

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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Grand Blanc, Michigan 48439

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
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human life. One song exhorted us to be "Looking out for Number 1." Another, popularized by an older gentleman who illustrated that this movement is not confined to youth, encouraged us with the lyrics, "I Did It My Way." Whose way? God's way? No, *my* way.

Finally, we see a reflection of society and ourselves in the magazines on the market. A few years ago it was *Life*, then *People*, followed by *Us*, and now the ultimate *Me* is on the stands.

The question we must ask is who is first in my life, Christ or self? Although this question has been asked for ages, it has not lost its relevance and may be even more appropriate for us today. With selfish desires first, our marriages will dis-

integrate. The evidence is all around us.

Overcoming Hindrances

We often refer to negative cycles of nature; for example, an abused child frequently grows up to be a child abuser. We need to be aware that positive cycles can also be created, in which a family, grounded in Christ, becomes stronger; and then, more thoroughly rooted in Christ, becomes yet stronger. The Christian cycle is stronger than other cycles because its strength is the Lord's. Therefore, we seek the leading of God's Spirit in our lives and put on the whole armor as described in Ephesians 6:10-20. Let us, as Paul says in that text, "keep alert with all perseverance." □

NOVEMBER 1979

Integrity

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NOVEMBER, 1979
Vol. 11, No. 5

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Mailing Address

8494 Bush Hill Court
Grand Blanc, MI 48439

OUR RESPONSE

It is a common view among spiritual leaders that a tragic number of Christians today have lost the ability to tell right from wrong. While giving lip service to the will of the Lord, their lives are actually controlled by this present evil world to the extent that they cannot be trusted to make correct moral decisions. If you think this appraisal is unduly cynical, remember that the problem is at least as old as the egocentric Corinthians. And it is reflected in the contemporary home and church in many more ways than we could enumerate here.

As any minister or counselor can testify, spiritual deprivation results in much misery even in Christian homes. This is bad enough, but that others suffer for it is clear from the fact that the heat of domestic conflict often boils over into the church, where one's frustrations with home life may cause him (or her) to attack others, or where preoccupation with family problems may rob him (or her) of the will to serve. Who knows how many churches have been either torn apart or enervated because God's purpose for individual homes was not realized?

These are but some of the reasons why I am especially pleased with this special issue on "Building Spirituality in Family Life" as our positive response to a situation which is surely very close to every reader. For it we are indebted to **Joseph F. Jones**, who planned and put it together. Joe, a highly respected (and overworked) professional counselor, is associated with the Charles P. Meredith Psychological Center in Farmington Hills and minister of the Troy Church of Christ. **Laquita Higgs**, a resourceful writer whom any editor would love, is currently in a doctoral program at the University of Michigan. **Robert Rohland** and **Todd Graham**, who are new to our pages, are, respectively, executive director and staff therapist at the Protestant Youth Organization in Southfield. We regret very much that another article by **Carolyn Thornton** must be held until next month because we lacked the space to include it. —HL

Family Building: God and Man

JOSEPH F. JONES

THERE was a time in our not too distant American past when the nature and purposes of family life could be safely assumed. While there might have been peripheral attacks on the significant position which marriage and family occupied in the structure of American society, the seriousness of marital commitment and the role of family in the responsible rearing of children were rather clearly delineated and generally accepted. But even during the past three or four decades disruptive forces have combined to place the family in jeopardy. More than twenty-five years ago Professor Elton Trueblood, with keen social perception, warned of the subtler forces then threatening marriage and family life. In part he wrote:

Of all the disintegrating factors the chief is the loss of the sense of meaning of what a family ought to be. Our basic failure is not the failure to live up to a standard that is accepted, but rather the failure to keep the standard clear! The majority . . . have lost confidence in the essential sacredness of the family as the basic unit of society.¹

Since these prophetic words were written it has become increasingly evident that this "essential sacredness" is hardly an assumed view of contemporary family life. Those acquainted with the literature in this field will recognize that while there has been a significant increase in Christian research and writing in an effort to counter anti-family trends, there has been an even more persistent, and perhaps pernicious, trend to deny the meaningful role which monogamous marriage and family have played in societal life. Perhaps the

most recent forum for the academic and professional expression of these current trends is the new journal *Alternative Lifestyles*, subtitled "Changing Patterns in Marriage, Family and Intimacy," first issued in February, 1978. But since the name of Carl Rogers is so commonplace among mental health professionals, and likely, reasonably well known to the reading public, it will illustrate these anti-family forces to cite some of his conclusions in the highly popular book, *Becoming Partners: Marriage and Its Alternatives* (1972). Attempting a comparison of marriage with other aspects of societal life—medicine, technology, industry—Rogers suggests the need for the social institution of marriage to play catch-up. He writes:

We still hold that tradition and religious sanctions, and codes of morality taken from the past must never be broken, and woe to the person whose values, discoveries, and ways of living violate these sanctions. . . . To me it seems high time that here too we begin to move into the twentieth century. It is high time that we recognize and respect the fact that quiet revolutionary as well as evolutionary experiments are a fortunate, not an unfortunate, aspect of our cultural life. Can we accept the fact that here too the name of the game is change, and that we are desperately in need of just such a revolution in the area of living partnerships and family life as has taken place in industry, agriculture, flight, space, and all the other aspects of life? Can we respect our explorers? This is the great question which we face. And if we did, what would we do?²

In answering this question himself, Rogers alludes to the long list of names of persons whose experiences have filled his

book, who in "their struggles for a better partnership, engaged—either in the past or present—in practices which federal, state, or local laws would class as illegal."³ The popular psychologist then comes to his incredible conclusion, which nevertheless seems a very palatable philosophy for many today. He says:

To give them, i.e. these practices, their old-fashioned names, "living in sin," "committing adultery," "lewd and lascivious conduct," "fornication," "homosexuality," "ingesting illegal drugs," even "soliciting"—these have all been present in these pages, though they are actions engaged in by individuals struggling to find a better pattern of partnerships, the old-fashioned names are, frankly, ridiculous.⁴

One other view advocated by Dr. Rogers is that states (perhaps at the national level) pass legislation declaring "that any partnership entered into by mutually consenting adults is now legal, providing it does no clear injury to other persons."⁵ The implications of such legislation for the stability of the social structure, the continuation of the family without any semblance of its traditional sacredness, are obviously not considered; nor does Rogers dare touch the complexity of the question in reference to the variable, "providing it does no clear injury to other persons."

This article is obviously not intended as a review of Rogers' book, and in one sense I have serious reservations about including these lengthy quotations and Rogerian views; but since this philosophy seems quite representative of many societal leaders in education, the mental health disciplines, and even in some religious circles, I have felt the inclusion of such contemporary thinking justified to provide the backdrop for our special issue on "Building Spirituality in Family Life."

Basic Biblical Assumptions

Without arguing their validity at this juncture, several basic Biblical assumptions undergird our approach to building

spirituality in marriage and family relationships. (1) Monogamous marriage is a unique relationship between man and woman, designed by God for the maximum well-being of each person. "It is not good that the man should be alone," has as its positive affirmation, "It is good to be together." (2) Having made man and woman according to his own creative and purposeful will, God knew best how their basic personality needs might be met, and consequently, ordained the relationship known as marriage. The basic needs which we have as persons, pointed out by today's behavioral scientists, existed in the first individuals to inhabit our earth: intimacy, security, love, sexual fulfillment, belonging, creativity. (3) Although God, in his perfect purposing and unlimited power, designed marriage as the most adequate relationship for fulfillment of the creature's being, he nevertheless made man with such a nature that he is not without personal responsibility for the unfolding and development of his life individually and in marriage. So the thesis resting on these assumptions is that marriage and family building is an enterprise that ties God and man together in an indispensable manner. Although in a somewhat different context, the apostle Paul's affirmation that "we are God's fellow-workers" is nowhere more applicable than in the family venture.

Adequate Perspective on Male-Female Relationships

Only when men and women recognize marriage and family building as a joint enterprise between God and themselves can there be an adequate perspective of the male-female relationship, adequate to meet innate human needs, adequate for maximum fulfillment as persons. The dismal, discouraging picture frequently painted of contemporary marriage and family often deals only with symptoms, or is merely descriptive of the existing social status of these relationships, while

slurring over some of the root problems of the sickness in familial relationships. One of the basic causes of marital conflict or basic incompatibility is a *distortion* of the original male-female relationship inherent in the creative work of God. In the creation narrative of Genesis 1 it is clearly evident that God made male and female as equals. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Setting the stage to trace the generations of Adam, the Genesis writer concludes: "When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and blessed them and named them Man when they were created" (Gen. 5:2).

But this innate equality became marred with the presence of sin, and the consequent disruption of that delicate balance in the relationship between man and woman. While some students of Scripture may see Genesis 3:14-19 as *prescriptive* of God's universal truth controlling the sex relationship until the end of time, particularly the male-female pattern of dominance/submission (or subjection), it is the present writer's interpretation that the passage under consideration is *descriptive* of the world of nature and man as a consequence of sin's devastating power. We exert all possible efforts to counter the consequences of man's sin, from scientifically improving the soil and stifling thistles to the minimizing of man's labor problems; with modern medical technology we work toward minimizing if not removing all discomfort (pain) for women in delivery and childbirth. But historically man has perpetuated one consequence of sin (i.e., male dominance-female inferiority and subjection) as though this were the expression of God's creative will for male/female relationships for all time. (For a classic statement of this viewpoint see the footnote on Gen. 3:14 in the highly popular *Harper Study Bible*, RSV, 1952).

It is this distortion of perspective between the sexes, fostered unfortunately it seems more by the Christian churches than society in general, which lies at the root of many marital and family difficulties. Here is frequently the source of hurt female egos, male chauvinism, female manipulation of males, loss of self-esteem, resentments, and hostility. Christians need to see marriage as a relationship between a man and woman who are created equal, working together with God for the mutual and maximum fulfillment of each person's needs. What a contrast to the ancient Roman "patria potestas" (power of the father-husband) it must have been when the apostle wrote to the church in Corinth that, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Cor. 7:3-4).

These words are little short of revolutionary in Paul's society, for everyone knew that the "wife did not rule over her own body, but the husband"; however, it was an inspired perspective pointing to the equality present in creation when the apostle dared to write that "the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does." The tragic view that sex is man's world, that women are placed here by God to provide for man's brute sexual needs and should always be available at man's beckoning, is a consequence of this distortion of male/female perspective. Little wonder that many contemporary wives deeply resent what they characterize as being "seen and used by men—husbands included—as mere sex objects." The best seller book by Marabel Morgan, *The Total Woman*, highly popular among church people, and now even being adopted by churches as a "text book" for courses on marriage, in my opinion only

further this grievous distortion of the Biblical relationship between male and female.

In Christ Jesus this distortion of sexual perspective can be righted, for in the redemptive work of the cross and the equal availability of God's grace to all persons as sinners—male and female—we hear the affirmation of God's universal truth, "In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so now is man born of woman. And all things are of God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12). No clearer statement of the complementarity of male and female could possibly be made; and it is this divine perspective toward all persons which will provide a solid foundation for building marriage and family life successfully.

Coping with Our Failings

Not only does the God-man involvement give an adequate perspective on the male/female relationship in marriage, it is the only adequate, completely satisfying basis for *coping with human failing* in domestic relationships. Marriage is hardly the place for the neurotic perfectionist, and the family constellation is in for serious trouble with the over-expectant, demanding, perfectionistic parent. It is imperative that in the close interpersonal relationships of family life each individual accept his own personal humanness, finiteness, failings. Expectations are often unrealistic and demanding. We hear marriage partners categorize certain behaviors as beyond their acceptance or forgiveness; some failings we even place beyond the sphere of God's love and forgiveness! Listen to these actual responses to spouse behavior: "He devastated me before my mother; how can I possibly forgive him?" "She knew that if she ever did that, and I learned of it, that it would end the marriage at once." Our fears of self-disclosure often preclude the open, unashamed ex-

pression of our feelings of hurt, anger, resentment; confessions of failing are frequently stifled because of judgmental, non-accepting threatening attitudes. In contrast to the perfectionistic stance just described, members of the family constellation will do well to confess their humanness daily, and strive to accept one another's finiteness and failings.

But if human frailty is present and acknowledged on the one hand, God's presence brings an abundance of redemptive grace and forgiveness on the other. A couple struggling for twenty years with deeply repressed hostility finally saw the source of their chronic bickering, sarcastic barbs and frequent threats to divorce each other, and with a sense of helpless frustration literally cried while asking, "What can we do about it?" The words of the apostle Paul seemed adequate, since they both claimed to be followers of Jesus. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:31-32). The warm words of admonition, coupled with the exhortation from Romans 15, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (NIV, 7), seemed adequate to provide new hope and motivation for the couple so long emotionally and spiritually alienated, yet living in close physical proximity.

"We can't communicate," "we don't make love very often," "we don't enjoy much in common." Understandably a couple (or family) can't communicate when there is hostility and anger; or a couple doesn't make love when there is deep ego hurt, or there is immature, child-like game playing; or see much in common when the perspective is so distorted of each other. Trying to build and maintain a marriage or family without God's presence, grace, and forgiveness is in essence to run counter to man's basic nature; for to be human is to err, to be

frail and failing. Indeed the prophet's insight was true to human experience, that "it is not in man who walks to direct his steps,"⁶ and nowhere in human relationships is this more evident than in marriage and family.

Family as Community

Only when God is brought into marriage and family building do we know how adequately to *relate as persons*. As affirmed in the first implication of the God-man thesis in this article, with God we can have the right perspective of each person, and the basis is laid for a meaningful, fulfilling relationship. Seeing others (spouse, children, relatives) through the eyes of God, we see our commonality, and can therefore engage in community relationships, where there is belonging, acceptance, understanding, sharing and caring, intimacy. How essential in building spirituality in family life to see and experience our relationships as community, for as the root Greek and Latin words imply about community, it suggests partnership, sharing, participation—because we hold so much in common. How tragic, then, to hear one say about his marriage or family members, "We just don't have anything in common."

In authentic family life, particularly a Christian family, there is the *sense of belonging*. Only a few years ago did Abraham Maslow, in his hierarchy of needs, suggest what God through the centuries had told us, that deep in the human heart is the need to belong. By nature man is not a loner, and when this characterization is made of some individual, it is not usually in the most complimentary sense. Man is not an island to himself. "It is not good to be alone," but it is good to belong.

Closely related to our need to belong is the *imperative need to be accepted*. What extremes of behavior adults and children will resort to in order to be accepted, or looking at the other side of this

coin, to avoid being rejected. The family as community provides such acceptance, and hopefully, an atmosphere of unconditional love. We need not fear the charge of some which confuses unconditional acceptance with noncritical approval. The Christian knows that God in Christ has accepted him through His unconditional love, while being all too aware that God the Perfect One does not approve of all his behavior! So it is in the community life of our Christian families.

In community there is *understanding*, or at least here is the presence of others who try to understand and know me. The community makes possible in fact what is so often merely intellectualized, that it is not nearly so important to be agreed with as to be understood. Here in the family as community there is *caring and sharing* for one another, the nurturing of each other which provides the necessary atmosphere for fostering growth and development. The extent of such caring for the Christian family is spelled out graphically by the apostle, who exhorted husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her." God in Christ gives the measure of how much a man must care for his wife, the wife for her husband, parents for their children. And where there is a caring and sharing community, there is fulfillment of personality needs.

Through the family as community there is *intimacy*. Howard and Charlotte Clinebell have written with keen insight that "there is in the heart of every human being, a powerful longing for a meaningful relationship with at least one other person. For some it is conscious awareness; for others it remains unconscious, felt only as loneliness or an absence of meaning in life."⁷ Growth into personhood is experienced in relationships, and it is in the intimacy of family structure, with person relating to person, that personality is most adequately formed. In the family as community, where man welcomes the saturating presence of God,

each member can intimately say to the other:

I know I cannot enter all you feel
Nor bear with you the burden of your pain.
I can but offer what my love does give:
The strength of caring . . .
This I do in quiet ways
That on your lonely path
You may not walk alone.⁸

Building spirituality in marriage and family life rests on the assumption that

such relationships are a God-man endeavor. With God's presence to provide purpose and direction, there can be adequate perspective on the basic male-female relationship; there can be grace and forgiveness to cover human failing; and there can be community to meet our needs as persons, rooting in our commitment to the Biblical view of man and woman in His creative and redemptive purposes. □

1. Elton Trueblood, *The Recovery of Family Life* (N.Y.: Harper & Brothers, 1953), pp. 18,19.
2. Carl Rogers, *Becoming Partners* (N.Y.: Delacorte Press, 1972), p. 213.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 213-214.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
6. Jer. 10:23.
7. Howard & Charlotte Clinebell, *The Intimate Marriage* (N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1970), p. 12.
8. From unpublished poem by Howard Thurston, used by permission in Clinebell, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 219.

Looking out for Number One

LAQUITA HIGGS

I am. I think. I will.
My hands . . . My Spirit . . . My sky . . . My forest . . . This earth of mine. . . .

I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. . . .

It is my eyes which see, and the sight of my eyes grants beauty to the earth. . . . It is my mind which thinks, and the judgment of my mind is the only searchlight that can find the truth. It is my will which chooses, and the choice of my will is the only edict I must respect. . . .

Whatever road I take, the guiding star is within me; the guiding star and the loadstone which point the way. They point in but one direction. They point to me. . . .

I know what happiness is possible to me on earth. And my happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose. . . .

I am a man. This miracle of me is mine to own and keep, and mine to guard, and mine to use, and mine to kneel before!¹

These words by Ayn Rand are rather jolting. Surely none of us Christians

would subscribe—at least, not directly—to the Rand philosophy, which is now the object of renewed interest on some college campuses. But even we Christians are vulnerable to selfism, the *I and me* which puts forward a claim to preference, for to be a person is to be potentially selfish. Indeed we live in a society which promotes self-interest and self-awareness, though not always self-understanding. Undoubtedly, we Christians are influenced by the heavy emphasis on individualism in our society,² and we need to look at how this individualism is affecting our family life.

The Biblical View

Ayn Rand's openly egoistic philosophy is, of course, only one way of viewing the self. An alternate view, the Biblical one, is to see our individuality as God-given. God, who gave us being, made us in his image, giving us a spiritual lineage so that

we can actually have fellowship with the Creator himself. Furthermore, Jesus died for each one of us, and he honors his children by dwelling within them. All of this makes us very special, but, more than that, God shows his respect for us as individuals. Though he is present in us, he is always separate from us. We are never absorbed into the Divine as in some Eastern religions. We maintain our separate identities, and we shall do so eternally. Another way that God shows his respect for us is by giving us free choice to serve or to reject our Creator. Since our individuality is, therefore, God-given, it is not to be condemned, but directed.

A Basic Point

In getting a Christian perspective on the self, a basic point to remember is that we find our identity only in relationship with others. There is no such thing as bare individuality. Awareness of self does not come first and society next as a product, for the society of others is fundamental, an essential for self-consciousness and for the development of personhood. The family, the society into which a child is born, nurtures the development of personhood; notice how the infant responds warmly, first to persons, rather than to things.

The family, however, is important not only in the development of personality, but it also puts a brake on unbridled individualism, for as the child grows he gradually becomes aware that the needs of others must be considered. Self-love is not compatible with emotional commitments to others, and for a family to be healthy, there must be a commitment to something larger than the self.

Unfortunately, modern society's do-your-own-thing, happiness-now philosophy has, in too many cases, drastically lessened the commitment to the family. Here, from a recent article in the *Detroit Free Press*, are the words of a man in his late forties who is attempting to justify

his leaving his wife and three children to live with a woman in her twenties:

Look, you get to be 46, 47 years old. You look at your life. You came out of school with a lot of dreams, and some of the dreams you got. Maybe most of them you didn't. You've got a wife you've known for so long it's hard to remember when you didn't know her. You've got grown kids. The challenge is gone out of work. . . .

You look at your life and there's nothing to look forward to, nothing really new.

It's such a trap. And you feel everything slipping away from you. You know you're going to do everything you're expected to do until the morning you die. And then you meet a girl. . . .

She made me feel young again. Listen, being with her was the difference between life and death. When I was at her place I was living, when I was at home I was dying.

I agonized over it. . . . But in my heart I was aching to make myself happy. I had spent my entire adult life making a life for my wife and my children. Now I wanted to make a life for myself.

The day that decided it, I was playing tennis with my new girl. I looked at her in her tennis dress, and she was so young and full of life. And without even wanting to, I thought what my wife would look like on the tennis court, and it repulsed me. That's how it happened, and from that day on I knew I was leaving.

It cost me a lot of money. And it cost me friends. Two of the kids won't speak to me.

I'm happier than I ever thought I had hope of being again. . . . I've got love.³

On the surface, it may appear that this man is to be congratulated for having found "happiness and love," but I suspect that in five years he will have a very different story to tell. His extreme desire for self-fulfillment has distorted his thinking; notice, from a Christian perspective, the problems which his extreme individualism has caused:

1. His own feelings are his authority for what is right. Objective authority and traditional values have no place in his thinking, so that he does not honor his marriage vows or his responsibility to his children. Jehovah said to Jeremiah, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). One's own feelings are certain to lead one astray.

2. His regard only for himself meant that he had little true love for his wife and children and little concern for the effect of his leaving on their lives. Not only did he fail to love his wife "as his very self" (Eph. 5:33), but he disregarded the second greatest commandment given by Jesus: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt. 22:39). Certainly there are no closer "neighbors" than our own families.

3. His goal was his own happiness. Happiness is a modern and a particularly American goal; actually, happiness cannot be an end product, for it is only a by-product. Jesus talks of the way of self-denial as being the way to self-fulfillment: "But if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self" (Mt. 16:25).

4. He validates himself through another person rather than through God. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and I am life" (Jn. 11:25), and Paul triumphantly affirmed, "In Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

A Major Influence

Although we have "picked on" this man a great deal, there is another side of the coin. Often, in our decade, we hear of women talking of self-actualization and self-fulfillment. We are all aware of the Women's Liberation Movement, but perhaps we have not realized what a revolutionary change it is making in the thinking of our society. The Women's Movement, in fact, will probably be one of the major influences for fundamental change in our society in the 20th century, a century which began with the movement for the voting rights of women. With the woman's role being brought into special focus in the seventies, we are witnessing a changing role of women which is having an effect on our nation (economically), on our families, and even on the church. It has meant a re-adjustment in the thinking of many women and, consequently, a re-adjustment in the thinking of their husbands. Some of this has been extremely

healthy; it was a disservice to our men (and women) to be taught that to be male is to be superior. But we must remember, in our re-assessment of roles, that whenever a partiality to self intrudes, in either husband or wife, then families can be, and are, split. We see the result of excessive individuality, whether in male or female, in the increasing number of divorces and of single-parent families in our country, which is surely not a good trend.

Each person and each family must somehow find its own balance, with God's help, between the fulfillment of each person and, on the other hand, a regard for the needs of the other persons in the family as well as a concern for the common good of the family. There will be times in any family when attention must be directed toward one of its members, but, overall, the balance between individual needs and the family's needs must be sought.

A basic ingredient for that needed balance within a family is a respect for each other as individuals. That basic respect involves a lot of listening and a genuine attempt at understanding, and simple, old-fashioned courtesy toward one another is not at all out of place. Children must be taught, and shown, that true selfhood includes responsibility to others, that it may mean some denial of one's own desires, that it may entail some unpleasant work. On the other hand, parents must not view their children as mere extensions of themselves, existing simply to fulfill the needs of the parent. This attitude puts the parent completely out of touch with the needs of the child. The parent must respect the selfhood of the child while at the same time teaching the child the nature of true selfhood.

And what is true selfhood? It is not the Ayn Rand worship of the *I*. In the story of the prodigal son, we are told that the hungry young man in the pig pen "came to *himself*" (Lk. 15:17) and immediately resolved humbly to seek his father. Without the Father in heaven our

value is zero. The individualism with which we begin is but a shadow of our true selves—that lies ahead, not in ourselves, but in God. Our completion is in him, but it is not always easy. Jesus mentioned some radical self-denial when he talked of plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand. Our life in God is paradoxical: He demands our life, but he gives it back. "If a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self" (Mt. 16:25).

Our modern emphasis on the self has had a healthy influence on the family if it has led us to a respect for each person within the family, but it can also leave the family in ruin if individual needs are foremost.

You might be wondering why all this concern for the family structure. I am not suggesting that we should have a sentimental, home-sweet-home view of the family, for the love of family, if it is

an end in itself, can wither and die. The family in itself is not holy, but it has the potential for holiness if each of its members submits to a higher love, the love of God.

And this, I believe, is the real reason for God's instituting the family. The family, while nurturing the growth of our physical selves, can be an instrument to point our spiritual selves to a higher love. In the little child we first see a love of family which can then lead to a love of God. The prodigal son knew that he must return to his family, and Jesus used this story of a father and his sons to teach us of the love of God. In the family we can learn to love even the unlovable, and we can learn what it is to be the recipient of undeserved love. Rather than being in opposition to the idea of the individual, the family can do much to bring its members to a perfect fulfillment and true selfhood, to eternal self-identity in God. □

1. Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (N.Y.: Signet, 1946), pp. 108-110.

2. See the July-August, 1979, issue of *Integrity* for a further statement of the problem of individualism in our society. For several ideas in this article, I am indebted to C.S. Lewis (*The Weight of Glory* and *The Four Loves*) and to Rufus Jones (*Rufus Jones Speaks to Our Time*).

3. Bob Green, "His Side of the Story," *Detroit Free Press*, 13 Aug. 1979, p. 13B, col. 1.

Turning a Family Crisis into a Spiritual Victory

ROBERT ROHLAND

"I just don't understand what happened. I thought things were going along just fine for Vickie and me. We've been married nine years now, but last weekend the whole thing blew up in my face. She says she hasn't loved me for a long time. She wants a divorce. Please help me; what can I do?"

Except for some minor variations, this is the frightened plea for help heard all

too often by marriage and family counselors. This is not necessary. By following a few basic guidelines, you can prevent a crisis from happening in your family.

What causes a crisis? How can it be prevented? Most experts agree that the most common cause of a family crisis is the failure to communicate with one another. As hard as you may try to help

them, the other members of your family cannot read your mind. They cannot know how much you are hurting unless you tell them. You must tell them.

The Search for Acceptance

One of the most urgent needs of the human heart is to be known, understood and accepted. The psalmist wrote, "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (Ps. 139:23a). What contentment we find in being known by God, and then being accepted by him because we are cloaked in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Thomas Hastings wrote it, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to Thy cross I cling," and with trusting hearts we sing it.

However, we also search for acceptance on a human level. Somehow it seems that being known, understood and fully accepted by another person requires more communication skill than does our relationship with the all-knowing God who always understands us. With God we do not have to wonder whether he knows the true intent of our hearts. He does not misunderstand our prayers.

On the other hand, the exercise of good communication skills on a human level is of critical importance.

If we fail to communicate we are automatically, though perhaps gradually, building toward a crisis.

The feelings which are not expressed to another person have a cumulative effect. For example, after you have been separated from a loved one for an extended period of time, the reunion is marked by a rush of warm affection. This is a wonderful and positive experience for both parties.

Likewise, after you have been offended or hurt by someone, a long delay in the expression of your feelings causes them to accumulate. They build up and eventually lead to a rush of hostile, negative actions which are usually triggered by some minor problem.

When a crisis develops it is because people lose their perspective. You can lose your perspective with both positive feelings and negative feelings. The saying "absence makes the heart grow fonder" is one way of reminding us that accumulated positive feelings distort our perspective. We tend to project upon another person our own fantasies of what we want them to be. Reality does not look the same to us anymore. As surely as this happens with positive feelings, it happens with negative feelings.

Unexpressed negative feelings are like crabgrass plants in your beautiful lawn—they spread rapidly. As you know, digging up one plant does not do any good unless you dig up all the other plants attached through the underground rhizomes. In the same way it is important to dig up and deal with any negative feelings we may be carrying around. Of course, the exercise of just digging them up does little good unless the objective is to rid yourself of these feelings.

The best way to prevent a crisis from developing in your family is to improve the daily communication. No, I'm not talking about the things like deciding whose turn it is for KP or what time 16 year old Suzy (who just started dating) has to be picked up from her Karate lesson. There is something more to this thing we call communication.

How often do you have real communication in your family? When we get beyond the daily coordination of activities and begin finding out what is going on inside the other person, we have what can be called "crisis preventing communication." A pleasant way to get started is by inquiring about the happiest time of a person's day. Here is your chance to participate in someone else's joy, which could be important if you had less than a good day yourself. Try to get involved in the other person's feelings. For example, put yourself in your spouse's place and try to feel what he or she feels. Or, when your second grader bounces home from

school with a star on her paper, let her exuberance touch you. You might find yourself bouncing right along with her. Go ahead. It feels good.

The achievement of open communication reflects your spiritual courage. This is true because the most common reason people do not communicate openly is their fear of rejection. In his book *Why Am I Afraid To Tell You Who I Am?* John Powell summed it up this way: "I am afraid to tell you who I am because if I do, you might not like me, and that's all I've got." Fortunately, the Christian man or woman can never be totally rejected. To the contrary Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of me" (Mt. 5:11). When you as a Christian bare your soul by communicating on a deeper level with people, you are exercising a courageous faith that even if everyone else turns their backs, you will always have God.

Resolving a Crisis

But what if the family crisis is already here? Is a spiritual victory still possible? Not only is victory possible, but the resolution of the crisis can be a significant time of growth in your Christian experience.

Any crisis should be an automatic cause for self-examination. Am I in the will of God? Is there sin that needs to be confessed, forgiven and avoided? What would Jesus do under the circumstances I am facing? Answering these questions gives rise to valuable insights.

Next, seek to reconcile your differences with others in the family. Go alone and seek forgiveness. If this does not work, ask another family member to intercede for you. You will soon find that when you receive genuine forgiveness it is the balm which heals the memory.

Once you are forgiven by God and your fellow family member, your mind will be free from guilt. Then you will be

able to work on the real problem. Try reviewing your recent times of anger for clues. What were the building blocks of this crisis? In most cases you will find that the building blocks are the frustrations and disappointments you have not expressed verbally. As mentioned earlier, these unexpressed feelings tend to accumulate. So make a point to get together right away with someone who will listen carefully while you sort out your thoughts. Usually it is best to do this with your spouse, or possibly with a friend you can trust to be objective.

You will find that a multiplicity of negative feelings can be distilled into one or two bite size problems. These can then be handled through constructive, positive discussions with appropriate family members. By sticking to the basic issues a permanent resolution becomes more likely and hurt feelings become less likely.

Here is yet another thought. If you are involved in a family crisis, and after prayerful self-examination you are convinced that you are innocent of any wrong doing, let God defend you. The Bible is filled with examples of God intervening in the lives of those who don't take matters into their own hands. In the meantime, pray for God's blessing upon the one who has offended you.

Try following the guidelines for preventing a family crisis. Set a few minutes aside for *real* communication with every member of the family daily. At the very least, this must occur between husband and wife, and then as often as possible between parent and child.

Not every family crisis can be prevented. So on those occasions when the volcano erupts, check yourself. Are you following the steps toward resolution or revolution?

Victory is possible for you, both in preventing and in overcoming family crises. However, it does take communication effort on your part, as well as faith enough to exercise God's principles for successful living. □

Societal Pressures: Overcoming Hindrances

TODD GRAHAM

The reason this article focuses on the negative—i.e., hindrances to growth in family spirituality, and particularly those generated by society—as opposed to the positive is that we need to be aware that there are societal pressures which often sneak in on us as a thief in the night, and that they are powerful. We also need balance, for while overconcern with hindrances may leave us spiritually deficient, a lack of concern for them may leave us vulnerable. Often those temptations that we say we would never succumb to may, in the end, be those to which we most easily fall prey, our guard being lowered when we are content that they are not a valid threat to us. We need, therefore, to be reminded of our human frailties.

This article is written with three assumptions in mind: (1) hindrances to one family member, particularly the husband or wife, may inhibit the spiritual growth of the whole family; (2) these hindrances are best overcome by actively seeking God's will and the leading of his Spirit; and (3) by being aware of these temptations we may be prepared to defend ourselves against them.

I suggest Galatians 5:16-24 as a guide to determining whether something offered by society is a hindrance. In this passage works of the flesh are seen as hindrances, while the fruit of the Spirit is evidence of spirituality. While our society erects numerous barriers to family spirituality, only three will be discussed as a challenge to stimulate further thought. These

barriers are: loss of values; pressures to conform; and "meism," or egocentricity.

Loss of Values

Loss of values manifests itself in many ways today. In our desire to create a more perfect human body, a more perfect race, we are coming closer and closer to genetic manipulation. The desire to eliminate deformed children may advance to creating various physical attributes which some see as more socially acceptable. The more subtle implication of loss of values may be seen in society's attitude toward children who are physically or mentally deformed. In Michigan alone in recent months, several suits have been initiated by homeowners to prevent group homes for the mentally impaired from opening in their neighborhoods.

Loss of values may also be seen in what I will refer to as abortion for convenience. This area is more subtle when approached face to face rather than from a distance. For a long time, without close examination, I held such abortions to be wrong. Recently, however, I had to re-examine the question with pained awareness. A 15-year-old girl came into my office to say that she was pregnant and wanted to keep her child. She is emotionally impaired, her life is in turmoil with no goals, she constantly uses narcotics, she has a vocabulary that is frequently vulgar, she is extremely hostile, and now she is pregnant at age 15. What should I tell her? But if abortion and

genetic manipulation are to be allowed, then how far away is euthanasia? And who will set the controls?

Another example of eroding values, and one which affects the very fabric of our society and our families, is our cheating of each other. We cheat on our taxes as though no one else will have to recoup the lost revenue (most likely it will be the least "sophisticated" among us). We cheat each other in the lack of quality and productivity in our jobs. And we cheat others of their self-worth, elevating ourselves above them in devious ways so that we ourselves might receive the coveted promotion.

These examples reflect a lack of respect for the God-given sacredness of others, whether they are our brothers in Christ or not. And I might add that smugness of attitude toward those who practice such things also denies that sacredness.

Pressures to Conform

Recently the teacher of the young adult class in a certain congregation stated that teenagers in America who wish to follow Christ have it easy. Although where he was coming from (free country, no persecution, etc.) was evident, I found the suggestion sickening, along with the implication that if teens have it easy being Christians, how much more so do adults with their maturity and growth.

We encounter pressures to conform from every direction. Constantly before us are the popular thoughts, the dress of the day, the latest. Adolescents are pressured to use narcotics, and adults are encouraged to rely on various prescription drugs. Sexual mores impinge upon teens who are yet unsure of their budding sexuality, and adults who thought it could never happen to them find themselves sexually involved with others. While society says, "That is okay," in reality it tears marriages and people apart emotionally, leaving deep scars.

Commercials and advertisements foster covetousness and envy. And there is the pressure to go, go, go. One is married to the job rather than the family. Pursuit of the dollar and success become uppermost. I am reminded of the song "Cat's in the Cradle," which tells of a son, at various stages in his life, coming to his father and asking him to do this or that with him. The father replies that he can't right now, but he will later on, and when he does, they will have a great time. At the end the son is on his own and comes by his parents' house. His father asks him to sit and talk with him, but the son is in a hurry and says they will get together later and that they will have a great time then.

Such bustle breaks up family life. It interferes with the sharing of dinners, study time, times of prayer, and family conversation. And a related hindrance to family togetherness is the telephone. No modern device has more control over us. We will tell a spouse to wait a minute, but we will drop everything to run and answer the phone. Believe it or not, we *do not* have to answer it, and we may even remove it from the hook when we do not wish to be disturbed.

Meism

"Meism" is a revolt against conformity, a reaction against continued striving in search of an illusory "American dream," against a society which has become impersonal and failed to recognize the self and in which we become a mere number. This reaction has created a new determination to "be me." The era of "me" has arrived. Commercial interests *reflect* where society is in advertisements, in the media, and through song. Slogans encourage us to "grab all the gusto you can," "if it feels good, do it," and "do your own thing," without examining the deeper implications in a society where it might feel good to shoot heroin until one suffers physical destruction, or where doing one's own thing might involve destruction of