

# Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement  
For The Real World

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*“Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.”—Deuteronomy 12:28*

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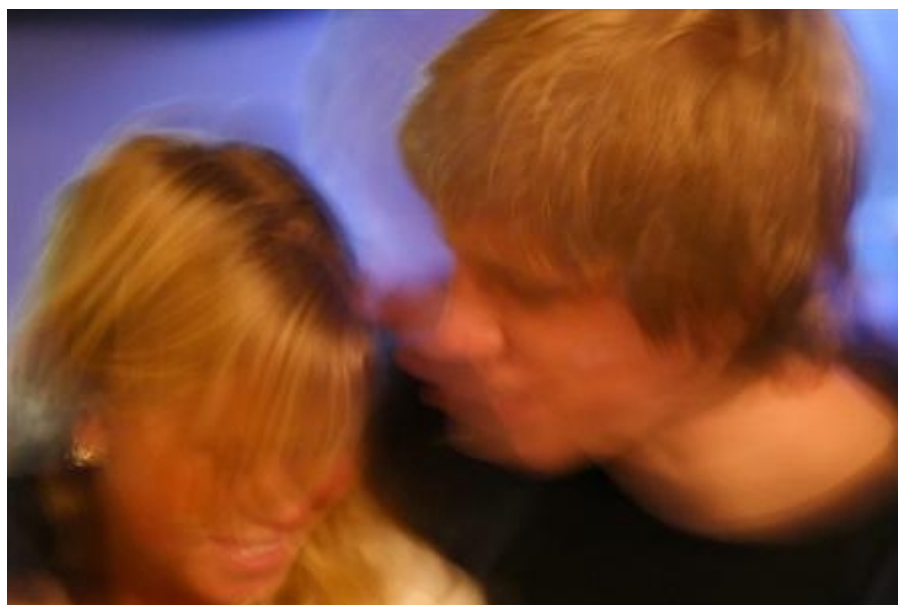
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## Whatever Happened to Childhood?

By Becky Sweat

*With the increased expectations aimed at children in today's society, is it possible that they are growing up too quickly?*



“**T**HE SHOWS MY KIDS WATCH ARE NOT EXACTLY like *The Brady Bunch* or *The Partridge Family*,” sighs Buffalo Grove, Illinois, resident, Ellen Shapiro. Favorite programs of her 16-, 14- and 12-year-olds are *The OC*, *Gilmore Girls* and *One Tree Hill*. Her concern is that “in all those shows the young people are always hooking up, they’re in serious relationships, and there’s a lot of talk about sex. When the kids watch these shows, they think they need to be in serious relationships too.”

She knows many young teens and even some preteens with boyfriends and girlfriends. “The thinking among the kids is that you really need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend from the sixth grade on—at least if you want to be cool,” Shapiro adds. This, she says, is so different from when she was a young teen. “I was just happy to go out with my friends and have fun. I wasn’t thinking about pairing up with someone.”

Topping the list of Elkind’s concerns is the type of entertainment and other products being marketed today to young children. As a result, “children in the 8- to 12-year-old age bracket are becoming more like teenagers, leaning more and more toward teen styles, teen attitudes and teen behavior,” he observed. Sex, violence and foul language formerly relegated to late-night viewing and R-rated movies are expected fixtures in everyday TV.



The adult issues his 8- and 10-year-old children—increasing threats of violence in particular—have to face also dismay Brad Johnson, a father in Orland Park, Illinois. “My second grader’s class recently took a field trip to the police station to

hear a talk about safety measures in case there's a school shooting or terrorist attack. There's also routine 'lockdown' drills at the elementary school," he relates. "My kids are having to confront a lot more really heavy issues than I ever did at their age."

For Barb Matusik of Lake Villa, Illinois, the adult world has invaded the lives of her three children (ages 7, 10 and 11) by making them feel much more pressured than what she experienced as a child. "School has become more stressful at an early age for kids," she observes. "They're doing topics like algebra and geometry in elementary school, which I didn't get until high school. They also have a lot more homework at their age than I did."

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*"My kids are having to confront a lot more really heavy issues than I ever did at their age."*

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Add to this all the extra activities kids are encouraged to sign up for. Matusik knows kids whose weeknights and weekends are filled with one extracurricular activity after another. "The kids can't have fun doing extracurricular activities because they have all this homework they know they need to be doing—and the activities cut into their homework time and make it harder to get their academic work done," Matusik says.

At first, these may seem like unrelated concerns by parents who are just reflecting on "the good old days" of their childhood—but there's a lot more to it than that. These examples illustrate the depth and scope of a serious problem in our nation: Children are growing up much too fast, and the carefree innocence of childhood is becoming a thing of the past.

An Associated Press report declared that 10-year-olds today act and think like 15-year-olds did just a decade ago. In other words, behaviors that would have been typical of teenagers are now common among "tweens"—kids that are between the ages of 8 and 12.

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*"Too often kids are expected to withstand adult-level pressure."*

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David Elkind, senior resident scholar at Tufts University and author of *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast, Too Soon* (Da Capo Lifelong Books, 25th edition, 2006), has been very outspoken about this trend. "Our society is compressing childhood more and more to where children are not children for very long," he says. "Children are under tremendous pressure to 'be mature' and to 'grow up' when they have not had the chance to develop emotional maturity." What changes in our modern world have caused this loss of childhood? Elkind believes it comes down to three main factors:

### **Media hard sell**

"There's a tremendous pressure in our society for children to become 'sexually precocious' at a younger and younger age," says William Doherty, professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota and author of *Take Back Your Kids* (2000). He sees this trend in the sexual images that are portrayed in magazine articles, television and movies, video games and in music videos that are marketed to preteens.



“Children are exposed to cable television and MTV, so they get into the rock videos at very young ages, which is really adult-oriented in terms of sexuality,” Doherty observes. “A lot of sitcoms have teenage characters in them who are sexually active. Many of the magazines read by preteen and adolescent girls regularly have articles in them about how to turn guys on or what guys want in bed. And obviously there are a lot of sexually explicit websites that children can look at.” This is quite a contrast from just a generation ago, he adds. “It used to be that kids would have to go out of their way to find these sorts of materials, but now they just need to turn on their television or go to the Internet.”

With so much sex and adult story lines in the media, many kids have their minds on sex and adult relationships long before they get into high school. Sometimes parents will encourage their young children to date as well.

Heidi Fitch, assistant principal at Hadley Junior High School in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, knows parents of elementary-aged children who have set up chaperoned “date nights” for their kids. “Parents think it’s cute, because their 10-year-old child has a date and they’re getting them a limo,” she says. The trouble is, “this pushes kids into a different kind of relationship with the opposite sex early, so that they can’t continue that friendship field as long as they should,” Fitch says. Once children start seeing the opposite sex as romantic interests, they lose out on that special time in life to just be friends with the opposite sex, according to Fitch.

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*“It used to be that kids would have to go out of their way to find these sorts of materials, but now they just need to turn on their television or go to the Internet.”*

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Schools too have had a part to play. It’s not unusual for elementary and middle schools to sponsor dances for fifth and sixth graders. “Instead of just having activity nights, they’re kind of promoting the idea that kids should be paired up and doing adolescent type of activities,” observes Sharon Dunham, sixth grade counselor at Hadley. This is more than most fifth and sixth graders can handle, she says. “They’re coming from an experience where they were having recess the previous year and now all of sudden they feel this need to have a boyfriend or girlfriend,” Dunham says. “It pushes them out of childhood and I don’t think they’re ready [for] it, especially in the sixth grade.”

### **Pressure to compete**

Another factor is the overscheduling of childhood. Many parents worry that if they don’t enroll their kids in a lot of extracurricular activities, their children will be missing out or be left behind. Sometimes, though, parents involve their children in so many outside activities that they really have very little time left just to play, have fun and be kids.

Marie Schalke, principal of Twin Groves Middle School in Buffalo Grove, says she knows elementary- and middle-school-aged children who take part in two or more extracurricular activities each day after school. “Some kids have one activity after another all the time. They may have basketball early in the evening and when that’s over, they go to hockey—on the same night,” she notes. Weekends, too, are often very busy, going from one sporting event or other activity to the next.

Performing well has become so important, that many parents enlist the services of private coaches and personal trainers to help their children succeed. Often, as was noted in the beginning of the article, kids have to really push themselves to take part in all the extracurricular activities and still do well in school.

“The adult competitive world has invaded childhood,” Doherty says. “Children’s schedules are such that they are living with a lot of stress. Parents are expecting their kids to have responsibilities that adults should have—in this case, to live these schedules, to multitask, to prioritize time, and to be efficient in the use of time.” He notes that teachers often tell him that students are coming to school tired every day. “Children should not have to have so many responsibilities that they’re always exhausted.”

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*All this fear and anxiety takes away a child’s ability to be carefree and have a normal childhood.*

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Kids are also feeling pressure to perform well academically. “We live in a very competitive world,” says Linda Marks, Ph.D., superintendent of Golf School District 67 in Morton Grove, Illinois. “Most parents today want their children to go onto college and they want them to go to good colleges, which means that they have to get good grades. That puts a certain pressure on children that their parents probably didn’t have.” She says parents are telling their children at a very early age: “You have to get good grades.” “You need to get into the accelerated classes.” and “You have to get into a good college.” Marks says that most of the present adult population, when they were growing up, “probably didn’t hear that kind of thing until they were in high school. But today, parents are probably way more aggressive about making sure their children are doing well in school.”

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*Without a long enough childhood, children do not learn many important relationship and life skills.*

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Certainly, it is important that parents encourage their children to do the best they can, adds Gary Hill, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist and director of Clinical Services at The Family Institute at Northwestern University, but “too often kids are expected to withstand adult-level pressure.” He hears about a lot of kids, who are expected to start college prep classes in the sixth grade, which he believes is way too soon. He also knows of kids—as young as third grade—who feel so much pressure to do well on national educational tests like the NWEA (Northwest Evaluation Association) and the ISAT (Illinois Standards Achievement Test) that they suffer nervous stomachs and headaches during testing week. “Society is basically demanding kids achieve at an earlier age, which is in forcing them to take on more responsibility than they may be ready for and in effect grow up faster,” Hill says.

### **News ad nauseam**

A third factor taking away from childhood is the 24-7 cable and Internet news coverage that many households have access to nowadays. “It is much harder to filter frightening news stories away from kids compared to a generation ago when many families may have had only one television with just three channels, and then, there was just the one hour of news in the evening,” notes Kyle Sieck, seventh grade counselor at Hadley Junior High. He knows kids at his school that watched Saddam Hussein’s execution video. “It is absolutely crazy to think that someone at this age has been exposed to something like that,” he says.

“Children today are seeing too much of the negative, often sensationalistic and frightening news events when they’re too young to handle it,” adds Elkind. He believes that the 24-hour coverage of the Iraq War and 9/11, for instance, served only to scare children and put another level of strain on them: “This news can be hard enough on adults to watch, but we can usually handle it. It’s too much, though, for little children.”

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*It can also be helpful to set aside a regular time each day when you always talk with your children.*

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For one thing, young children might not understand that the events being reported on the news are hundreds or thousands of miles away, or that they’re isolated occurrences. “If they see too many negative news stories on television, they may start to feel that the violence is all around them in their own town and feel frightened when they really don’t need to be,” says Nancy Lashbrook, social worker department chair for District 54 in Schaumburg, Illinois, and a social worker at Hoover Elementary School. All this fear and anxiety takes away a child’s ability to be carefree and have a normal childhood, she says.



In many households, family members are each looking at a computer or watching a television by themselves in their own room, and this adds to the problem. “Young children especially will often have trouble with reality and fantasy anyway, and if there’s not an adult with them to explain what they just heard, oftentimes their minds will make it into something bigger or scarier than it really needs to be,” Lashbrook says.

**Does it matter?**

Okay, kids in our society are growing up faster these days than they did in past generations. But, you might ask, what’s really the big deal if a 10-year-old lives or acts like a 15-year-old?

There are many reasons why children should not be rushed into growing up. First and foremost, childhood provides them the time they need to mature and learn critical lessons. Without a long enough childhood, children do not learn many important relationship and life skills.

A big part of childhood is being able to spend time playing with peers. This is very important, Elkind says, because “it gives children the opportunity to learn about themselves, to create and to innovate, and to learn how to make independent judgments. They also learn mutual respect and how to work with others.”

Adds Doherty, “There are developmental ‘tasks’ at different stages of a child’s life. Children have plenty of years ahead of them to face the tasks and developmental challenges of adolescence and adulthood. Childhood is a time to be mastering what they need to master as a child—to learn at school to relate to a peer group, to be part of a family, to learn to be with siblings, and to play. The consumer role, the sexual role, the competitive ‘career pursuit’ role—developmentally those are meant to come later, when a person’s brain and body are developed well enough to handle them. But the child’s brain and body are not developed well enough to handle these pressures.”

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*Children who are hurried out of childhood still miss out on a lot of the simple pleasures of growing up.*

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Children who are rushed to grow up before they are ready or who have too many adult-level pressures put on them may develop stress-related health problems such as nervousness, hyperactivity, eating and sleeping disorders, and headaches and stomach problems.

But even if they don't develop any of these problems, children who are hurried out of childhood still miss out on a lot of the simple pleasures of growing up, of innocent fun and happy experiences that they should be able to look back on when they are adults.

“Play gives children a sense of enjoyment that they can call upon later in life. When they're adults and feeling down or stressed, they can remember those happy, carefree times when they were children,” Elkind notes. “These childhood experiences give us a storehouse of memories that we can fall back on when we're adults. But when we overwork and overpressure our kids, they don't develop that storehouse of happy memories.”

Children who are rushed around all the time and don't have enough time to play and rest may not even know how to relax when they become adults. “We're teaching our children to be harried and continually busy and they're not going to know how to just sit still and enjoy a quiet moment,” says Dayna Prochaska, a social worker at Lincoln Prairie School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois.

Prochaska also warns of the importance of one's own example: “If you lead a frenetic lifestyle because you're overwhelmed with your own work responsibilities, your kids are learn by your example what you think is important.”

## Preserving childhood

Knowing this, what's a parent to do? As a parent, you can help your child grow up at his or her own pace. Here are some suggestions for preserving childhood for your kids and keeping them from growing up too fast:

- **Stay in touch with your child's world.** Familiarize yourself with what's going on in your children's lives so that you can know whether or not they're growing up too fast. You may be able to offset some of the pressures and influences.

For example, read their magazines and books to learn what their age group is concerned about. Watch movies and television programs with your kids and listen to some of their music CDs and their favorite radio stations. Get to know your children's friends, their parents and your children's teachers, coaches and school counselors; they can tell you what your children do and talk about when they're away from home and also give you a better idea of what kids are like in your children's age group.

- **Keep the communication channels open.** Make time to talk with your children every day, no matter how busy you or your children may be. When your child comes to you to talk, stop whatever you are doing to listen. It can also be helpful to set aside a regular time each day when you always talk with your children, such as during breakfast or dinner, or right after they get home from school. Or you might want to cook dinner with your children and talk then, or take a walk together every evening after dinner. Starting this kind of regular communication early in your child's life will foster better communication when he or she is a teenager.



Talk about news events—but know how much your child can handle. If you have young children, limit how much of the really intense or unsettling television news coverage you allow them to see. It's best to watch footage of these types of news stories in another room, away from your children, or after your children have gone to bed.

Of course, “if it's a really big story in the news, such as the type of coverage that was given to the collapse of the World Trade Center or the Iraq War,” Elkind says, “you won't be able to hide it from your children, and neither should you try to do that. But your kids don't need to hear all the gory details either.” Try to judge how much information they can handle, and then explain it in terms they'll understand.

If you're concerned that your children are hearing too much of the “heavy” news stories being discussed at school, voice your concerns to your child's teacher or your local parent-teacher association.

- **Set limits.** If your child wants to go to a social function or see a movie that you believe is inappropriate, don't be afraid to say no. “Your kids need you to be their parent,” says Emmah Welsh, eighth grade counselor at Hadley Junior High. “You cannot be your child's friend. They have plenty of kids to be their friends.” If your children don't understand your reasons for saying no, it's okay to simply say, “Because I said so.” That's gone out of favor, Welsh admits, “but at some point you have to make it clear that you're the adult and you have the final decision.” You shouldn't be afraid to say no or put your foot down when your children want something you don't feel is best for them, she says.
- **Be willing to go against the tide.** There may be times when your child is about the only one in his or her class who hasn't seen a particular movie or isn't going to a couples dance. Not only is your child likely begging to go along with the crowd, but you may be getting flak from other parents as well. They may say to you, “Well, why don't you let your kids watch that movie? There's nothing wrong with it.”

“Your kids are going to get peer pressure from their friends, and you may get peer pressure from your kids' friends' parents,” Welsh says. It can feel like a lonely battle at times, but for the sake of your children, you need to stand your ground and do what you know is right.

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“You're probably not doing a good job as a parent nowadays if your kids don't think you're mean,” notes Doherty. “If you just do what all the other parents are doing, your kids won't think you're mean, but they're going to lose their childhood.”

- **Simplify your schedules.** Don't think you have to run all over town every night, transporting your children from one activity to the next, just because everyone else is doing it. Know how many activities your child can handle (and you too, since you're most likely to be the chauffeur) and keep it at that. Be sure to allow for some downtime every day.

“It's probably the relaxed evenings at home when you played board games with your children or read books together that they're going to look back on with fond memories when they're adults, not the science camp or swimming lessons you enrolled them in,” Hill says.

If changes need to be made in your family's lifestyle, start implementing them today for your sake and your child's. After all, "your time with your kids is really very short," Marks says, "It sounds cliché, but kids do grow up very quickly."

Try to make the most of this stage of life while you can, and to ensure your kids don't grow up TOO quickly!

### Recommended reading

Read more about godly child rearing and how to do it in today's world by requesting our free booklet [\*Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension\*](#).

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## Speaking of Marriage

By Katherine Rowland

*In spite of loud complaints from some wives and husbands, married people are generally happier than single people when they apply some important principles. Find out what those principles are.*



**I** FIRMLY BELIEVE that one can reflect the happiness of marriage without being Pollyanna or delusional about it. What is needed is not a blow-by-blow account of the trying times in a marriage, but rather a practical view of what it is like to be happily married even while honestly realizing that marriage isn't always some fantastic la-la land of bliss and bonbons.

My husband Chris and I just celebrated our 13th wedding anniversary. Naturally, my thoughts tend to turn to the sentimental and syrupy on such occasions. However, this year I found my

thoughts filled with a certain poignancy: In much of my recent reading, I have noted the growing trend among women to write savagely about their marriages and their husbands.

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how we say it—is a  
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I'm not sure that we as a society should be surprised by the books and columns hitting the shelves, filled with shrill lists of all that is wrong with marriage and with husbands. After all, I have heard the same types of things said at all types of gatherings for as long as I can remember. It seems that in any group, there is at least one woman who rarely speaks of marriage or her mate in a positive light.

The Bible has a lot to say about how we use our speech. Proverbs 11:12 says, "A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue" (New International Version throughout). Of course, this doesn't apply only to men. We read in Proverbs 31:26 that the wife of noble character "speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue."

What we say—and how we say it—is a vital key in marriage, whether we consider what is said inside the home or what is said outside the home.

### **Inside the home—agreeing to agree**

I've read in several places that researchers conclude that about two thirds of married couples' disagreements will end unresolved—even in perfectly happy marriages! The thinking here is that many disagreements stem from basic elements of the spouses' personality or psychology, and thus these cannot be completely resolved.

My husband and I are not one of those couples who can claim to "never argue." Through the years, we've disagreed about where bread should be kept (counter or refrigerator), how socks should be folded and the proper pronunciation of words like "folk." Of course, the disagreements I mention are the lighter side—we've disagreed on many things that weren't humorous (or at least didn't seem so at the time).

What seems to make the difference isn't how many disagreements a couple has or how fundamental the issues are. Rather, the difference lies in how the couple treats any given disagreement and how they think of disagreements in general.

The first step is to bear in mind that our attitude toward our marriage and our partner should be that of striving to agree with one another—or perhaps it is better put that we should be striving to be *agreeable* with one another. Two people who are striving to be agreeable will try to avoid sharp words and sweeping statements. Each will be thinking of the other's feelings. They will focus not only on the issue at hand, but also on seeking a solution that moves the two of them together, rather than apart.



In Ephesians 5:21 Paul instructs Christians to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." As married people, we must remember that our marriage is a representation of Christ's

relationship with His Church. As such, we must be willing to yield to one another for the sake of the good of the relationship. If we go into a disagreement with the idea that one of us must “win,” both partners will ultimately lose. Such disagreements do not build the marriage—they weaken it.

Instead of seeking to win a disagreement—thinking of “me”—we must think of how to find a solution that strengthens the “we”—the relationship itself. What solution is reached is not the point; rather, the process of reaching a solution is what will move two people closer together or farther apart. Further, as we show honor to one another, we honor Christ.

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*I came to see my speech had incredible potential to bring my husband either good or harm.*

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Of the disagreements I mentioned (bread, socks and pronunciation), none is a huge issue. The solutions we reached? Respectively: I would put the bread in the refrigerator, according to his wishes; he would fold his socks his way and I would fold mine my way; and we would pronounce certain words according to Webster’s. This allowed us to not only remove the irritant, but to keep our perspective and not allow small things to grow into large ones.

It’s a small change of wording, but a big change in attitude.

My husband has his quirks, and I have mine. Sometimes those quirks collide, and there’s a bit of disagreement in the air. But we have reached the point in our marriage where we almost always end up both apologizing for being disagreeable and out of sorts.

### **Outside the home—doing no harm**

The other part of taming our treacherous tongues occurs outside the home. Those who are writing the literary works on unhappiness in marriage have a lot of responsibility here.

Negative statements are so easy to make. We live in a time that claims to value honesty at all cost—as long as the cost isn’t one’s own. This pressure to be “real” and to be “blunt” pretends to offer relief to one’s own feelings and to keep one’s relationships free of facade.

What I discovered early on in my marriage, though, was that making noise to others about my husband’s shortcomings didn’t make me feel better or take any of the frustration out of my feelings. Instead of allowing me to regain focus on the basic soundness of our marriage, it pushed me to look for yet more problems. It didn’t resolve a thing. My complaints also encouraged others to complain about their own husbands. We didn’t achieve solutions. We just wallowed in being negative and feeling smugly frustrated about how clueless our husbands were.

### **For me, something needed to change**

Proverbs 31:12, in speaking of the wife of noble character, says, “She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.”

What I came to see was that my speech had incredible potential to bring my husband either good or harm. Some of the people I knew would never really get to know my husband. I was his public relations officer, and frankly I was doing a lousy job.

Even if all of one's complaints about one's marriage partner are valid, there are only certain times and certain people with whom they should be shared. There are absolutely times when it is wise to go and seek counsel about a problem in one's marriage (or any relationship). The first step is to go to that cherished partner—husband or wife—about the issue. If it's not worth talking to him or her about, then it's not worth bringing it to any other audience.

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*Two people who are striving to be agreeable will try to avoid sharp words and sweeping statements.*

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A turning point in my attitude came when an acquaintance mentioned that my husband had said something to her about a quality of mine that he valued. Mixed with my pleasure in hearing that he spoke well of me when I was not present was discomfort at some things I had said about him when he was not present. They weren't big complaints or major issues, but they certainly weren't compliments. How would he feel if someone told him of those things? When we spill dirt about our spouse, we cast them in a negative light and make ourselves look small-minded—and we dishonor God who ordained marriage.

On the other hand, when we use our speech to build up our spouse—whether he or she is present or not—we demonstrate love and honor. We illustrate for those around us the joy and peace of marriage, and we give our spouse, our convictions and ourselves a good reputation.



I like the fact that my husband and I work together and that we work well together. When I look back, I am amazed at the different opportunities that have come our way, and I am excited about the new opportunities that appear to be just over the horizon. I can be excited about them because I know that we will tackle these things together.

I love that I can brag on my husband to others where appropriate—and that he doesn't do it himself. I love that when my husband's name comes up in our social circles, I only hear good things. I love being able to add to those good things in my own speech and conduct. I love knowing that when my name comes up or when the topic of marriage arises, Chris will not be saying rude things or telling stories of my faults. I can hold my head up when I meet his friends and coworkers, knowing that he has been careful with my reputation.

I am glad that we can show our children a good working partnership between people who enjoy each other and enjoying being with each other.

When my husband and I took our marriage vows 13 years ago, we promised to love, to honor, to cherish and to respect one another. Over the years, we have learned to take those vows very seriously indeed, especially as they apply to our attitudes and our speech. When we open our mouths to speak, we have the ability to do great good or great harm. It is imperative that we choose carefully before we ever utter a word.

## Marriage—A Wonderful But Serious Thing

By Robert Berendt

*It's a treasure that can last a lifetime if you prepare for it with care. It's a blessing if husbands and wives treat each other with godly love.*



**O**UR LOVING CREATOR MADE US male and female and stated that this was good (Genesis 1:27-31). God immediately went on to show the wonderful potential of marriage by inspiring the words of their union in Genesis 2:21-25.

In His teaching in Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus Christ referred to the potential for happiness within marriage that God gave. There are eternal lessons to be learned in this holy union. Not only are humans happier when they work toward a family relationship that is godly, but also children (who take the better part of two decades to reach adulthood) need the stability of a home with mom and dad to have the best chance of becoming mature and responsible adults. The eternal lessons are derived from the parallels that marriage makes with the ultimate relationship of mankind and God (Ephesians 5:30-33).

Now that we can see the importance of the marvelous institution that holy matrimony is intended to be, let us take a look at some of the realities of life. We all know that we humans are imperfect and usually come into marriage with many (or at least a few) mistakes, as well as gaps in our character. It seems to take a lifetime to “get it all together” and then when we finally seem to have made real progress, life is about to end. In fact, that is the essence of what life is all about, reaching that level of knowledge and building good character.

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*There are eternal lessons to be learned in this holy union.*

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## Marriage

God has made us all with hormones that kick in around the teenage years. He expects adults to teach the young self-control; and when maturity arrives, marriage is a natural step one takes to reach the highest level of human interaction that we can imagine. Mankind is good at ruining and destroying the beauty of God's creation and it is no different in our personal lives and thus marriage. For this reason, God has stated some strong and clear guidelines for our lives.

*God takes our marriage vows seriously because the results of a broken marriage are long-lasting and devastating.*

Marriage is a holy union because it is an agreement a man and woman make with God to love, cherish, honor and be true to one another. In Mark 10:9 Jesus states this fact very strongly. "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." It is to our peril and great unhappiness that we all too often take these words too lightly. Though no one should have to live in an abusive situation, marriages are to be treasured and preserved through every effort we can exercise.

There are two of God's Ten Commandments that clearly address this important phase in our lives. God says, "You shall not commit adultery" and "you shall not covet your neighbor's wife." He also states in no uncertain terms that those who practice adultery or fornication (sex prior to marriage) will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). The commandments are written alongside "you shall not kill" and are just as serious. God takes our marriage vows seriously because the results of a broken marriage are long-lasting and devastating.

God wants us to be as happy as possible in this life, and therefore He tells us how to live. We have the right to choose which way we are going to go so we can be happy or miserable. We should note that at conversion, even a person who has come out of a miserable and sad state is able to start fresh, in the sense that they are made clean and pure by Jesus' blood. Of course, once made pure by this precious blood, God expects us to remain pure (Romans 6:1-3).

## Family strength

In Ecclesiastes 9:9, God tells us to live joyfully with the wife whom you love. This is a two-way street, and we can just as easily understand this to be to live joyfully with the husband whom you love. Marriage allows us to express the deepest kind of love to one another, a love based on trust. Without trust, a marriage cannot survive, at least not a marriage that is godly and happy.



Psalm 128 speaks of children like olive plants around the table of their parents. Parents having meals together and living like a family are vitally important role models for their children. That is what God wants for us, although we do not always reach that ideal. Both partners in a marriage have the responsibility of doing their part.

Marriage is based on trust. When two people fear God, they will try harder to live as He directs. God intends for a marriage to last a lifetime, therefore before marriage, people need to be sure they have many things in common. Religious beliefs rank

very high on that list. In fact, spiritual compatibility is the one factor that God commands in the Bible. A believer (one who is “in the Lord”) must not choose to marry a nonbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:39). We need to give time to counseling and planning as we try to ensure that our marriages are as happy as possible.

God clearly expects men and women to keep themselves sexually pure before marriage. It is a strong beginning for a long and happy marriage when each partner comes to the other as a virgin and gives themselves only to one another. That is the foundation of trust.

The Proverbs 31 woman bears noble and highly-prized qualities. She is worth more than gold or diamonds and “the heart of her husband safely trusts her.” She will be discreet and will guard her honor and that of the family with great care. Needless to say, the husband must also exercise these qualities. This is God’s intention. But in real life, we know there are mistakes that happen. Accidents can happen and other factors can create problems for us. We live in a society that has lost its sense of correctness and chastity. The heartache, depression, loneliness and misery we see all about us are a result of choosing to disobey God somewhere along the line. Recovery is possible to some degree, but never completely.

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*God intends for a marriage to last a lifetime, therefore before marriage, people need to be sure they have many things in common.*

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### A holy, loving marriage

Malachi 2:11-15 expresses God’s anger at men who “deal treacherously” with their wives, meaning men who do not remain faithful to the marriage vows. He also refers to marriage as a holy institution and a “covenant.” Husbands and wives should never let down in their efforts to build and maintain a lasting and loving marriage.

God’s people are different from the rest of the world in that they strive to obey God and to live according to His Word. We want to be like Him, and in marriage we are able to learn and to express many of His attributes. Love, sharing, giving, forgiving, wisdom, kindness, trustworthiness, patience, nobleness and goodness are a few that come to mind. The marriage will reflect the degree to which a husband and wife are succeeding in this. Our marriages reflect our godliness. None of us is perfect, and we are all walking this path together. Understanding our frailties and need for a close mate will go a long way towards making our lives as happy as they can be within the conditions we find ourselves.



Life does come to an end and all human marriages end with the death of either one of the partners. Often, it is at a sorrowful time such as this that a person fully realizes the blessing that a partner who is trustworthy, helpful and supportive has been. God created us to be social creatures. We need relationships and we need one another. He says it is not good for a man (or woman) to live alone (Genesis 2:18) and thus marriage provides us with companionship up into our old age.

We share each other’s accomplishments and adventures in life in such a close way that we come to grasp in time what Adam meant when he said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). We are to be as



one in marriage, reflecting the ultimate goal that Jesus Christ so carefully recorded in John 17. Verse 21 states: “That they also may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Marriage is wonderful. God intended it for men and for women. This society has so twisted and distorted that godly intent and concept that we can find ourselves at war with the society we live in. God’s way is worth dying for and it is worth living for. Husbands and wives, and the young people who will one day be husbands and wives, have choices to make. We who have lived the biggest part of our lives hope and pray that the choices you make will allow God to bless you every day of your lives. Open your doors and let Him come in—then there will be peace and contentment, excitement and adventure that leave no regrets, no scars, no sorrows and no tears.

Marriage is from God and intended for all people. Use it wisely.

For more on the subject of marriage, please request our free booklet [Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension](#).

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## “You’re Not Wearing That...!”

By Becky Sweat

*The scoop on kids’ clothing styles and what parents can and should do.*



“**Y**OU’RE NOT WEARING THAT to the party!” Have you ever found yourself bellowing out those words to your teenager or preteen? Karen Janatka of Long Grove, Illinois, has. Like a lot of adolescents, Janatka’s 12-year-old daughter has a definite preference for clothes that are slinky, skimpy and skin-tight.

“She and her girlfriends dress basically like high school girls,” Janatka sighs. “They like very fitted outfits, tight shirts and tight pants—clothes that show off their bodies.”

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*So what’s  
motivating teens to  
dress this way?*

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Janatka doesn't think it's a matter of her daughter wanting to be provocative, but rather that she just likes how the clothes look. "My daughter's developed kind of early, so she's got a really cute figure and I think she knows it," Janatka says. The fact that all of her friends are wearing these kinds of styles makes her daughter want to dress that way even more.

It all adds up to a certain amount of conflict in the Janatka household. "We'll go shopping for a dress for her to wear to [a party] and she'll want to buy one that's really low cut and very revealing—and there's no way I'm going to let her wear that," Janatka relates. "A lot of times we can come to a compromise, like we'll buy the dress but she has to wear a tank top underneath. Still, clothes are a constant issue for us."

Sound familiar? If you have a daughter anywhere near adolescence, you probably can relate. Chances are she doesn't care to wear loose t-shirts and traditional-cut jeans. The attire of choice for adolescent girls in recent years includes ultra low-cut jeans and shorts, micro mini skirts, tube tops, corset tops and belly shirts. A lot of times the shirts will be emblazoned with catchy little words and phrases like "Hottie," "Sexy" and "I know what boys want." True, girls may not always be able to get away with wearing these clothes to school, but anywhere else they go—whether it's to the mall with their friends, to a party, or a day at an amusement park—that's their garb.

Winnetka, Illinois, parent, Gary Hill, says that when he picks up his 15-year-old daughter from high school, he routinely sees 15-, 16- and 17-year-old girls dressed "like they're 25 going out to a nightclub in downtown Chicago."

Besides being a parent, Hill is a clinical psychologist and director of Clinical Services at the Family Institute at Northwestern University. "Adolescent girls today are definitely dressing above their age level," he says. "Many, though, go a lot further than that. They're dressing in a very seductive, promiscuous way."



What about the boys? Some of their clothing styles are "on the edge" as well, Hill observes, but their clothes certainly don't send all the sexual messages like the girls' styles do. "The boys tend to wear the baggy, low pants and big shirts—which doesn't usually bother parents nearly as much as what the girls are wearing," Hill says.

### **Should you be concerned?**

Of course, part of adolescence is "testing the limits" with the older generation. Wearing different or even outlandish clothes is one of the ways teens do that. Young people made a statement in the 1920s by wearing cloche hats and knee-length skirts. In the 50s, poodle skirts and saddle shoes were the "in" thing for teen gals. In the 70s, they wore bell-bottoms and platform shoes. Many psychologists and educators, however, believe today's clothing fads are not in the same category as the way adolescents dressed in past generations.

“Parents might not have liked the bell-bottoms that the teens wore in the 1970s, but there wasn’t anything sexual or provocative about them like there is about today’s fashions,” notes Marie Schalke, principal of Twin Groves Middle School in Buffalo Grove, Illinois.

The problem with today’s girls’ clothing styles relates to safety. “When there’s a group of girls just hanging out together, they look at each other in a certain way and they understand that what they’re wearing is nothing more than being in style,” says Linda Marks, Ph.D., superintendent of Golf School District 67. On the other hand, she continues, when the girls go out in public, “What they’re wearing becomes a concern, because they may attract the wrong kind of attention, which can lead to rape and unwanted pregnancy. The fact is we live in a real world with many, many sexual predators. But most girls aren’t thinking about that.”



At the very least, Hill adds, by dressing in a blatantly sexually provocative way, “it sets the girl up for being viewed as a sexual object, and for guys to make inappropriate advances towards her.” He says this can be very stressful for a girl to have to be constantly dealing with a lot of sexual advances and always having to say “no.”

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*If you have a daughter anywhere near adolescence, you probably can relate.*

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The provocative clothing can also create misunderstanding between the two genders. Explains Hill: “When a girl dresses provocatively, she might be thinking, ‘I’m not trying to come on to boys; I’m trying to compete with other girls.’ But what girls don’t always understand is that when a boy looks at that kind of dress, he’s thinking sex, but girls often don’t go there so fast.”

If the boy then makes a sexual advance towards the girl, she may get mad, but he doesn’t understand why, Hill says. The boy thinks to himself, “Well, wait a minute, look how you’re dressed. Weren’t you coming on to me?”

“You not only end up with a lot of miscommunications,” Hill says, “but the boy might also be charged with sexual harassment.”

### **Behind the trend**

So what’s motivating teens to dress this way? The number one culprit in many people’s minds is the media. “Kids are seeing images of people like Brittany Spears and Paris Hilton being promoted as teen idols and they want to wear what they’re wearing,” observes Kyle Sieck, seventh grade counselor at Hadley Middle School in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. These scantily-dressed entertainers appear in any number of movies, television shows, magazines, music videos and Web sites—all of which are targeted to adolescents. Kids see all the attention these celebrities are getting, Sieck says, and “they feel if they dress the same way, they’ll get a lot of attention too. The trouble is, they don’t put it together that that’s not the kind of attention they really want.”

Peer pressure, of course, comes into play as well. “Whatever my daughter’s friends come to school wearing, then she wants to dress the same way,” Janatka relates. “It may start with just a couple girls wearing a trendy little outfit, and before long, all the kids want the same kind clothes.”

Another culprit cited by parents is clothing manufacturers. Many parents bemoan the fact that it’s become very difficult to purchase “wholesome” or “little girl” clothes. They say fashion designers have simply shrunk teenage styles to fit younger girls. “It’s just about impossible to find clothes that are appropriate for young girls these days,” says Sue Einersen of Morton Grove, Illinois, mother of a 9-year-old girl. “But you can sure find a lot of short skirts, string bikinis, platform shoes, low-cut dresses and blouses that are cut off at the midriff!”



Long Grove parent, Cheryl Spencer, agrees. She says she’ll often have to drive all over town searching for “decent” clothes for her seventh and 10th grade daughters. “Most of the stores all carry the same low-cut shirts and low-rise pants, so you have to be willing to hunt around a lot to find the few stores that have more traditional clothes,” she says. This can take a lot of time, which a lot of parents don’t have, so she figures that’s why some parents just give in and let their kids buy what they see at the first store they shop at.

But while retailers have certainly been flooding the market with provocative clothing styles, child psychologist Sandra Burkhardt, Ph.D., ABPP, maintains that retailers are only responding to a market demand. “There are a lot of 9-, 10- and 11-year-old girls wanting to wear the teenage styles of clothing, and retailers have picked up on this,” asserts Burkhardt, who has a private practice in Orland Park, Illinois, in addition to teaching in the psychology department at Saint Xavier University.

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*Of course, part of adolescence is “testing the limits” with the older generation.*

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The reason so many preteens want to wear older girls’ clothing, Burkhardt says, is because they’ve already hit the age of puberty. Girls are maturing faster today than young women did a generation or two ago. In fact, girls today are entering puberty around four years earlier on average than girls did a century ago, according to Burkhardt. This, she says, is primarily due to an increase in body mass in children at a younger age.

“As soon as the individual is of a sufficient body weight and density there’s no reason for her not to go into her reproductive years,” Burkhardt says. Once a girl enters puberty, all the hormonal, social and emotional changes start—which includes being more tuned-in to the opposite sex and wanting to wear the more provocative clothing, Burkhardt says.

Clearly retailers are pushing these kinds of styles, she acknowledges, but what’s really behind this trend is that the girls want these clothes. “You simply can’t get youngsters interested in that stuff until there’s started to be some physiological changes that make them more aware of these kinds of things,” Burkhardt says.

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*Clearly retailers are pushing these kinds of styles.*

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And finally, truth be told, sometimes its parents themselves who are the driving force behind teen clothing sales. Hill says that ‘dressing provocatively has become a source of competition among some parents, basically to see whose daughter looks the best. It’s like, ‘Look at my 15-year-old

daughter. Isn't she a knock-out?' They feel a sense of pride that their daughter looks so grown up." These parents may actually encourage their daughters to wear certain kinds of trendy outfits, to make them look more grown-up, Hill says. It doesn't bother them that their daughter is 15 and dressed like she's going out to a nightclub.

Some parents will even buy the same types of outfits for themselves. Laments one school principal: "A lot of times, when we'll notice that a student is dressing inappropriately, we'll call the parent in so that we can talk to her about how the daughter is dressed. Then when the mother comes to school to meet with us, we see she's dressed the same sleazy way! It then becomes very difficult for us to tell the 13-year-old not to dress the way she does when her mother is wearing the same kind of clothes."

### What parents can—and should—do

It is probable, however, that most parents do not want their daughters—young or old—to be dressing promiscuously. But the alternative route is not always easy—not when your daughter begs, pleads and even insists that you buy her certain types of clothing. What's a parent to do?

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*"If modesty isn't important to you, it won't be to your children."*

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- **Set the right example.** First and foremost, model the right kinds of dress for your children. Let them see by your example that you can dress modestly and still be very stylish. If you're going out for a night on the town with your husband, go for the classy, elegant look rather than the suggestive or risqué look. Your kids notice what types of clothing choices you make. "Modesty is something that needs to be taught in the home," Marks says. "If modesty isn't important to you, it won't be to your children."
- **Shop together.** With today's busy lifestyles, the temptation may be to just give your daughter some money and drop her off at the mall to do her own shopping. Don't do this. You need to be there with your daughter—at least most of the time—to make sure she makes the right choices when buying clothes. If she's just shopping with her friends, she'll be more tempted to buy clothes that won't be appropriate. Make time to go shopping with your daughter and be willing to go to as many different stores as it takes to find decent clothes. If time is lacking, check out different retailers' Web sites to preview what they're selling so that you don't waste time going to stores that don't meet your needs.
- **Establish reasonable rules before you shop.** Set the limits with your daughter and clearly communicate them to her—before you go shopping. She should know in advance what is definitely out. Some rules you might consider are: All clothes must be in line with the school dress code, no skirts shorter than three inches above the knee, shirts must cover the navel, no tops or shorts with flirtatious phrases or graphics, etc. But do try to strike a reasonable balance. You may not want your preteen or teen to be dressing like a pop icon, but she doesn't need to look like she just walked off the set of *Little House on the Prairie* either.
- **Be creative.** Sometimes "unacceptable" types of clothing can become "acceptable" when worn with something else. If your daughter wants to wear the ultra short skirts, buy her some leggings to wear underneath the skirt. If she insists on a very low-cut party dress, choose a nice camisole or wrap to wear with it. If she just has to have that string bikini, find a coordinating wrap skirt or coverall that she can have on when she's not in the water. Try to find a solution where both you and your daughter come out winners.

- **Don't be afraid to say "no."** Be willing to take a firm stand and say "no" when you really believe you need to—even if none of the other parents you know are willing to do so. "Parents have the responsibility to set limits for their children," says Emmah Welsh, eighth grade counselor at Hadley Middle School. When you tell your children "no," this can actually help them face their peers. "Your kids can kind of use you as an excuse and say to their friends, 'I can't wear that because my parents won't let me'—something they can use as a crutch until they get to the point where they're able to identify for themselves why certain clothing selections are inappropriate," Welsh says.
- **Acknowledge your child's feelings.** When telling your daughter "no," it's best to acknowledge her feelings: "Yes, I know it's not easy to be different." "I realize you had your heart set on that dress." "I know you're disappointed." "I understand that all your friends have string bikinis, but I'm not going to buy one for you. I'm sorry, but I just think girls should not be wearing string bikinis to the beach." Your daughter will appreciate that you're validating her feelings and not dismissing how she feels—even though she may not agree with your decision.
- **Explain your reasons.** Provide your daughter with an explanation of why you are not allowing her to wear certain types of clothing. "Kids want explanations and a framework for why you make the decisions you make," says Sharon Dunham, sixth grade counselor at Hadley Middle School. Tell your daughter: "I'm doing this to keep you safe, I want to protect your character, I don't want you to be sending the wrong messages to others by the way you're dressed. My first job is your protection, not necessarily your happiness for the moment." "These kinds of explanations are really important, so that it's not just a heavy-handed, 'this is what I say and so you're going to do it' approach," Fitch says.
- **Stick to your guns.** If your daughter conjures up a lot of highly original and inventive arguments to try to change your mind, don't try to answer her with similarly brilliant counterarguments. If your daughter starts crying or yelling in an angry tone of voice that "you're the strictest parent in the world!" etc., don't respond with an equally emotional counterattack or cave in because you can't stand to see her tears. Simply keep repeating "no" in a very calm, matter-of-fact tone of voice. The truth is, Marks says, "No matter how upset your child seems right now, deep down inside she appreciates the fact that Mom and Dad care enough to set rules. And ultimately, it may not be in the immediate future but at least some day—perhaps when she's an adult and making decisions about her own kids' clothes—she's going to respect your stands."

For more helpful information on parenting, request our free booklet [\*Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension\*](#).

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# The Wonderful World Beyond Today!

## Part 4: War and Peace

By Mike Bennett

*How will true peace come to this troubled planet?*



- “Either war is obsolete or men are”—R. Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983).
- “Peace is not an absence of war, it is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition for benevolence, confidence, justice”—Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677).
- “There is little for the great part of the history of the world except the bitter tears of pity and the hot tears of wrath”—Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924).

**H**UMAN HISTORY IS, AT ITS CORE, the story of wars. We study what led up to them, what weapons were developed and used, who was hurt most by them, who was considered the winner and what was done to prepare for the next one.

The spaces in between wars are often referred to as peace, but too often they are merely times of sorrow and recovery from the war just past, or fear and preparation for the war to come. Precious little peace can be found in human history.

After two devastating world wars, the nations gathered in San Francisco, California, in 1945 to found an organization “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind” (Preamble to the United Nations Charter). But in spite of that lofty goal, between 1946 and 2002, there were 226 armed conflicts by one count (John D. Wright, *Guide to the State of the World*, 2005, p. 80).

*Human history is at its core the story of wars.*

Why is man drawn inevitably toward war? Why have our best efforts failed to bring peace?

### Causes of war

The Bible reveals that the cause of violence goes all the way back to the rebellion of Lucifer, who became known as Satan (Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18). “You became filled with violence within, and you sinned,” Ezekiel records about this rebellion (Ezekiel 28:16). Satan is described as a

murderer, a roaring lion seeking prey and a dragon making war in heaven and on earth (John 8:44; 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:7, 17).

Satan, humanity's greatest adversary, currently rules this world, and broadcasts his attitudes of hate and violence into the minds of men (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2). His influence helps amplify our natural selfishness to a fevered pitch as described by James:

“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war” (James 4:1-3).

And so we find ourselves in a world that desperately needs and desires peace, yet which is far from it. Cries of “peace, peace” are too often wishful thinking, political maneuvering or outright deception (Jeremiah 6:14; 1 Thessalonians 5:3). Paul accurately described the human condition this way:

“Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and *the way of peace they have not known*” (Romans 3:15-17, emphasis added).



Thankfully, the Bible reveals that Jesus Christ will rescue this world from the final throes of the most destructive world war, before we annihilate ourselves (Matthew 24:22). Under His rule, the elusive way of peace will finally be taught.

### Swords into plowshares

Outside the United Nations buildings today, a famous sculpture of a man beating a sword into a farm implement captures the longing of humanity for peace and hints at the way it will truly come. The inspiration for the statue—and the true hope for disarmament and peace—comes from a beautiful prophecy in Isaiah.

“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

*Thankfully, the Bible reveals that Jesus Christ will rescue this world from the final throes of the most destructive world war, before we annihilate ourselves.*

“Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:2-4; repeated in Micah 4:1-3).



What a wonderful vision! Finally, disputes between nations will be resolved without resorting to the horrors of war, which only plant the seeds of future conflict. At last, nations will be forced to disarm, but they will soon realize they have nothing to fear, since their neighbors will all be disarmed as well.

War colleges will be shut down, and the militaries disbanded. No more will the young, with their bright hopes and great potentials, be used as cannon fodder. Instead of investing the best minds and greatest resources into developing weapons of destruction, nations will be able to invest in making life better for all their citizens.



Today some of the most impoverished nations in the world import inordinate amounts of arms. Weapons make up 33.5 percent of Eritrea's imports and 20.5 percent of Ethiopia's (Wright, p. 87). Gone will be these wasteful arms races, and today's dangerous neighborhoods—like the Middle East, where 40 percent of arms exports go—will be peaceful at last.

### The way of peace

Though Christ's rule will begin by halting wars using supernatural force, soon peace will spread through education in the way of peace. Christ's followers are taught to become peacemakers even in this present age (Matthew 5:9), and they will teach others in the world to come.

Paul described some of the elements of this way of peace in his letter to the Romans: "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord.

"On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:16-21, New International Version).

Many other biblical passages detail the attitude and approach of the peacemaker (for example, see Romans 8:5-8; 14:17-19; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7; 14:33; Philippians 2:3-5; 4:6-9; and James 3:17-18). The way of peace, coupled with the justice and mercy of God's government, will provide effective conflict resolution on the personal and national level. Ultimately, every conflict can have a win-win solution that will benefit all parties for eternity.

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*The way of peace, coupled with the justice and mercy of God's government, will provide effective conflict resolution on the personal and national level.*

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## Rebuilding and renewal

After the most devastating war in human history, there will be an incredible amount of cleanup and rebuilding to do. But this time people will be able to rebuild knowing that it won't all be destroyed again in a few years by another war.

This time the rebuilding can be done in a sensible and sustainable way. Cities will be clean and safe. Villages and farmlands will be productive and beautiful. Picture these scenes from the words of the prophets:

“I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them” (Amos 9:14).

“So they will say, “This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the wasted, desolate, and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited” (Ezekiel 36:35).

Even Jerusalem, perhaps the most fought over piece of real estate in history, will finally live up to the meaning of its name as a city of peace and safety:

“Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zechariah 8:4-5).

A world without war will be incredibly better than today's world. But a world with true peace—resulting from following God's way of peace—will be fantastic almost beyond human imagination!

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## Letters to the Editor

### Lesson in Wisdom



I want personally to thank you for every message. Every message has touched my heart and impacted on my thinking about life, friends and the godly life we ought to live in this world. I appreciate everything you are doing to change my life and Christian family as a whole. May you be blessed as you continue spreading God's message and impacting on Christian life. May the good Lord in heaven bless you all.

— A. Akol

Some feedback messages are edited for space and/or clarity