

Reconnecting the Family



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Reconnecting the Family

A GUIDE OF CHRISTIAN VALUES

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INTRODUCTION

If there is one institution in today's society that has borne the brunt of Satan's fury, it is the family. The need for a big beautiful house, the two-car garage and the things of this life has trapped us in the two-income family and an empty home life unraveling before our eyes.

Author and speaker Jim Hohnberger and his wife, Sally, were living the American dream—a successful business, status in their church, and the prized possessions of today's modern rat race. It also led to an empty family life. Their search for real spirituality and the simple life led them to a wilderness experience that reconnected their family.

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CHAPTER 1 INDEPENDENT ATOMS

"If a house be divided against itself that house cannot stand"
—Mark 3:25

CHAPTER GOAL

May we see in the stories of others an explanation of what has happened to the family and be motivated to correct these problems at any cost to ourselves.

When I manage to get back to my home town, my time is consumed with family obligations. I rarely see the friends that I grew up with. Once in a while our paths cross and we middle-aged men stare out at each other through eyes that last saw us in the prime of life. We introduce our families and talk about the intervening decades, lingering at the goodbye, knowing that such a chance meeting will probably never happen again and this farewell will likely be the final one.

But last year was different. I had a meaningful conversation with an old friend. He turned to me and asked, "What's happened to us, Jim? I've lost my kids, and it's not just me, most of us have. And yours—they're still happy and, well, innocent. What happened, Jim?"

I assured my friend that what happened to him was no accident or twist of fate, but rather the logical outcome of a carefully set and cleverly disguised trap. This trap has captured in its jaws parents and youth, and like some vicious beast is tearing the very fabric

INDEPENDENT ATOMS

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of our families apart. I shared with him the same story I now share with you in depth, the story of *independent atoms* and the plot to accomplish it.

The alarm clock's jarring notes awaken thirteen-year-old Katie Miller. She groggily hits the snooze button, claiming a few more moments of rest. Three snooze-alarm later she finally turns on the radio and drags herself out of bed. She turns her attention to the homework she didn't get to last night. As she sings along with the radio, she glances at a poster of the artist; the singer's bare chest and tight pants add a certain something to his words about love and create strange longings within her. She wonders whether her friends think and feel as she does. With a final glance at the poster, she sighs wistfully and returns to her work.

After a quick shower she spends a frustrating half-hour trying to decide what to wear from a closet overflowing with things she doesn't like anymore. She joins seven-year-old Caleb at the kitchen table for some cold cereal. Mom is on the phone with the office while loading the dishwasher. Dad's car is gone, and she remembers something about him having an early sales call. There's no sign of Nancy, her older sister. She must have left already.

Mom hangs up, looking flustered. "Katie, my meeting's been changed. Can you see Caleb to the bus before you go? If I don't leave now, I'll never make it in the morning traffic."

“OK,” Katie mumbles, her mouth full, “but I can’t wait with him. My bus leaves ten minutes before his.”

“That’s all right. If you get him down there, he’ll be fine for ten minutes. I’ve got to go. See you after field hockey.”

“Better get your books together,” Katie tells her brother a few minutes after Mom leaves. There’s no response. “Caleb, we have to get going!” Nothing. She looks up and screams, “*Caleb!*”

He looks up from the television cartoons and yells, “*What!*”

“We have to go, that’s what!” She stomps over to the TV and turns it off. Caleb heads for his room to gather his books, looking very sullen and mumbling under his breath.

Hustling to the bus stop, Katie barely squeezes in before her bus pulls away. She glances back at Caleb’s forlorn little frame. He looks sad and lonely waiting until his bus arrives.

School is a whirlwind of activities, and by four-thirty Katie is playing field hockey. After the game, she sees her mom pull into the parking lot. Eagerly she runs to meet her, hoping to share all the news of the day, but Mom is on her cell phone coordinating the evening’s activities with Dad. Caleb is already at his after-school program but will be done at five. Mom is rushing to drop Katie off at the piano teacher’s so she can pick Caleb up on time. It’s across town, and she would never be able to make it back in rush-hour traffic to pick up Katie, so Dad will get her on his way

home, and they will meet Mom and Caleb at the orthodontist’s.

Later, with her braces newly tightened, Katie doesn’t feel much like eating. She only has ice cream at the fast-food joint. While her family eats she reads a few pages of a novel a friend has lent her.

The family reaches home long after dark. It’s been twelve hours since Katie left, and now there’s homework to do. She works away in her room, distracted by her stereo and the frequent calls of friends on the telephone. She takes a short break to watch her favorite television show and sips diet cola. She worries about her weight. It’s so hard to stay thin.

By eleven she’s done and turns to gossiping on the phone with her best friend. When Mom calls “good night” through the closed door of her room, she doesn’t bother to reply. She’s too busy telling her friend how she would just die if she met “him” in person, her eyes studying the poster again.

Katie Miller is a pseudonym, yet she represents a whole host of young people today who live with, and yet, apart from their families. Without a conscious choice, they have become victims of the greatest Trojan horse ever given to the human race. In many ways we are just like the ancient Greeks, falling for things that look valuable, right, and edifying. We seem powerless to see that the very things we embrace are those which seek to kill us. It is no accident that life in the 21st century is a constant and never-ending chase after things, which for the most part elude us. Why?

Let’s turn the pages of history back to somewhere around the end of World War II. Amid a beautiful grove of trees, where the hillside forms a natural amphitheater, a strikingly handsome being is addressing a group of followers. With a deep, majestic voice and kingly bearing, Satan confides in his chief demons. “Families!” He rants, pacing before them. “I control most of this world, but I can’t accomplish half as much as I want because of their lousy families! Well, we shall put an end to this!”

“We must lay our plans carefully. Ever since that first marriage in Eden, families have endured wars, famines, and political and social unrest. Amid all the upheavals in society, the family unit continues to function. We’ve damaged it to be sure, but it remains, however imperfect, like a scarred yet still mighty citadel protecting their members from a thousand avenues of our influence. We must change this! Families can never be fully eliminated, so we must undermine their protective influences while leaving the shell intact and apparently healthy. We must separate the members of the family into so many different parts that they resemble *independent atoms*. Yes, yes, I can see it all now,” he chuckles with diabolical glee. “Accomplishment of this task will require all our craftiness and the patience to wait decades for the results . . . but it *will* be worth it.

“First, bring them prosperity! Prosperity has always been our ally. The church has never done well

under its influence. Now let’s try it on the family. Have them place their emphasis on earthly things. Let them succeed and prosper. Get them to move to bigger and better homes in the suburbs. These new neighborhoods will have no roots; there will be no grandparents just down the lane that might notice our subtle intrusion. Many of the women who worked during the war in large numbers will still be willing to work, and many others will volunteer outside the home. Every moment stolen from their families is a victory and prepares the way for our scheme.

“With transportation advances making it easier to travel, we must make trips away from home a part of the job for as many as possible, especially among the executives. If these essential leaders conform, they’ll drag their companies with them. Can you see how it’s all going to unfold?” he queries his followers.

“In their rush to make up for lost time, people will acquire something their parents shunned, *debt!* And in combination with a tightening economy, debt will give birth to the modern, two-income family. This will be the first generation to leave home to maintain a *lifestyle*, rather than life itself.

“New and better medicine and techniques, which might benefit a godly human race, will simply result in healthier sinners. Development of drug-based birth control will set the stage to dramatically alter their moral components, they will *never* recover from the effects. That’s just what we want.” Satan laughs and then continues.

“Young people will be separated from their parents by having school as the primary focus of social and not just educational development. Items of community interest like dances, at one time major family events, have been ceded to the schools. A new decade will see new music, and the ‘happy days’ of rock ‘n’ roll will captivate young people. For the first time music, the great unifying force that was shared within the family, will become a wedge of division between the generations, and, if we are careful, can forever remain so.

“And television,” hissed the great arch-enemy, “we *will* control television. Oh, it will seem very innocent and appealing at first. We will let it blossom and bloom with fun and sophisticated programs. Like the piper, we shall be leading them down the path to destruction. Young people who will be raised in a culture that values religious form over substance, will discard their parents’ belief systems and seek meaning in sensuous lifestyles and social activism. United more by disgust with the status quo than a coherent vision for the future, they will embrace almost any concept that is diametrically opposed to the system of ‘normal’ behavior that they have come to view in their parents’ lives as hypocritical. Music and drugs, communes and communism, as well as free love and free spirits will alter the perceptions of a generation and the viewpoint of the world.

“Under our clever onslaught, it isn’t just the weak marriages that will fail, but the apparently strong

ones. Remarriages will become so common,” he states flippantly, “that blended families will be just one more stress, further weakening their chances of success. Increasingly parents will feel the economic pressure to earn more and work longer.

“As the crowning glory, tempt the highest leaders in the land to break the law and then lie to cover it up. Bring it before the people in hideous detail so their trust in public officials is shattered and the government is forced out of office. This will create an atmosphere of chaos, and amid the storm of controversy, the people will find the old standards they used to rely on for their bearings have been set aside, leaving them adrift on the tide of cultural change.

“You see, the people will be so degraded and disgusted, they will become completely unaware of the depths to which we will take them. The upheaval will unsettle them. But we must move slowly now or they may become too aware of their danger and seek to return to *God*,” and he spits the name out in utter revulsion. “Bring hard times upon them. That will distract them. This not only encourages both parents to work and further stresses the family units, but it is a great smoke screen for the next phase of our attack.

“Then we will use the human form to seduce them into sin and idolatry, just as we did with ancient Israel, but we shall accelerate the program and speed up the process. Every television program, magazine, and billboard will be saturated with images that suggest impure thoughts. Movies will allow explicit

portrayals, and we shall encourage producers to display such things shamelessly. For it is by ‘beholding’ that the moral fabric of society begins to break down.

“While we keep them increasingly stressed and hassled by the burdens of life, turn their focus to the future with vain hopes that when this or that temporary problem is over, they will slow down, and then they will have time. It’s all an illusion.” Satan’s hideous laughter drifts over the gathering. “It will never happen, and to make sure, we must ever stay ahead of them by laying the groundwork for a new world-wide computer system that will eventually speed their lives up even more.

“The birth of the internet society will seem a blessing to these harried individuals, who must now not only respond to those about them, but answer countless letters, phone calls, messages, and e-mails. Time is the weapon to use against them. Give them call waiting, so that when they are interrupted by a phone call, their interruptions can have yet another interruption. Ludicrous, isn’t it?” Satan queries, and his imp’s chuckle knowingly.

“Couples will be so overwhelmed that they will become little more than ships passing in the night. With no time for true intimacy, their unmet needs will tend to push them toward any avenue of fulfillment. Children, provided with food, clothes, and gobs of toys, will feel like little more than orphans in their own homes. Deprived of the loving attention of parents, which should be their birthright, they are left to

fend for themselves and spend larger and larger amounts of time with their peers—all because Mom and Dad are just too busy.

“The family, once the bedrock of society, will crumble, and with it the fabric of civilization starts to collapse. Oh, the ‘family’ will still stand, but like a tree rotted from within, its strength is gone and only the shell remains. Now everything becomes acceptable, except for old-fashioned biblical standards, and that’s just how we want it.” Satan smiles with a satisfied sigh. “The few who cling to such *antiquated* beliefs are viewed as mentally unbalanced fanatics or simpletons, worthy of pity or contempt by the more enlightened members of society.”

A timid hand is raised at the back of the crowd. “O mighty leader,” a loyal servant hesitantly begins, “the humans assigned to me won’t fall for those traps. I have the *really* religious ones,” he mutters scornfully.

“You’re worried about *them*?” the mighty leader replies disdainfully. “They’re no trouble at all... just as gullible as the rest, but I have something special in mind for them anyway. We will use their very churches against them,” he continues smugly. “While we entice the worldly characters to be too busy in their pursuits, get the church members too busy with *good* works—too busy in evangelism, with pastoral duties, with outreach, with theological controversy and social activism. It doesn’t matter at all that these are ‘good’ activities. Just make sure,” he instructs the inquiring demon, “that they have no time to experience

introspection, quiet contemplation, or worst of all, communion with God," he jeers, momentarily agitated. Regaining composure, he continues. "And so, my friends, go forth with your legions to the victory."

With the passing of time, the echoes of this demonic summit meeting have faded away, leaving us with only the results to analyze. The devil's plan has been more successful than he ever dreamed it would be. Today's families are but a dim shadow of what they should be. Time spent together as a family is virtually unknown. Even the family supper hour is a thing of the past in most homes, and in those where it exists, it is usually shared with television.

Materialism consumes not just the world but even supposedly Christian homes. These people are so near and dear to my heart, because they remind me of the life I used to lead. You should have seen my home and my possessions years ago.

One beautiful young family stands out in my mind. They were so stressed by burdens of life and completely stymied in their efforts to find a way to spend more time with their kids. In response to their plea for help, I started asking questions.

"You work, don't you?" I asked the wife. "And you have two cars, right?" They both nodded. "You have a nice large home, correct?"

"That's right," the husband replied.

"And that home is furnished with beautiful furniture, is it not?"

"Yes, always the best," the wife admitted.

"And yet you are telling me you don't have the time to spend raising your children for God."

"That's exactly where we are," the man of the family confided.

"Well, here is what you do. Your wife should immediately resign from her job. Sell the second car and the expensive furniture. Sell your home and use the equity to move out in the country and buy a little home or even just a piece of property and put a mobile home on it."

It's easier to hear God's voice in a natural setting; there are simply fewer distractions, but they could find the experience they are after anywhere, *if they were willing*. Country living is far more a state of mind than a location. No, *not everyone needs to move to the wilderness, but everyone needs a wilderness experience*.

"Do whatever it takes," I encouraged the husband. "Just make sure you're out of debt. Then you can cut back your work to a minimum, and you will have found the time you need to work with your family."

By the time I finished, I could see it all over their faces. I had struck at the very root of their value system. Would they consent to live in a *trailer*, if that's what it took? They left me, still struggling to come to terms with which ideal they wanted more.

Today's families are fragmented because we have allowed them to be. We believe the devil's lie that we have to do certain things and make a certain amount

of money, so we can provide for our children the type of lifestyle we feel they deserve. We are fools if we believe that *things* are more important to our children than our *time* is.

What is your home like? Do you rush out the door in the morning and chase loose ends all day? Do you feel like Mom's taxi service ferrying kids from school to sports, to doctors, to school plays, or a friend's home? How often have you struggled though endless homework assignments, given out in response to the parental outcry for more and better education, and realized they are robbing both you and your child of the joy of fellowship together? Is there any time left to be a family? Do you really know what goes on in your child's heart?

If you're not happy with your answers to these questions, then you and your family have fallen victim to the devil's plan. He wants to separate you one from another to achieve his goal. He wants to split your family into independent atoms. Only you can interfere with his plans, and the secret to that is to stop playing his game. You will always lose.

Satan's illusion is that our manipulated life has limited options. Ask God what He would have you to do. He *always* has a way out. Discover His plans for your family and then take steps to accomplish His plan, no matter how far afield you may find yourself. Untie God's hands so He can bless you. Be willing to act in the way He has made clear. You can be certain He will direct your steps in the future.

Well, what of that family I left struggling with their choice? I didn't hear from them for a long time, but sometime later we were in their area of the country, and we paid a surprise visit to their home. It was after dark when we pulled up, and there was the man installing a new screen door. He looked up at us in shock. We were the last people he expected.

I can hardly find words to tell you what I experienced walking into that house. There was a peace in the home and a oneness between husband and wife. The children showed marked improvement in their attitudes since we last saw each other. "What happened?" I managed to ask.

"We've been having family worship, Jim, and just spending time together as a family," and a grin a mile wide spread over his face.

"And the new door?"

"We're getting the house ready to sell."

That family had made the decision. They had decided to put their family first, ahead of every other consideration, and their home clearly reflected the beginnings of a harvest of joy. Come with me while we explore ways to transform your home into a fortress so strong and mighty that it need not fear the empty roars of a defeated enemy. May God direct His plans for your family as together we explore time to be a family. This truly is the key to your children's hearts, no matter what their age.



CHAPTER 2

TIME TO BE A FAMILY

“And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”

—Malachi 4:6

CHAPTER GOAL

If you have a family or are even considering having one, you know it’s no easy task to succeed, but any can if they wish. It will take a committed investment in time to be a family.

This is Mark’s story:

“The screen door creaked as it opened, its painful groan of protest ending in a sharp bang as the springs snapped it shut. If I had been old enough for such thoughts, I would have recognized in that old door an apt representation of my family that looked so good and functional to the outside observer and only rarely allowed the world to hear the sounds of the suffering within.

“Too young to fully comprehend all that I had lost in the death of my mother and unable to prevent my father’s advances, I had no one with whom to confide the burdens of my young heart. So, I would open that old door into the back yard and finding a comfy spot on the lawn I would lie in the grass for what seemed like hours and stare up at the clouds. Gradually peace would come. I didn’t have any practical knowledge of God or even religion, but there

was something comforting out in that soft carpet of green staring up at the clouds. There someone loving cared for me, speaking to me through quiet impressions in my thoughts. His voice of love was so appealing to me in my unloved condition that I never forgot the sound or the import of His words, the very first ever in my life that showed what a loving father might be like. I sought out my refuge in the lawn several times and that comforting presence was always there for me.

“As I grew older and life became even more chaotic, these quiet periods of contemplation became a part of my past, no longer actively sought, yet not fully forgotten. The memories were simply overwhelmed in the struggle for the survival that has been the story of my life.

“Born the third of four children, I was my father’s first son. With two older sisters, I was understandably pleased when a baby brother arrived for me to play with, but the carefree days of early childhood were eclipsed by my mother’s diagnosis with breast cancer. She gradually declined until she died at age thirty-six, when I was only eight. As tragic as my mother’s death was, the changes in my father, prompted by her illness, were worse.

“After my mother became sick, my father began molesting me, setting a pattern that would continue for years and I would come to find out, a pattern that included my other siblings, although at first none of us knew about each other’s encounters.

“When Mom died, Dad sent the girls to live with relatives in New Jersey and my brother and I went to live with a friend of the family in Missouri. It should have been a welcome respite, but as hard as it is to believe, a friend of this family picked up the pattern of molestation right where my father left off.

“My brother became ill while we were living in Missouri and it was soon discovered that he had leukemia. My father came to visit when he heard and shortly thereafter announced that he was remarrying and intended to reunite his family.

“Our new stepmother had four children of her own and while any family of ten was likely to garner attention from a curious public, ours was doubly interesting for people watchers due to the obvious health problems of my brothers. My brother had by this time undergone treatments for his cancer and had lost his hair. Due to the medications he was on, his body was always swollen and puffy. One of my stepbrothers had cerebral palsy and another had a congenital heart defect that interfered with the oxygenation of his blood, giving his skin a distinct purple pallor. Needless to say, when we were out together, we were a hard family *not* to notice.

“Yet, with all our oddities, my family looked all right to the outside observer. This was due, in part, to my father’s income. As an engineer, he headed a department for a major American company where he made a very good salary. We lived in one of the largest houses in the neighborhood, both due to Dad’s

income and through the necessity of housing eight children. What no one could see was that behind those doors on that nice house and in that apparently stable family was a home whose occupants lived a hellish existence.

“It is hard for someone who has not grown up in an abusive household to understand, but physical abuse or even the inappropriate physical intimacy does not wound the spirit like the mental abuse that so often accompanies it. My father continued to molest me for many years. However, it was the cruelty of his comments that revealed the pathological evil that motivates someone, who could have been respectable and accomplished much good in the world, to degenerate into a heartless man with dark desires. I grew up never hearing the words, ‘I love you’ except in the context of engaging in his animalistic activities.

“My younger brother and I were typical kids. I engaged in a certain amount of kidding around and teasing of my younger brother. When he died, my father hurt me terribly by stating that it was my teasing and horseplay that had contributed to his death. I excelled in sports and longed for approval from someone, but no one cared. No one ever came to my games. I knew the bitter tears of rejection. As I grew older, the direct physical abuse was replaced by a constant and never-ending fear of being rejected. With every activity that didn’t meet parental demands, threats of being thrown out of the house always lurked. My

sister was kicked out of the house at an early age and as soon as I was able, I joined the Marines and it was there that my life began to take a different turn.

"I loved being a marine. I was physically fit and academically I stood at the top of my class. I was invited to attend the U. S. Naval Academy on the basis of my leadership potential and superior academic record, not to mention placing first in every area of basic training. Some people struggle with the demands of military life, but I thrived. Compared to my struggle for survival at home, it was easy! There were clearly understood rules and expectations, as well as clear rewards for achievement. Compared with my father, the officers, while if not kind, were certainly fair. It wasn't long before my training days were over and I found myself working as an air traffic controller in beautiful Hawaii.

"I felt I had it made—at last! I had a job I enjoyed, money sufficient for my needs and I dated a number of extremely attractive women, including some models. I enjoyed all of life's pleasures, including substances, which even though illegal, grew well in that tropical paradise. I knew a number of guys who smoked marijuana, and I decided it was simply a good business deal to sell to them, since I had to get my own supply anyway. I started packaging the sweet, slightly rotten smelling, resin-coated leaves and was turning a good profit. I wasn't dealing on the street and never really viewed myself as a 'drug dealer'. I was just taking life as it came and for the first time

result of time spent in the car, commuting to other activities. The ideas that families might set time aside, just for the sheer pleasure of enjoying one another's company seems charmingly archaic and out-dated like those old black and white television programs depicting the traditional family unit. Even the most active proponents of traditional family structure don't really want to return to those days of emotionally distant husbands and fathers, nor do they want the limited opportunities for women, the segregation of minorities and all the other social inequities of that time. In truth, we long for the cohesive family units and the sense of worth and value that being a member of such a family instilled.

What is it that provides a sense of family? Many things contribute, but none so much as the tradition of time. It is not enough to take time to be a family when it is vacation or when it is convenient. This special set-apart time allows everyone to bond with the others, not only in the activity planned but also in the anticipation of that special time. If you want to draw the hearts of your family closer, you're going to have to provide a minimum of one special time each week that is entirely theirs, time you plan, schedule and defend at all costs against any activities that would steal away from you those special moments.

The more fragmented your family, the more time you will need to heal and build bridges and yet, ironically, you will likely have more opposition from your family members. If your family is really hurting, push

pleasing myself, and doing what I wanted. Just how long this lifestyle might have lasted, I will never know because a friend of mine asked me to go on a motorcycle ride with him. I had always loved motorcycles, and I jumped at the chance ..."

Let me jump into Mark's story. After hearing his background of abuse, and knowing the odds that he might follow in his father's footsteps and become an abuser, you would be forgiven if you wouldn't want him as your father. I realize that few homes and families are as destructive as Mark's and yet, there are even fewer homes in which the family members are in love with each other and have truly bonded together as a family. Amazingly, God's solutions for our families are simple and effective. Over the years the devil has subtly managed to steal away our time—the one element most needed if we are to have exceptionally close and affectionate families. The good news is that we don't have to fall victim to our enemy's plan. Come and explore with me how to have *time to be a family*.

Today's families are stressed, pushed and pressed for time. With everyone on the go constantly and so much emphasis placed on kid-oriented activities, we have come to view everything from trips to the dentist to after-school sports as family activities. The media has played a role in reinforcing this myth by reporting that modern parents spend more hours with their children than former generations. Only rarely do they confess that this increase is often the

for more time, not less. But be willing to compromise and negotiate a deal that will work for everyone. Most families try to set aside a portion of the evening hours for their family time. You can use just about any time the family is together. You can even set aside part of the weekend. The time can be as short as a half hour or as long as a couple hours. Just make it a regularly scheduled part of your life, and soon you will establish a habit, a tradition that no one will want to break.

To be sure, doing this will require some sacrifice. You will have to set aside some social activities and your kids may have to turn down friends who want them to visit, but most of all, that endless "things to do" list must be completely ignored. However, if you are willing to make the investment, it will be worth it.

If your children are older, they may object to just spending time with Mom and Dad, but press on anyway, knowing only your lack of friendship in the past is to blame. Their objections are the strongest evidence that you are losing their hearts. Prompt action is needed.

So you have decided you need family time. Now, what do you do? In truth, anything is better than what you have been doing up to this point—nothing! Your activities will vary with the age and temperament of your children. Ideally, recreation should be of such a nature that it supports the goals of spiritual growth you have for your family. Games that encourage competition and build up "self" in one child and discourage another should be set aside for more wholesome

fare where everyone can play and have fun, whether they are good at it or not.

When our children were small, we would color, make things in the sandbox, and play with modeling clay or finger paints. Let go, have some fun and be fun. If your little daughter wants to have a tea party—why not go along? What little child doesn't love to have Dad for a horse? And participation is the key. I have watched many a toddler in the arms of Mom or Dad gleefully reach out chubby arms to tag someone in a game we love to play, freeze-tag!

What else can you do? *Read.* Let your little ones play blocks on the floor while your older ones draw or help with the reading. Involve everyone in discussing what you read and ask questions. Choose books that are interesting and build character. Be creative. Record a book on tape for long car trips.

Another wonderful family fun time can be special projects! Do you have boys or girls that want to build a tree house, create a hiking trail, or complete a woodworking project? Work becomes play when it is something they want to do and you are willing to lend the time and effort to make it possible.

Swimming, canoeing, tubing down the river, hiking, mountain climbing, biking, and caving are available in the summer. In the winter sledding, cross-country skiing, building snowmen or snow forts, real igloos, down-hill skiing or snow boarding, and ice skating are all wonderful outdoor activities that don't have to involve any competition, yet allow

time for the family to bond together and often talk. Many families toss around a football, play kickball or baseball without keeping score. Badminton, volley ball, hide and seek, duck-duck-goose, kick the can, and I spy are other options, but the list is as endless as your imagination.

By playing with our children, we bind their hearts to ours with a golden thread of love, but like a single fiber in a rope, one is not enough to make a lasting connection. So we must make sure that every week we are adding fibers to our ropes of love until there are so many we can't count them and the bond between our children and us is strong, secure and virtually unbreakable.

Families that try this program repeatedly say that it works, but many start and then let it fall by the wayside as the care and problems of life crowd out their efforts. Children intuitively know when they are a priority and when they are not. When they know they are more important to Mom and Dad than anything else, it provides them tremendous feelings of security and love.

Still not convinced? Well, you have a right to be skeptical. After all this program of spending time with your children seems just too simple, right? Well, join me on a visit to one of the most loving, close-knit families I know. They live in Wisconsin and since I go there often to visit my elderly mother, I try to visit them as well because their home has utilized "family time" in very practical ways. It shows in the children.

Sally and I arrived just before mealtime and after an exuberant greeting, we barely settled into the guest quarters before the meal was served. When I arrived at the table, I began to wonder if they were expecting the president, instead of Jim Hohnberger. Everything was just lovely and the family was delighted with our enjoyment. I felt very loved, knowing in my heart that they did it all for us, even though we're not royalty. The food was carefully prepared and artfully arranged. Every item seemed to have been specially chosen to not only taste good, but to add beautiful balance and color to the table. They even had my favorite—avocados. Someone took the time to create special name cards at each place. I've eaten many a meal in this home and even though the food might be simple, it is always presented in a most attractive manner, while the little extras that make the meal and welcome so special are never neglected.

After dinner as I helped clear my plate, I found a little love note tucked away under it just letting me know how special I am to them. I notice I wasn't the only one whose needs and special likes had been considered.

Soon, four eager faces surrounded me, as they tried to decide what to do for family time. Suddenly their father piped up, "I know! Let's give Uncle Jim a concert." The children all agreed and headed off to collect their instruments and set up for a grand concert. Meanwhile I relaxed and sank deeper into the sofa, while we visited with the father and mother.

"Concert night has been a regular occurrence for years, about once a week, I'd guess. It gives the children a chance to show us what they were learning in a fun way. Although, it was pretty bad when they were first starting. There were a lot of squeaks and squawks," their father laughed. "We always tried to encourage them, even when it was rough on our ears."

The results of their loving father's encouragement showed that night as the children gave us a glorious concert. Each child plays at least two instruments and they vary from the piano, harp, cello, violin and viola.

This is like heaven, I thought as the music wafted over my soul. *Surely the angels make music like this,* I mused. Family time flowed naturally into the evening's high point—worship. Music and songs lift our spirits and their father tells a story that has me on the edge of my chair, as he changes his voice to match each character. But the father didn't stop there, just content that he had shared a good story. He gently brought it home personally in family discussion. When at last they were all talked out, they recommitted themselves in prayer. It seemed that even more peace and contentment reigned in their home. Tired and sleepy, we loited by the fire, but it was time for bed and the children drifted off.

I couldn't help but eavesdrop as the children were tucked in. These budding teenagers still hug and kiss their parents. They wanted Dad to sit on the edge of their beds and talk—really talk. These children revel in their father's love, attention and encouragement.

When the father at last returned to sit with me by the fire, I mentioned the tuck-in routine. He laughed and said, “Yeah, sometimes if I take too long with one, the others will remind me that they want their time too, before they fall asleep. I’ve even had the other children arrive with their pillows and blankets to bed down on the floor, so they can be close to us while we visit.”

“How do you develop such closeness with your children?” I had to ask.

“Jim, I learned a long time ago that I didn’t know what to do to be close to my children and to help them. I’ve known you almost two decades. When you formed your ministry, I knew you didn’t have all the answers. I’ve just been doing what you do and what you tell everyone else to do—sitting at the feet of Jesus. I go and sit at His feet every day and ask him what He would have me to do and He *always* gives me direction.”

So, are you wondering who this wonderful father is? Would you be amazed if I told you it’s none other than the same Mark, who was abused as a child, who grew up without a good father figure to model, who never felt loved and was never encouraged, even while excelling. When we left him last, he was selling drugs on the side in Hawaii and had promised to take a motorcycle ride with a friend. What happened next? “Mark, what turned things around for you?”

“Well Jim, that friend of mine didn’t tell me that the motorcycle ride was to go see a minister. Before I

knew it I was at this pastor’s church staring out his office window, wondering when we would leave. My friend seemed in no hurry and had an endless supply of questions for the minister. An hour slipped by. *It won’t be long now*, I thought and still they talked on. After awhile I started to listen and in their conversation about God, I again heard a voice I recognized. I knew it was that still small voice that so comforted me when I was a boy, the same one that had lain dormant all these years. Now it rang loud and clear. I knew it was my *true* Father. When I was a child I didn’t understand that it was God speaking to me, only that I had been loved. Now I knew it had been God and I turned to him with my whole heart. We left five hours later, but I didn’t leave alone. I had my Father with me. For me Christianity has never been a religion. It’s always, always been a relationship with the One I love—my Father.

“My life was instantly transformed. I quit drinking, gave up the drugs and stopped every activity I thought might displease my Father. Oh, that everyone could taste of my experience with the God of love, who is my father and who would be such a father to them if they would allow it. God does not use a one-size-fits-all approach to winning our love and devotion. Oh, there are many biblical principles and such to guide us, but what He really wants is for us to sit at His feet and let Him instruct us personally.”

I studied Mark’s face; the firelight revealed a powerfully built man, softened by middle age, but

there was something more . . . an inner peace. It was a man surrendered to God, ready to obey. We sat companionably in the silence, each of us lost in his thoughts.

“Time for bed,” he commented, regretfully rising to his feet.

I agreed and headed to my room, still contemplating how a home like this can be a little foretaste of heaven and how an abusive one can be a living hell. *That’s about it*, I concluded in my thoughts. *Stories like Mark’s make you hate sin in all its evilness. A truly Christian home draws the affections toward our heavenly Father and only He can bring such joy and peace into a home occupied by failing human beings.*

“Good night,” Mark called, his voice floating towards me as I walk towards the guest room. I could almost hear his smile in the darkness, but he didn’t wait for an answer as he walked to his room. This family had taken the time necessary to be a family and it showed. The children knew they were loved without the limits of time or convenience. *If every home could be like this*, I thought, *the world would be a better place.* A wave of emotion surged within me and I gave vent to the fullness of my heart, as I said out loud, even though he couldn’t hear, “God bless you, Mark, for what you’ve let God do in this home. Good night!”



❁

CHAPTER 3 THE FAMILY FIRM

*“Train up a child in the way he should go and
when he is old he will not depart from it”*

—Proverbs 22:6

CHAPTER GOAL

*To dramatically change the way our homes work
by an equitable distribution of work between the
family members and to invest the time redeemed
from Mom and Dad’s schedule in the children.*

The rains of spring and the snows of winter were a thing of the past. The forest was garbed in a variety of new green growth not yet tempered by the rainless heat of the late Rocky Mountain summer. The call of the outdoors was hard to resist, but my inside chores needed to be finished first. Our guests would be arriving soon and I wanted my time free to spend with them.

When the phone rang, Sally was kneading bread, her hands rhythmically pressing and turning the dough and forming loaves that no bakery can equal. It was our friends, leaving Kalispel and headed towards the north fork and our house. I thought of this family as I hung up the phone, one of the many God has brought into our lives. And as always I wondered what God had in store for their visit. Would they see something of value, something they wanted for themselves, or would they like so many others look at our lifestyle but decide it required just too great a sacrifice?

Bob and Samantha had a boy and girl about the ages of our teenagers. We had met at one of our meetings and they had told us excitedly of their planned visit to Glacier National Park. When they learned where we lived they grasped hold of a new possibility. Could they come and visit us while they were there? Our lives are planned anywhere from twelve to eighteen months in advance. What was amazing to both of us was that the time they planned to visit was free. Now they were on their way.

As they drove along, Samantha mused to herself, *It's a long drive up those fifty miles of gravel road to their home; I hope they like us. The closer we get, the more nervous I feel ... Jim and Sally are so nice, I'm sure everything will be all right*, she said to reassure herself. *I guess I've kind of made them into spiritual supermen, but they're just people like us. Still, I'm afraid my family won't measure up.* Her reverie was broken as Bob asked her to look up something on the map and the normal car chatter resumed.

One advantage to living in the wilderness is that when you hear a car, you know it's for you. We were out on the back porch to greet our friends as they drove up. They climbed stiffly out of their car. Samantha graciously turned down our invitation to come in and have a seat. "Thank you, but after the trip here, sitting is something I'm not quite ready for," she said with a laugh.

"Jim, who did the rock work around the foundation of your cabin?" Bob asked.

We headed down to the creek using the trail that had been another of our special projects. Our home sits up on a forty-foot rise and the creek is at the bottom of a steep decent. The boys wanted to build a trail into the hillside providing a gentle grade for easier access to the creek. Many family times in the evening were given to this trail, cutting the trees, building retaining walls of logs and at last spreading gravel its whole length.

As we wandered back along the winding trail, Samantha found her mind wandering as well, *This project must have required their family to spend hours and hours working together and yet they never tell stories of frayed nerves and rising tempers in the process. How do they do it? Bob and I can hardly write a letter together without fighting.*

"Mmmmm, smells like we're in time for lunch," I said, leading the group into the cabin. "We better head inside because Matthew and Andrew should have the meal ready."

"We sure do, Father," said Andrew. "Glad you're here too. I was getting hungrier and hungrier just smelling it all. I just finished the salad, so everything is ready."

Wow, Samantha thought, *the smells in here would give credit to a world-class restaurant. It's clear those smiling boys didn't just warm up food their mother had already prepared; they had actually made the meal. I can tell because Sally is going around peeking into this bowl and that pot to see what they've made. She trusts*

"We did. We wanted the boys to get a taste of different construction techniques, so we came up with this project to teach the boys masonry skills. It took about two years to complete it all."

Since we had already begun an impromptu tour of the property, I decided to continue showing them around. I tried to convey that our home was just a simple mountain cabin when we moved in and the land around had been very rough, but of course, that was hard for them to imagine as they gazed at the neat attractive yard and trim house.

Bob had heard me mention the workbenches our sons had made in previous talks and now he just had to see them! So we stopped at the garage before heading to the garden. The boys had completed this huge project themselves and now the benches provide plenty of workspace. The largest of these benches is almost twenty feet long and three feet wide with shelves and storage drawers. "The boys put in every board, nail and bolt," I told Bob. "They really enjoyed it and used most of their spare minutes over a period of many weeks. It really kept them busy and gave them a sense of accomplishment when they were done."

Samantha may have been nervous about visiting here, Bob was thinking, but I'm astonished. I have to twist my son's arm to get him to mow the lawn and their boys stick to a time-consuming project like this for weeks! There's something more here than meets the eye. I've got to know more.

them to make a meal for company without her supervision or even her insight! Just incredible! Something's going on here. I've got to find out how she does it.

"You mean your boys cook as well as do the more traditional men's work?" Samantha asked. She thought the question seemed stupid with the proof right before her but they didn't seem to mind.

"Sure, we do, and more!" replied Andrew.

"You see, Bob and Samantha, our philosophy has always been that if our sons expect to head a household someday, and they do—then they must know how to perform every task and duty of the household in order to be in a position to manage those tasks done by others." I explained. "It's kind of like working your way up from stock boy to president."

Makes sense, Samantha thought, everything in these boys lives has been placed there to prepare them for success. I sure have a lot to teach my kids.

"How did you know what to teach your boys?" Bob asked.

"I didn't. I merely tried to involve them in every task I thought they might be remotely capable of doing. We started at a very early age. I also tried to teach them to anticipate my needs as they helped me."

"Anticipate?"

"Yes. For example, when I was changing the oil in our truck I would train the boys to try to think ahead of me so I wouldn't have to say I need the wrench. They were supposed to think out the sequence of events in changing the oil so that when they saw I was

ready for the wrench they were ready and I wouldn't have to ask for it. It took a number of times to train the thinking process and it was a real trial of my patience, but they soon learned the art of planning ahead. In fact, it became almost a game to keep out in front of me in thinking out the job!"

Bob nodded his head thoughtfully. "When I tried to involve the children in my work, I just gave up because it was so aggravating. Besides, it was easier to do it myself. Guess I was pretty short sighted."

"Bob, it's a problem at least as old as parenting. To train children for service requires an investment of time and self-denial that tend to really rub parents the wrong way. Recently I read a story of a woman writer who had suggested parents teach their children by working with them. Her article generated various letters, one of which she responded to and I'll paraphrase, 'You asked, "Don't your children bother you when you work with them?" Of course my children bother me, but I never let them know it.'

"We started to give our children greater and greater responsibilities, far beyond what their peers experienced, but the greater efforts demanded of them did not make them sullen and rebellious. In fact, the more we pushed and demanded, the sweeter the personalities became and the easier it was to get them to surrender. Day by day, every job crossed their wills and required them to submit to God's will for them and as they did so, He increased their natural strengths and abilities. We have just continued that

and attention because it is consumed in the tasks, which might have been done by others. Their parents have less energy for play and growing weary, they tend to become less cheerful, bringing an oppressive atmosphere of gloom into the home. This situation is even more pronounced in single parent homes where one adult must carry the whole load of household burdens, often in addition to full-time employment. So, how do we rectify such problems?

First and foremost, it will take a schedule. The majority of families we counsel have no schedule. They often think they do, but on examination we find the schedule is something imposed by others, be they schools, employers, etc. Just because you have to be at work or at school by a required time does not mean you are scheduled, any more than driving the speed limit when there's a police officer following you proves you're a law-abiding driver. No, it's what you do when there's no external authority exerting control that proves whether you're scheduled or not.

We've found it helpful to divide the day into three parts. The first part is the early morning hours. That's the time we rise, spend our personal devotional time with God, take care of personal grooming, have family worship, and finally breakfast. The second area is the working hours of the day, where tasks begin. Depending on who you are, it may be outside employment, housework, or schoolwork. The third area is the evening hours. This is the time set aside for family recreation and it should be guarded as rigorously as

way, running our family like a business with Matthew and Andrew as the junior partners."

"So, you started the family firm," Bob laughed, and then turned serious. "Will it work for us? Even though our children are older?"

"Bob," I said glancing at his kids, "you have good kids and it's not their fault they haven't been trained. Why don't we pair them up with ours for a day and see how they react?"

"But Jim," Samantha interjected, "I haven't even taught my daughter to cook yet!"

"It's all right. She has to start some time and it might as well be here." And so we did. All day long I saw her daughter chop wood with Andrew, while her brother helped plan meals. Those kids worked, and I mean worked hard all day, but every time we saw them, they seemed happy. We ate fantastic meals and enjoyed great conversation.

When God designed the first family in Eden so very long ago, He never intended the situations families have allowed themselves to be placed in today, through, tradition, chance and social pressure. Today the family is composed of two parents who carry a disproportionate amount of the household responsibilities. This is harmful, in many ways, to all parties, but it especially robs the children. They do not view themselves as vital, contributing members of the household and with that lack of responsibility, they lose the wonderful sense of self-worth that comes from being needed. They also lose their parents' time

the work hours are from interruption. I usually remind people that the early morning hours begin at the end of the evening hours, because the time we retire in the evening determines our willingness to get up on time the next morning. New schedules should always be adopted and implemented in the evening before the start of a new day. That way any new program can start fresh and doesn't have to begin by dragging the baggage of the previous day's intemperance.

The purpose in scheduling our family life is not just efficiency, but rather that we understand the schedule as a tool used of God to redeem time that can be wasted. It's a gift for our happiness that He may draw us closer to Himself. We all want to be like Jesus and a schedule will help achieve that goal.

In helping countless people plan schedules that work practically in the real world, we have adopted the following philosophy: Do *only* those things necessary to your temporal comfort and happiness, then you will find the time to read your Bibles with prayerful interest, and raise up a well ordered, well disciplined Christ-centered family.

God is a God of order. This is self evident from the natural laws visible in nature. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven." So our schedule should reflect a time for everything that needs to be done in our households.

The best way to make a schedule is to simply launch right into it. Write out your purposed

schedule. Keep in mind that you must tailor your schedule to fit your family and you will gain far more cooperation if the various members of your household are involved in the decision making process. Then try it out for a week. Continue tweaking and adjusting your schedule until you have it in good working order and then leave it alone and in place.

After years of experience, I can emphatically state the people who have the most trouble staying on schedule are the parents, not the children. The children enjoy knowing what to do and when. It's the parents who will make or break the schedule in your home. If you keep the schedule, allowing nothing to interfere, your children will do likewise. If you allow this or that temporary problem to intrude, then soon everyone will view the schedule with contempt.

Every company has rules, principles and by-laws under which they operate. Our homes need such rules as well. They should be simple and adapted to your children's ages. There is one more very important principle to remember; your household rules must be enforced!

The ideas I've presented in this chapter are not complex theology. But we have found there is no substitute for a well-ordered and well-run Christian family. It reaches deep into the hearts of children and binds them to life-long principles that will serve them no matter where they may be called or what they do. Becoming a member of the family firm is the training

ground for real life. The only question left to ask is, "What do I want for my children?" May God be with you as you decide:

What Do I Want For My Children?

What do I want for my children?
Do I seek for them worldwide fame?
Do I treasure for them wealth and riches?
Do I want their lives to be just like a game?

What do I want for my children?
Is it power and wisdom and might?
Do I want for them untold blessings?
Do I want everything to go just right?

I'll tell you what I want for my children:
A heart full of peace from above,
A life of serving others,
A heart of patience and love.

I want them to know my Saviour,
To be free from the power of sin.
This is what I want for my children.
I want them to walk with Him.
I want them to be like Him.

—Ruth Anderson



CHAPTER 4 FAMILY COUNSELS

"Provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"

—Ephesians 6:4

CHAPTER GOAL

To start implementing family counsels in such a manner that they are a constructive tool to alleviate conflict and bring about the type of family government the Lord envisioned, empowering all members to reach their potential.

"Father, can we have a family counsel sometime soon?"

I turned from my yard work to see Matthew seriously gazing at me with sober eyes. Clearly something was bothering him, but I had no idea what it was. In our family anyone can have a family counsel if they wish. They just have to come to me and ask for one and then I schedule it in where it seems appropriate. Sometimes you need a little more information to make sure you plan on a time that will work. For example, if someone has a vacation suggestion we might do that very casually, but if someone is upset or has a serious concern we may need a larger expanse of uninterrupted time. I decided to probe just a little. "Is something bothering you?"

"Yes and I would appreciate it if we could talk about it this week."

"Well, Matthew, this evening is free. How about seven-thirty?"

"Sounds fine, Father, thank you!"

After he left I racked my brain to see if I had done something to offend him, but I came up with nothing. The Holy Spirit didn't bring anything to mind in that moment and so I concluded it must have been Sally who was responsible. She must have asked him to do something that was not his job or pushed too hard in his schoolwork. Whatever it is we'll be able to deal with it tonight, I thought. Secretly, I relaxed a little thinking that I wasn't the cause of the problem and wouldn't be on the hot seat, so to speak.

That evening as the family gathered, I reminded everyone of the purpose of family counsels. It's not to condemn or condone, but to find a solution. I also reviewed the ground rules. The first one is that the person requesting the counsel has the right to speak without interruption until they feel they have stated the problem sufficiently. Then no one else is allowed to speak unless they have an idea for a solution, a suggestion, or need clarification on a point. That being said, we prayed that God would lead us. We asked that self be surrendered and controlled, no matter what the issue. Then we turned the time over to Matthew, eager to hear his complaint.

"Father, you used my brand new chain saw today and didn't ask my permission," Matthew stated indignantly.

I sat there in stunned silence. I had been so sure that I wasn't the cause of his problem and now this! I struggled just a moment to pull my relaxed mind

back into gear. Yes, I had borrowed his saw. There were some small limbs behind the green house that I wanted to clear out. When I went to the workbench to get my saw, Matthew's brand new lightweight model was right there and it seemed the perfect tool for the job, so I borrowed it. At thirteen, it was the first real power tool he had ever owned. Of course, he had paid for it himself, but as it sat there temptingly in its shiny red paint, I never even thought to ask permission.

I had always been strict about requiring the boys to ask before they used my tools. That way if something was missing or broken, I knew who to check in with. The very act of asking cultivated respect for other's property and responsibility when an item was borrowed.

As I sat there on the hot seat, I suddenly saw the situation through Matthew's eyes. I could imagine how he felt when he heard a chain saw running and looked out to find me using his brand new saw and he hadn't even used it yet. He was offended that I hadn't extended the same courtesy of asking first and rightly so. I was beginning to feel very small in my seat.

The big picture loomed before me, and I began to wonder what would have happened if we didn't have a mechanism like family counsels for dealing with such conflicts. Imagine if you will, Matthew feeling hurt, angry and blowing up. Or if he had come to me privately, I might have been tempted to say, "Listen, I make the rules around here. That's just the way it is. When you get your own home and pay the bills, you

can make the rules." In my heart, I knew that responses like that just embitter the children against the parents.

With every eye in the room riveted on me, I knew I had to respond and every word I said mattered. "Matthew, I can't think of a biblical principal for this problem, but I've always believed that 'What is good for the goose is good for the gander.'"

"Huh? What does that mean," he asked perplexed.

"It means I'm sorry I used your saw without permission. If it's good for you to ask first, it's good for me too. I promise I will do so in the future," I concluded. His face relaxed and melted into a smile. I knew it was all over, dealt with justly and fairly and peace flooded my soul too. Harmony was restored.

Family counsels can be used as a tool to work miracles when dealing with conflict, but it doesn't stop there. We've had some family counsels gathered around the table planning for vacations or around a fire deep in the wilderness with only the cry of loons to accompany our words. We've even had them in the car as we travel. Yet many families are reluctant to try them. The underlying sentiment seems to be, "That's fine for your family, but it won't work in our home or with our kids."

Children are much more likely to support a government in which they have had some input. Parents need to learn that everyone, not just the children, want to be part of the decision making process or at

least have their feelings taken into consideration. Family counsels are a natural extension of the "Family Firm" that we talked about in chapter 3. It is in giving those junior partners the ability to participate in the family government that they learn self-government. It's not just a symbolic representation either, but a real, meaningful voice in the family. Children appreciate and respond to that consideration.

I have found that in any household, it's not the children who have a problem with change, but the parents. We parents are most guilty when it comes to lack of follow through. The results achieved always depend on how motivated we are. God often uses desperate circumstances to motivate us as adults to try forms of change, which we might normally dismiss as distasteful.

And this brings us to the final, but most important point in family counsels. No matter how much a child may want their own way and no matter how much we may desire or even feel obligated to grant them their wish, it takes leadership to run a household. Friend, it is the same today in your home and in your marriage and in your life. Jesus stands before you as you try to find fulfillment in this world's false pleasures and so-called freedoms saying, "I love you! I cannot let you go!" Will you respond to his plea today and take those first hard steps to bring about a resolution to the conflicts that Satan has been using to ruin your happiness at home?

Ask God what He has planned for you and your family as you put these methods in place; then seek a willingness to follow through. Chances are that God's methods will cross your will and will require you to go deeper in your surrender to Him if you're to succeed. Can you recall a recent situation in your home that might have been easier to resolve if you and your family had established a specific method whereby conflicts could be addressed and a forum where suggestions might be considered? Ask God for guidance as you seek to correct any wrong ways of dealing with things He has shown you.

All of us expect certain things from our families, and when we don't get them we are displeased. By clearly laying out the family council as the expected way family problems should be dealt with, the expectation has been created that both you and your family will use that method for resolving them. Are you willing to stick with it, even when it is inconvenient? Are you willing to persevere when it's not easy and to let self die when your will is crossed? If so, you will find your family government markedly improved, and you'll be able to instill in your children a model of what a home should be like. May God attend your efforts.





A CHRISTIAN GUIDE TO THE FAMILY

The key to attaining a true Christian family life lies in your decision to put your family first, ahead of every other consideration, save God. To save your children will require you to live only to secure the future of your little ones. May God direct His plans for your family.

- Seek the wisdom of God and a willingness of spirit that may reveal to you just the message He has for you. Look for solutions.
- Spend special time with your family and with God. Make your devotional life more than a formality. Make sure you're seeking to know God as a family.
- Ask God to grant you the freedom of thought to really see what your family might become through His power.
- In your quiet time with God, ask Him to help you develop the principles of family time and family counsels. Use them as effective tools under His guidance.
- Ask God to remove the defensiveness that just seems natural with the sinful flesh we all share, and to give you a sense of objectivity.
- Ask for divine help in removing the thorns that come with our old and sinful ways and attitudes.



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