as no surprise to hear that married couples have arguments. In fact, sometimes they have more than arguments. They have fights! But it isn't polite to call them "fights"—so let's call them "opportunities."

This chapter is about opportunities to calmly or not so calmly discuss troublesome issues, to improve communication in a marriage, and to increase true intimacy between husband and wife.

According to Robert Kelley, author of *Courtship, Marriage and the Family*, a marital argument is "a result of a breakdown in the working partnership between husband and wife." It takes skill and self-control to turn these destructive squabbles into "fair fights" that improve husband-wife communications, solve problems, and produce positive results. But it can be done by following a few rules:

1) Do Your Thing to Cool Off

Whatever the source of an argument, once it begins people can become extremely angry. In an

atmosphere of tension, frustration, and hurt feelings, facts can get distorted, and commonsense talk isn't always achieved. Instead, evil motives may be imputed to every statement. Words may be seized upon and taken completely out of context. So if a couple is obviously heading into an argument, it's best to reduce the level of their emotional state before they begin.

Each of us has his or her own particular way to cool off. Some people like to go for a walk; others might want to engage in violent sports activities. But however you do it, cool off!

Once you've calmed down from your initial anger, you may choose to forget the whole thing. If not, you are ready to implement rule #2.

2) Argue with the Right Person

This may sound like a ridiculous thing to say. After all, you might ask, whom else would I argue with? What this rule actually means is that we should argue with the person we are really angry with and not pick on an innocent party. For in-

stance, if you are angry with your boss, don't take it out on your wife. If it's your wife that's the problem, don't take it out on the kids or the dog. A definite sign that you're arguing with the wrong person is when your anger is all out of proportion to the actual offense.

Some psychologists refer to this type of arguing as "dumping"—piling your frustrations, angers, and hostilities on others, taking out your built-up wrath on innocent people. Children are often the victim in this game of "dumping." They are scolded, spanked, or criticized, sometimes because their parents are frustrated with others, not really with them. Dumping is cruel, and it allows a person to escape a confrontation with the real issue at hand. It resolves nothing.

3) Argue About the Right Thing

You'd be surprised how many arguments are started and fought viciously about the wrong subjects! Counselors and psychologists are well aware that the problems people present are not necessarily the prob-

lems of prime concern to them. The real problems lie underneath.

The same goes for married couples. For instance, a husband may criticize his wife's house-keeping when he really may be upset with her lovemaking. Or a wife may criticize her husband about always being at work, when in reality she is hurt because she doesn't feel he gives her enough attention.

When we argue, we need to carefully examine ourselves to find out how we feel and exactly what the source of our irritation is. A husband should ask himself, "Am I really angry with my wife's house-keeping? Is that the issue? Or could it be something else?"

Of course sometimes it is difficult—humiliating, embarrassing and potentially hurtful—for us to share what is really troubling us with our mates! It takes courage to open up and reveal ourselves! We become vulnerable when we show what really hurts us. It could be used against us. There must be love and trust in the relationship in order to argue about the right thing. But it pays big dividends when it is done.

4) Argue at the Right Time

Bringing up a sensitive subject to one's mate not only requires courage and trust, but also proper timing. In fact, the choice of the right time is more important than the choice of the right words. It may work out fine if you blurt out from the heart what's troubling you, instead of keeping it hidden. But if you don't choose the right time to bring up a sensitive subject, you may only make matters worse.

How many times have couples begun an argument just before they were supposed to leave for a party? Not only have they damaged their marriage relationship, they've ruined a good evening as well.

When bringing up a sensitive subject to your mate—one over which you are irritated and must confront him or her—do so at the right time, when you're both able to cope with a discussion. Don't bring it up in front of company. And don't bring it up when you know that your time is too limited to properly discuss it.

Some people play what Eric Berne in his book, *The Games People Play*, called the "Sweetheart"

game. One mate brings up faults of the other in front of company. He usually does this in a way that is quite a putdown to his spouse. However, at the end of the putdown, he usually says something like this: "Isn't that right, Sweetheart?" Of course, the use of this affectionate term makes him look good. It also puts his mate in the awkward position of not being able to say anything in retaliation. This is a "game"—but it is not fun or pleasant to play! However, married couples sometimes use other names in their arguments besides "Sweetheart."

5) Don't Bring Up Past Fights

Once an argument has taken place, it ought to be resolved and buried, never to be resurrected! However, some people tend to "give in" in order to end the argument before they are really satisfied with the outcome. Because they abandon an argument before it's really resolved, they will tend to resurrect that old argument in the context of a new one. Once again, this is subtly showing dissatisfaction with the outcome of past arguments. The unsuspecting mate was previously *deceived* into thinking everything was okay. This breeds mistrust and lack of confidence and can only damage the marriage relationship.

6) Avoid Name-calling

In a "fair fight" both parties are trying to resolve a conflict in the best way possible. But in the course of an argument, frustrated and hurt mates may lash out, and in turn hurt and frustrate their spouse. And they usually do it through the medium of insults or name-calling.

This form of personal verbal assault is very destructive. First of all, it throws the entire argument off any logical track. Instead of trying to settle the problem at hand, it only serves to add another problem. Instead of examining one's own words and actions to see where they might be improved and how they might contribute to a solution, the party that resorts to name-calling focuses attention on the mate and attempts to blame them for the problem.

7) Avoid "Stamp Saving"

Sometimes we save up grievances like we save trading stamps. Per-

haps we don't immediately say anything to our mate about a particular problem. But then after weeks or months when we do have an argument, we unload all kinds of things over which we had hostile feelings in the past.

A mate may be shocked to learn of little incidents (maybe not so little to their spouse) which are now being brought up days, weeks, or even months later during an argument over something else. The husband or wife may not even suspect the other spouse felt this way because their true feelings weren't revealed at the time of the original offense. But now, since an argument is in progress, one mate decides to cash in all these "trading stamps" at once.

"Stamp collecting" breeds a reaction of distrust and lack of confidence. Your mate may begin to wonder about everything that happens from that point on, thinking thoughts like: "He seems okay now, but will he throw this up in my face later on?" Your mate may develop an insecurity and a distrust of you because of not knowing whether bygone incidents may be resurrected in the future.

The cure for cashing in stamps is this: Either express your displeasure about the incidents *at the time they occur* or at the earliest convenient time, or make up your mind to forget them forever!

But what if you see a recurring fault and decide that it needs correcting? Then bring up that fault or action at the proper time—when it occurs again. But don't bring it up during an argument over something else.

In Summary

Marital arguments should always be constructive—beneficial to a marriage. They should enhance each partner's understanding of the other and make for increased harmony in the future. They should bring two people closer together as the problem is resolved. For each partner should learn to see things from the other's point of view as well as from his own.

As mature partners, each can realize that it is possible for two

human beings to live together and have differences, that differences are not of themselves wrong or evil, and that those differences can be worked out compatibly, amicably, and lovingly. They can learn that there is absolutely no reason to hide or pre-

tend. Rather both partners can be honest and aboveboard, instead of allowing a wall of silence to come between them or letting hostility drive them apart.

If you and your mate can discuss these rules together and apply them,

you'll have fewer marital squabbles. And you will find that your occasional arguments don't have to be a source of major depression, but can instead be a source of profit for both of you and a real benefit to the precious relationship you hope to keep.

Chapter Two

CLOSING THE GENERATION GAP

My parents fight . . . they don't understand me . . . my father doesn't talk to me . . . I really hate both my parents . . . my father's away a lot . . . I have no rapport with my father."

These are the confessions of increasing numbers of teenagers. But why? Why should one of the closest, warmest human relationships end up on the rocks?

One of the biggest social problems today is the parent-child problem. A communication gap has separated teenagers from their parents. How does it come about? How does this wall of misunderstanding develop? When does it start? And what can one do to correct it?

Teenagers Speak Out

Interviews with teenagers, once loved, cuddled, played-with, and talked-to children, reveal some surprising points.

"There are a lot of things that I don't know about my parents," says Chris, a sixteen-year-old sophomore from New Jersey. "My father goes out on the road. He never talks about what he does, but I have to wonder sometimes. My parents fight . . . they fight all night" (Thorpe and Blake, *The Music of Their Laughter*, p. 1).

Sandy is sixteen, the second of three girls. Here is how she views her parents: "My father works for a chemical firm. I don't know what he

does or how much he makes, but it must be a lot, because we live well.

"My parents are concerned with what other people think. It's really not my mother. It's mostly my father. She's really nice. He's all right but he just doesn't understand. He says that he wants to understand and everything, but I don't think he ever could, really. He's just not like—he just won't understand. I guess he's really concerned about his job, and he's in the Lions Club business. I don't know what that is. He's some head of it or something. He goes to that a couple of days a week, and I don't know . . . I don't know how to describe him really" (*ibid.*, p. 3).

How pitiful! Here is a young girl who does not really know her own father and does not know how to express herself well enough so he will understand. Obviously there is little family contact. She does not even know what his job is or what his club responsibility is.

Sandy's family lacks conversation and cohesion. Sandy has contact with her mother and feels that her mother is "really nice." But she feels that her father "doesn't understand," couldn't understand, and "won't understand." She started the thought, "He's just not like . . ." Then she interrupted her words. We can only wonder to whom she was comparing her father. Perhaps she wished her father could understand like one of her teachers does.

But in any case, we can plainly see that Sandy has virtually given up hope that there will ever be any understanding with her father. In just sixteen years, starting from birth, here is a girl who has just about ended all fellowship with her father. How can this be?

What's He Really Like?

If you were to meet and talk with Sandy's father, you would probably like him. He is no doubt esteemed highly among his associates at work and in the Lions Club. He is likely to be regarded as a stalwart member of the community—an active, contributing member of society.

In all probability, he doesn't really know what his daughter thinks. He evidently works hard, giving time and energy to his job to provide for his family. He sees his daughter at home, getting ready for her activities, school socials, etc. Sometimes he must feel frustrated and may comment: "I just don't understand these kids today." At times he may try to come up with something to say to his daughter but can't seem to establish any rapport. So, finding no common ground, he buries his face in the newspaper or hurries off to his club duties.

The above situation describes thousands of homes where there is virtually no father influence. The trouble is that too much time is spent trying to pin the blame on someone, instead of solving the

problem. Parents accuse teens: "They're young, rebellious, and won't listen." Teens in turn accuse parents: "They're square, hard-nosed, and won't listen."

The common denominator? Neither will listen! Each usually feels the other is at fault. For teenagers, the subject of parents is so charged with emotion that many do not even want to discuss it with interviewers.

Results of Another Survey

Bibi Wein, author of *The Runaway Generation*, reported: "There was more reticence and emotional charge on the subject of parents than on anything else covered in the interviews." She further explained that the teenagers interviewed spoke more openly about their sexual activities, drugs, etc. than they did about their parents.

She continued: "Rather than expressing hostility, anger or condescension for the elder generation, most kids just didn't seem to want to talk about it."

Teenagers were asked, "Was there a time when you liked your parents better than you do now?" Miss Wein reports: "Most answered yes, but could not say when that changed, or what had happened.... About 65% said their parents did not know much about their attitudes and feelings."

Miss Wein then asked a series of questions to discover the attitude of teenagers toward their parents.

"Question: Do you want them to know more?"

"Many answered yes. Those who said no did so not because of secrets or fear of punishment, but because of fear of disillusioning and disappointing their parents, or because they felt that there was simply no possibility for more understanding.

"Question: Would you like to know more about them?"

"Almost all said yes.

"Question: Was there a time when you decided it was better not to tell your parents personal things?"

"I never talked to my parents, was one fairly common answer. Others said there once was such a time, but they could not recall it. Many seemed to feel that time had been around the age of six. There was a strong feeling that parents didn't

want to know more about their children and were unwilling to receive communications on any subject where there might be disagreement" (pp. 307-308).

When Communication Breaks Down

Parents start losing communication with their children about the age of six—about the time they enter school. It seems at this point that parent and child begin to live in two different worlds. Their interests part. Their lives become more enigmatic to each other until there is really nothing to talk about.

Here, in many cases, is the beginning of the problem. As long as all members of the family share everything in common and the children are not affected by outside interests, all *seems* to go well. The lack of communication, genuine interest, and outgoing concern between members of the family has not yet shown its weakness at this point in a child's life.

But when children enter school and grow older, new interests and influences begin to make their marks. As time progresses, the weakness allowed to develop in the family unit becomes more evident. Not all parents realize they are out of contact with their children—that school influences are stronger than the family.

Our youth need direction and a consistent set of guidelines. Every parent should be doing everything possible for preschool children in laying the foundation of discipline and right teaching.

One teenage girl summarized the feelings of many teenagers when she was asked: "Do you have private moments with your father where you sit down over coffee and he tells you something?"

"No."

"Do you wish you did?"

"No, I try to avoid that sort of thing...."

She continues: "I have no rapport with my father. I don't think there's anything binding my father and me. I never got any sex education when I was younger. I came by it, I guess, like most girls my age do, in school, dirty jokes, dirty books."

Does this describe your home? What have you taught your children?

In an interview, Mike, a Penn State junior, made a candid statement about his parents: "I never got one iota of sex training from my parents.... I think parents are very naive."

He says further about his mother: "I can't sit down and talk with my mother about something that's bugging me."

These young people are not unusual. These parents are not, unfortunately, a rarity in our society. These family situations are typical.

When we consider the breakdown of the home, the terribly unhappy marriages, is it any wonder our societies are literally coming apart thread by thread? The fabric that underlies a healthy society—the home itself—is being ripped apart.

What can parents do to see that this generation will grow up to be sound, respectful, useful citizens in a world running amuck?

What Can You Do?

The answer involves one basic consideration. You cannot be a good father unless you are first a good husband. And you cannot be a good mother unless you are first a good wife.

The climate set by the husband and wife definitely influences the climate in which the child will be reared. If a child is reared in turmoil, strife and confusion, how can he learn stability and peace? Children learn by imitating. When the only thing they have at home to imitate is constant bickering and strife between father and mother, they become hostile and aggressive toward others and lose the sense of security that comes from a warm home relationship.

The two people a young child loves most in the world are his father and mother. The child wants to see them happy, to see them together. But when they are torn apart by strife, the child's whole world seems insecure.

The emotional effects of this insecure environment are just beginning to be realized. We are now experiencing a generation that has been reared—or rather, allowed to grow up—in homes devoid of love and affection, in homes without proper rules of conduct or organiza-

tion. No wonder we have a "run-away generation."

If you are married, you are first responsible to your mate. You should make your marriage a happy one. Nothing is more emotionally important to your child. Loving your husband or your wife totally is one of the greatest benefits you can bestow on your child.

Next, parents and teenagers alike must begin building the bridge of communication. In a survey taken with young people, this question was asked: "What do you do when you are at home?"

"The activity most often mentioned was listen to records. About half mentioned having some household chores, but in general, I got no sense of any activities that were not solitary ones, including watching TV. In most cases, I sensed little participation in family life" (Wein, *op. cit.*, p. 308).

Too often while parents are home with their children, they might as well be a hundred miles away. If you're going to spend time with your children, spend it profitably. Make it memorable.

You need common interests in order to have conversation. If you and

a close friend separate for quite a while, it is difficult to converse when you meet again. You may find that you have little in common. You will have to spend hours bringing one another up to date on your various activities and experiences. Each of you will have to do a considerable amount of talking as well as listening!

This is the key to rebuilding a bridge of communication with your children. You will have to find out what their interests are. You will also have to bring them into contact with your experiences. But even here you will need a common bond of experiences and interests.

Parenting Demands Involvement

Some men tend to involve themselves in their work, hobbies, and careers. If a father isn't careful, he can soon find himself consumed with all kinds of outside activities, leaving little time for his family.

Many wives complain that their husbands leave them alone too much. They have virtually no companionship with their husbands, and the marriage suffers.

In the course of planning his life, a man must recognize that he com-

mitted himself to certain definite responsibilities when he married. And these responsibilities take priority over most personal preferences in his life. He must ensure that he spends enough time with his wife. This should include taking his wife out occasionally—having time alone with her for conversation.

If he fulfills these major responsibilities and has time left over for personal interests, well and good. But what happens in most cases is that a man wants to "have his cake and eat it too." He wants to spend most of his time working or engaging in his favorite recreational activities and hobbies. Then he hopes he has enough time after work to devote to his family. And it is usually his family that is left without the proper attention.

Parenting is an important responsibility—one that needs to be taken very seriously. It is possible that the course of our nations and even our entire civilization may be determined by the quality of time we spend with our children—so every parent needs to take stock of his own private family situation, and do whatever he can to help close the generation gap.

Chapter Three

RESPECTING EVERYBODY'S HUMAN POTENTIAL

On October 29, 1975, the National Organization of Women declared "Alice Doesn't Day" (named for the motion picture *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*). Women were asked to go on strike for 24 hours—to stay away from school, not go shopping or deposit money in the bank, and skip work if possible (if not possible, they were asked to wear an armband to work or refuse to do "feminine" jobs like making coffee).

This mass demonstration was an

attempt to show people in the United States (and around the world, for that matter) that women have an essential function in today's society. In fact, society as we know it could not continue if "Alice Didn't" go to work or if she didn't shop, teach, drive, answer the phone, do the typing and filing, cook the meals, make the coffee, etc., etc., etc.

But why were these women moved to demonstrate so strongly against doing what they've always done? What made many of them

dissatisfied with their traditional role in life?

Women in Today's World

Mainly because of new technology, times have changed radically in the past fifty years. Problems have arisen all over the world because our environment is changing faster than our social institutions. Change is thrust upon us before we are ready to deal with it.

As Alvin Toffler wrote in the best-selling book *Future Shock*: "Future

shock is a time phenomenon, a product of the greatly accelerated rate of change in society. It arises from the superimposition of a new culture on an old one. It is culture shock in one's own society . . . [It] is the dizzying disorientation brought on by the premature arrival of the future. . . . It may well be the most important disease of tomorrow. . . . The malaise, mass neurosis, irrationality, and free-floating violence already apparent in contemporary life are merely a foretaste of what may lie ahead unless we come to understand and treat this disease" (p. 11).

One example of this hard-to-take change is the way the average woman's life-style has rapidly evolved since the 1900s. While a woman could formerly count on having a large family and spending nearly all her life rearing children, today the average woman in the United States has her last child before she is 30 years old. By the time she is 34, that child will start to school, and by age 46 he or she will leave home for college.

Consequently, many women find themselves finished with motherhood in their middle forties. Add to this the fact that the average American woman is widowed by age 56, and has a life expectancy of 76, and it's no wonder many women are concerned about their rapidly changing role in life. What do they do when their children are no longer dependent upon them and their husbands have perhaps died?

Unfortunately, many women become very despondent. Some turn to alcohol—figures show that an increasing number of women are becoming alcoholics. Others turn to pills or suicide, or strive frantically to remarry. This depression or despondency is only normal, however. It is paralleled by a man's feeling of letdown when he is laid off his job or fired.

If a woman cannot count on being a homemaker, mother and wife all her life, then she is indeed in trouble unless she discovers other options. As she grows older, the job she filled for the first half of her life will vanish, and she will need to find something else to give her life meaning and purpose.

A Brief Biblical History

According to the Bible, women have been on earth almost as long as men. So what does the Bible have to say about them? Does it really limit their role in life as much as some people think it does? Does God want women to be considered inferior beings? What is His attitude toward them as outlined in His Word? And how should women view themselves and their purpose in life in light of the Scriptures?

As Christ stated in Matthew 19, God originally intended for a husband and wife to be "one flesh" (Matt. 19:3-6). A man was to leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife. He was not to divorce or put her away, or take to himself more than one wife.

But people failed to live up to this ideal. Polygamy is recorded as early as Genesis 4:19. By Moses' time, it was actually legally recognized, with laws governing how a man should treat his different wives (Deut. 21:15-17).

Under the laws of ancient Israel, it was obvious that women were thought of as somewhat inferior to their husbands. Yet under the Mosaic and Levitical system, and later on in Judaism, women were infinitely better off than their counterparts in most of the surrounding nations. They were honored as mothers (Ex. 20:12) and were to be feared and obeyed by their children (Lev. 19:3; Deut. 21:18-19). The mother was a highly respected figure. She often helped name the children, and was responsible in many cases for their earliest education.

Israelite women were allowed to attend religious services and could even present offerings for sacrifice (Lev. 12:5-6). It may come as a surprise to some that in Old Testament times a woman as well as a man could take a Nazarite vow to dedicate herself to the Eternal (see Numbers 6:2).

Women Demand Their Rights

But under the laws given to Moses governing land inheritance, only male heirs could inherit their father's land. Consequently, if a man had no sons, his land would ordinarily go to the next of kin who was a male.

During that time, a man named Zelophehad died who had only daughters. But these daughters stood up to protest to Moses against what they considered an unfair law. Moses took the matter to God, and God rendered this decision: "The daughters of Zelophehad *are right*; you shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them" (see Numbers 27:1-11).

Because of the spunky protest of these women, God went on to give this added legislation: "If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers."

Jesus' Unorthodox Approach

When Jesus Christ came on the scene, He taught contrary to the Jewish establishment of His day by declaring that "judgment, mercy, and faith" were more important than picky Pharisaic rituals. Some of His actions were radical compared to the accepted practice of that time and society. For example, in the Gospel of John, chapter four, we read of Jesus carrying on a lengthy conversation with a Samaritan woman. When His disciples saw it, "They *marveled that he was talking with a woman*, but none said . . . 'Why are you talking with her?'" (Verse 27.)

The disciples were truly shocked—and not just because Jesus was talking to a despised Samaritan, but to a *woman*. In order to understand their reaction, we must realize that according to the custom of the times it was considered shameful or disgraceful for a rabbi or teacher to speak to a woman in public. In fact, most rabbis would not even speak to their own *wives* in a public situation. It lowered a man's public esteem if he even considered them worthy of conversation.

So Jesus' unorthodox conduct shocked the disciples. But because of who He was and due to the tremendous awe and respect for Him that they had, no one took Him to

task or interrogated Him about His actions.

The Lesson of Mary and Martha

In Luke 10:39-42, there is a short account of Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus. While Jesus was a guest in their home, Martha acted as hostess while Mary "sat at the Lord's feet" (an expression which meant to sit as a student learning from a teacher) "and listened to his teaching." This aggravated Martha quite a bit, since she was "distracted with much serving." So she came to Jesus and finally complained to Him, asking for His help in telling her sister to do the woman's duty. "Lord," she said, "do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me."

Of course this was her role—to serve and be hospitable and prepare the food. It was the men's place to sit and eat and discuss scriptural matters.

This is exactly the way it was centuries before when the angelic messengers came to visit Abraham (Gen. 18). Sarah stayed out of the way while Abraham talked with these "men." Sarah made bread, prepared the meal, and eavesdropped on the conversation.

But Mary, in contrast, sat among the disciples as a student listening to Jesus' words. How did Jesus view his situation? He answered her worried sister: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (verses 41, 42).

It wasn't that Jesus thought serving was unnecessary. Certainly someone had to do it, and we must admire Martha for her diligence. But Jesus was emphasizing that the role of women encompassed more than physical duties. Women along with men should learn the "one thing" that is "needful." Christ believed that women were to heed the divine words of God and be concerned with spiritual issues every bit as much as men.

Again, this was revolutionary. Most rabbis would have preferred the women to be in the kitchen preparing the food, leaving the men to

discuss spiritual matters. But not Jesus!

Faithful Women

Christ's overall attitude of respect for the dignity of every human being attracted quite a few women followers who "provided for them [Christ and the disciples] out of their means" (Luke 8:1-3). These women who followed Jesus and gave to Him from their money or possessions were faithful right to the end of His life. While His own disciples all "forsook him and fled," these faithful women followed Jesus right to the cross (see Matthew 27:55-56 and John 19:25-26).

And on the first day of the week, after they had rested on the Sabbath, it was again the women who went to visit the tomb very early in the morning to bring spices which they had prepared. They were the ones who found the sepulcher opened, the stone rolled away, and Jesus' body gone (Luke 24:1-3). The disciples had no idea of what had happened. It was the women who saw the angels and heard the words they spoke and "remembered his [Christ's] words" (Luke 24:8). They returned from the sepulcher and told the disciples and the rest of the followers what they had found, even though the disciples didn't really believe them (verses 9-12). We find that these women were also among those that were waiting faithfully with the apostles of Jesus for the promise of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:13-14).

Outstanding Women

In his letters, the apostle Paul mentioned a number of women who had labored and served the Church, thus furthering the gospel of Jesus Christ. One outstanding example is Phoebe. Paul said of her: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well" (Rom. 16:1-2). Paul introduced her to the church at Rome, commending her for her exceptional assistance.

In this same chapter, Paul com-

mends several other women for their service and help. Among them is Priscilla, who with her husband Aquila aided Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3). It is interesting to note that in some instances Priscilla's name is listed even ahead of her husband's. However, when they are mentioned in the context of their home, Aquila is mentioned first.

Paul states that Euodia and Syntyche were women who had "labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:2-3). These women had such an outstanding part in furthering the gospel that Paul gave them honorable mention along with Clement and other of his fellow laborers.

And the gifts of the Spirit were bestowed upon the women of God's Church in that early first century, just as they were to men. The daughters of Philip "did prophesy" (Acts 21:9).

Women's Contribution

Throughout the Bible, God shows He is pleased with His creation of mankind as male and female. God does not want the abolition of these distinct sexual characteristics. But a man and a woman are both human beings, and as human beings deserve an equal amount of respect and dignity. No matter what one's gender might be, we are all children of God and empowered to fulfill the same destiny: "... There is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:28, 29).

As times and circumstances change, God does not expect Christians to try to indefinitely maintain their particular society's old status quo regarding women. Christ certainly didn't. Because of our rapidly changing culture, we may need to reevaluate traditional thinking in order to help women make a greater contribution to society as a whole. All of us as Christians need to reexamine our own personal lives, habits and prejudices in this regard, and make sure our individual attitudes toward women parallel those of Christ.

CHILDREN ARE PEOPLE TOO!

Because children start off in this world totally helpless and completely without any knowledge, parents sometimes view them as objects—and helpless objects at that. This is not to say they are not loved, cared for, and affectionately cuddled. They may be. But since children are totally dependent upon them, many parents do not see their children as separate individuals. In other words, to a lot of adults, children are not really “people.”

The Fifth Commandment Expanded

The Bible has a lot to say about the status and worth of children and the treatment they should receive from adults. We are all familiar with the basic commandment, “Honor your father and your mother.” It is one of the Ten Commandments stated in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and is repeated in the New Testament by the apostle Paul and Jesus Christ Himself.

Notice this Fifth Commandment as expounded in the book of Ephesians: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth” (Eph. 6:1-3). Here Paul applies it to children and says that they should obey their parents “in the Lord.”

But notice something further in verse 4. “And, ye *fathers*, *provoke not your children to wrath*: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Here we have a commandment for parents—that they should not provoke their children to wrath.

The Greek word for “provoke” is defined as “make angry” (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Arndt and Gingrich, p. 635). In Colossians 3:21 Paul also says: “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.”

Here a different Greek word is used, which is likewise translated “provoke.” This word is defined by the Arndt and Gingrich lexicon as “arouse, provoke (mostly in a bad sense), irritate, embitter” (p. 308). Some translators render Colossians 3:21 as, “Do not exasperate your children.”

Parental Provoking

As adults we often have recourse when we are provoked. If a person has truly taken away our civil rights, perhaps we can regain them through the courts. If someone has slandered or libeled us, we may be able to obtain remuneration through lawsuits. Or if we are in the presence of someone who is constantly belittling, insulting or provoking us, we can simply leave. As adults we are generally free to pick and choose our relationships with people.

But put yourself in the place of a child being provoked by his mother or father. Basically he is helpless—he has no recourse. He may develop a desire to run away from home, but if he does, he jeopardizes his basic security. Prior to teenage, it is difficult for him to be on his own. He has no financial resources and practically no ability to provide anything for himself. He is very much dependent upon his parents; provoked or not, he must stay with them. Besides, he may love his parents and wish to have a good relationship with them.

The end result of parental provocation is a feeling of discouragement, exasperation and futility on the part of the child. It leads to harbored resentments and thoughts of revenge which the child sees no way of fulfilling.

The Principle of Reciprocity

In studying human relationships, sociologists have discovered the important principle of *reciprocity*. That is, we all have a tendency to treat

others as they have treated us.

When someone gives something to you, it is natural to feel a desire to give a gift in return. If a neighbor treats you with kindness, it is natural to want to treat him with kindness also. If someone is extremely courteous to you, you tend to express your best manners in his presence. If someone speaks to you with sarcasm and little digs and jabs, the natural tendency is for you to sharpen up your wits too.

Jesus verified this principle of reciprocity in the Sermon on the Mount. He said: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” (Matt. 5:46-47.) Here Jesus is saying that the publicans naturally love the people who love them. They are acting out of the principle of reciprocity. The publicans salute the people who salute them, or greet the people who greet them.

Forces at Work

Whether parents realize it or not, the forces of reciprocity are at work in their own children. Children will tend to treat parents as parents have treated them. Or, seeing the futility of retaliation, they will treat *someone else* as their parents have treated them.

Thus parents who are sarcastic, disrespectful, insulting and over-demanding will tend to have children who are also insulting, disrespectful and over-demanding to others. These “others” may be their playmates, teachers at school, or other “authority” figures in their lives which children substitute for their parents.

So the principle of reciprocity is working in your children right now! It was at work in you when you were growing up. It shaped your attitude toward your own parents.

It is pitiful and shameful that

there are so many people who hate and despise their own parents. And it seems so hard to understand in many cases. You may meet two parents who appear to be very fine, upstanding people. On the surface it is difficult to understand why their children despise them or seek revenge or retaliation against them in attitudes and words.

But as was explained earlier, many parents have a different attitude toward their children than they do toward adults. Most adults treat another adult with respect. After all, if they don't, he's likely to break off the relationship. Since we don't like to lose friends, we cultivate them through appropriate behavior. We don't insult or belittle, because as adults they are capable of sharp verbal retaliation and in some few cases may even resort to physical violence or "legal revenge" in a court of law.

But with children, adults somehow seem to take a different point of view. Children don't seem to have any rights as far as grown-ups are concerned. Children don't need respect. Children should always "do as they're told," or "be seen and not heard," or "eat last," or "respect their elders." While some of these well-worn clichés are indeed based on good principles, they denote an overall attitude of respect in only one direction. Everyone needs self-respect and a feeling of self-worth. No one enjoys being humiliated, put down, squelched. Not even children!

Many parents seem to want to

belittle or take away the respect and self-worth of their children and still retain their children's respect, love and admiration. They usually find such a thing is impossible! (Of course, they don't think of it in these terms. They are not really conscious or aware of their actions when they don't treat their children with respect.)

Respect Begets Respect

There is perhaps nothing more overwhelming to a child than to have his parents treat him with honor and respect. Try it and see. Consider being hospitable to your own children. Think of their comfort and their welfare and talk to them in a tone of voice which conveys your respect for their person, their self-worth, and their God-given individual rights. If you show respect for their opinions and their knowledge, you are likely to see them reciprocate by showing respect for your opinions and knowledge.

But if you carelessly dismiss every suggestion your child makes as "silly" or "stupid" and not worthy even of consideration, the principle of reciprocity will be at work. Furthermore, you will be putting a lid on your child's creativity.

Ask *yourself* whom you respect. Chances are you highly respect and admire people who treat *you* with respect. You want to please people who think well of you, honor you, hold you in high esteem. Are your children any different than you are?

Young people are often amazed at how differently they are treated

once they become adults. In fact, I have heard remarks from young people saying how amazed they were at the respect and honor they received once they were married. Or how once they left home and went to college, their parents looked at them as though they were real persons. Why can't this start much earlier in a child's life? Why can't he know that his parents look at him as a real person from birth onward?

Dorothy Law Nolte wrote a poem entitled "Children Learn What They Live." It goes like this: "If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn. If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight. If a child lives with fear, he learns to be apprehensive. If a child lives with pity, he learns to feel sorry for himself. If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy. If a child lives with jealousy, he learns to feel guilty."

BUT—"If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient. If a child lives with encouragement, he learns to be confident. If a child lives with praise, he learns to be appreciative. If a child lives with acceptance, he learns to love. If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself. If a child lives with recognition, he learns it is good to have a goal. If a child lives with honesty, he learns what truth is. If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith in himself and those above him. If a child lives with friendliness, he learns the world is a nice place in which to live."

With what is your child living?

Chapter Five

THE FAMILY THAT EATS TOGETHER

Does it make any difference if the members of your family eat together? Why not just scatter out around the house and eat separately? Or is there more to mealtime than just eating?

Perhaps few people take time to think about if they eat together as a family. Maybe most of us do not realize how mealtime is linked with one of the big problems of our age—the generation gap—the communi-

cation breakdown between family members.

The Breakdown of Communication

Today a breakdown of parent-child communication is contributing to

the fragmentation of the family. This is especially true in families in which young people have begun to develop some of their own values, values which may conflict with those of their parents. Parents may appear to be close to their children when they first start school, but with the advent of adolescence something tragic happens. Communication breaks down. Alienation begins. And many children find themselves at odds with their own parents!

Examine your own situation. When does your whole family—every member—get together and talk—really have a good conversation? Chances are, it's seldom if ever.

You know how it is. Everyone is busy. Each member of the family is involved in various activities during the waking hours of the day.

Then, of course, there is television.

"Pipe down! Shut up! Be quiet!" are the expressions heaped on someone who tries to talk during a TV program. A member of the family might get to say a few words during a commercial, but only if the commercial is not too entertaining.

With school, work, play, television-watching and other activities, is it any wonder members of a family can seldom be together at the same time—*except for meals*? Everyone has to eat. This is why mealtime can be a tremendous opportunity in your home!

The Evening Meal

Most parents today are working feverishly to provide the best for their children. In an inflation-racked economy it is often necessary for both parents to work in order to supply needed financial resources. It may also be necessary in order to save enough for the children's future education. Everyone wants happiness and security. Therefore, a great deal of time and energy is spent acquiring the necessary finances.

But too often relatively little time or energy is spent providing for the family's spiritual and emotional needs. And herein lies the real tragedy in too many homes.

The family today is under tre-

mendous pressure. The "nuclear family"—father, mother and children—must supply not only physical necessities but also each member's emotional and spiritual needs.

However, in the hustle and bustle of the average home, these needs may go unfilled. The only time for togetherness is neglected or ignored. Fewer and fewer meals are eaten together. In many families certain members eat no breakfast at all. And furthermore, the morning rush provides little time for family dining or leisurely conversation. Generally lunch is eaten separately—dad at work, the children at school, and mom wherever she happens to be. In any case, there is little time for togetherness at the noon meal.

Usually there is only one time during the day when the entire family can be together: the evening meal. And here is a golden but neglected opportunity to satisfy each other's emotional needs.

But all too often families miss this opportunity. Perhaps they don't realize its importance. Or perhaps they are caught up in the eat-and-run syndrome which characterizes a great deal of modern society. Snack shops, sandwich stands, and drive-in restaurants accommodate a hurry-up mentality. And often it is the family that suffers from this frenetic approach to life.

There may be family members who yearn for fellowship. Yet there is no time for fellowship—no time when everybody can be together and share each other's lives.

Yet in many countries and among certain ethnic groups it is considered *essential* that all the family be seated at the dinner table together. In these cultures a meal represents far more than just adequate nutrition. It is a time for family communion—fellowship, conversation and enjoyment.

Do you have meals like this in your home? Does every member of your family convene for the evening meal? If not, you may be passing up a great opportunity, a chance to gather your entire family—the most cherished people in your life—around you in an atmosphere of love.

The sharing of food has always connoted the sharing of love. Fes-

tive occasions are usually marked by special meals or banquets. Sharing food together is a sure way to strengthen the bonds between people.

Psychologists have found that the old adage, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach," is true. People are more receptive and more amiable over a pleasant meal.

In the Bible the sharing of food exemplified the pinnacle of intimate fellowship. When Christ appeared to Abraham, they shared a special meal (Gen. 18). And before His crucifixion, Jesus gathered His disciples around Him for the Last Supper.

The Right Atmosphere Can Help

What is the atmosphere around the dinner table in your home? Is it pleasant?

In all too many cases it is not. It is filled with harsh talk, arguments, unpleasant subjects, bad manners, gossip, and parent-child conflicts. In many households, meals are an unpleasant experience, served in an unsettled and unsettling atmosphere of blaring television and fussing children.

When mealtime is used as an opportunity to bicker and argue, it not only has a great unsettling effect emotionally, it is physiologically abusive to the body. The digestive tract is directly affected by the emotions. Emotional upsets ruin the appetite and keep food from digesting properly. This fact was recognized by the ancients and recorded in the book of Proverbs (15:17).

But when the atmosphere at mealtime is pleasant and enjoyable, there is also an increase in the secretion of saliva and digestive juices in the stomach. The resulting improvement in digestion makes for much better health.

Make Time for Meals

Authorities have long recognized the importance of mealtime. A noted nutritionist, for example, wrote: "In the life of a family the potentialities of mealtimes are unlimited. Often they are the only times of the day when the family is all together. For parents, they are times to teach good food habits by practicing them as well as preaching

them; to learn to know the character and needs of each child; to stimulate interest in learning through a steady choice of topics for conversation at the table . . . to relate the happenings of the day and boast of small triumphs, to give praise for tasks well done.

"Perhaps even more valuable than these opportunities are the rich possibilities mealtimes offer for the social and emotional development of children. They are times to help children learn socially acceptable behavior, develop good personality traits and social poise, practice restraint through refraining from eating until all have been served, and show respect and concern for the feelings of others through the use of good table manners and the avoidance of conversational topics that may offend.

"Finally, mealtime offers opportunities to give children responsibilities, somewhat akin to the chores of another generation, that not only aid in the development of manipulative skills but, even more important, give children status in the family. Perhaps those who think this sounds fantastic should be reminded that we eat three meals daily, lasting from ten minutes to an hour, 365 days a year, and that most children live at home for the first 17 years of their lives" (Fay Kinder, *Meal Management*, pp. 2-3).

Mealtime is an excellent opportunity to teach children proper etiquette. You'll be glad you did when you take them out to a restaurant—or to the boss's house for dinner. Children who learn proper manners at home are more at ease with others. They develop confidence in handling social situations, and this confidence aids the development of the whole personality.

Here are some tips on teaching manners in the home. First, parents should learn how to instruct and correct children at dinner. Never nag at children over dinner in order to get them to use proper manners. Instead, make a game situation out of learning and your children will take to it readily. This is especially true for smaller children. And good manners should be taught early.

Second, don't confuse your children by giving them all the rules of

etiquette at once. Teach them one or two rules at a time, and let them concentrate on practicing these rules until they form a habit.

For instance, when instructing your children on how to hold each piece of flatware properly, give them instructions prior to mealtime. Then at mealtime, praise them for doing it right. Of course, mom and dad should set the proper example. This phase of etiquette can be taught patiently and gradually. Once it's become second nature, you can begin to work on some other aspect of table manners.

Places at the Dinner Table

There is an old proverb that says, "Wherever dad sits is the head of the table." Perhaps the family meal means more to a father than anyone else. It gives him a chance to have his whole family gathered around him. It is an opportunity to set an example his children can look to. They see what it means to be the adult male of the family.

A father can guide the conversation in a pleasant and uplifting direction. He can be sure topics of conversation are of interest to the whole family. And here is his opportunity to get to know his children better, and to open up to them in turn.

There are scores of subjects for pleasant mealtime conversation, but it is important to make sure the conversation is pleasant. Here is where parents can exercise proper leadership—by directing the conversation and keeping it on the proper level.

In a healthy, strong family there are bound to be disagreements. Controversial matters are sure to arise. But these conflicts can be taken up privately in after-dinner conversations. It would certainly put a damper on mealtime if every evening were characterized by conflict and argument.

Mealtime should be a pleasant experience filled with goodwill, promoting family closeness and love. However, some families like to give the illusion that everything is okay—that there are no problems. Some will even go so far as to quash any hint of conflict between family members. Rather than work out

such conflicts, they deny that problems even exist. While this booklet is not intended to cover the working out of conflicts, it is nevertheless important to stress that conflicts can and should be dealt with in the proper context.

Artistry at Mealtime

Well-prepared and pleasant meals can take on a form of artistry. Whether one or both parents participate in the preparation of meals is up to them. But creativity can definitely be expressed at mealtime. A complete dinner—prepared and served—is akin to a minor engineering project! It must be planned in advance, then each portion skillfully done so that all phases are completed in a coordinated manner.

Add to this the infinite variety of ways one can decorate a table and you truly have a masterpiece. A table setting can be a work of art in itself. Flower arrangements can be used to brighten and enliven a table setting. Color coordination can also enhance the beauty of mealtime.

"The table is the point for family reunion twice or three times a day and nothing can be lacking that we can do to make those meetings pleasant and cheerful. No decorations will suffice to cover untidy napery, dim glass or only partly cleaned silver. All details must be looked to, and then a perfect home may be expected.' This advice taken from an *English Penny Weekly* dated 1896 has lost none of its validity" (Patricia E. Roberts, *Table Settings, Entertaining, and Etiquette*, p. 54).

We should all realize that the table setting and the way in which food is served have an important psychological effect on the persons eating. A pleasant atmosphere can actually make a dish appear tastier and more palatable.

You don't necessarily need expensive food, dishes, or decorations to set an attractive table. There are place settings in many different price ranges—all can be used to good advantage. Just one rose, or flowers from your yard or garden, can add immeasurably to your table setting.

Even on a picnic—using paper plates, paper cups, and plastic flat-

ware—the table setting can add much to the enjoyment of a meal.

When a great deal of work has gone into setting an attractive table and preparing a proper full meal, it is important that all members of the family be on time for dinner. This may not always be possible, but consideration of this factor is important. When one member of the family is going to be late or cannot make it to dinner, it is important he or she let the other members of the family know.

When a family is close and loving

there is definitely something missing when all members of the family are not gathered together around the dinner table.

Prayer of Appreciation

The finest way to start off a meal is to pause and take time to be thankful. Today people seem to forget that everything we eat comes from the ground and that it takes rain and sunshine to make it grow. Even animal products are dependent on the vegetation that comes from the ground.

There is One who made this earth and who provides the rain and sunshine. It is good to pause and give thanks to Him for the food we eat, for our health and safety, and for our home as well for each member of our family.

It is up to us to give our children a home life of warmth, security, comfort, closeness, and love. There is no better place to start than at the family dinner table. So begin to make your mealtimes profitable and reap the benefits that come to the family that eats together!

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