

Syllabus for the Course

ON

Family Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

A pastor from Sweden had journeyed to America to learn how to make his own country come alive for God. Several friends attended a weekly Bible study which was also Pastor Ragne's assigned duty to attend. His insights, always peppered with humor, livened up the group.

Soon it was time for Pastor Ragne to return to Sweden. His new friends presented him with an engraved pen-and-pencil set for his desk back home. Many new American friends loved the affable, Nordic teddy bear. They asked him what was the most interesting thing he had learned about Americans. Without hesitation he said in a thick, Scandinavian accent, "Well, when I first got here, everywhere I would go, everyone would always say to me, 'Ragne, so good to see you. How are you doing?' It took me about six months to realize--nobody wants an answer!"

This is sad, but true. We have all experienced the sting of the insincere inquiry. Why doesn't anyone want an answer? For some, of course, it's just a social greeting, but for most of us, we can see a clue into how we live. As Americans, we are too busy, so over committed, so up to our ears in many duties and debts--we just don't want to know about the other person. We have so many problems of our own, there is no time left for anyone else--we just don't have the time to "want an answer."

There are some observations to be made from this:

1. The local church is often perceived as not truly caring, and not having a ministering spirit. The local church desperately needs a family ministry that will truly reach out to the whole family. It must be operated with the right philosophy and motivation, and also be so well organized that members will be involved in it and help make it a reality. There are many around us who would respond to a sincere, compassionate ministry to the whole family. We must be involved even if we, too, have problems of our own. Maybe our churches are also perceived to be too busy with our own interests?

2. We must also recognize that many who are hurting don't really want any answers. It is also for these that we must pray and labor so they know someone genuinely cares.

3. Many who should be willing to be involved in a family ministry don't really want to hear of the problems that someone else has. Probably we have little concern because our hearts are not attuned to the Holy Spirit and to those who are needy. I do not want to be negative, but in reality, maybe this is our problem.

4. If a church builds a "family ministry" owned of God, then it must be apparent that there is commitment, empathy, and pliability on the part of the whole church. It will take patience, consistency, and dogged determination to reach some of these people who are so sure that no one truly cares.

From another viewpoint Christ commanded Christians to confront their culture. That command is indeed radical and in many instances a seemingly impossible task. To fulfill that command necessitates that the local church have a comprehensive family ministry that actually addresses twentieth-century problems right where people live.

1. This means that God wants us to be "salt and light" to those around us. The basic institutions God has given to make this possible are the family and the church.

2. Today, many Christians have been seduced into accepting with few qualms the world view of our non-Christian society. They do not analyze the values they adhere to or what affects their conduct and attitudes. Instead, many Christians go through life content with simply keeping the status quo with the world's dominant culture. Easily we make peace with humanism, secularism and all that goes with it.

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Since we are to confront our culture, then of necessity we must *know* the difference between the two views -- God's or the world's -- for comparison and examination. We will follow and give acceptance of one view and rejection of the other. God has not called us to the status quo, to personal peace or to affluence, but to conflict and confrontation with society.

"It the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:18,19.)

If the local church is to also help the family have a ministry toward our society or culture in which we live, then it will demand that the church have a Biblical impact toward those families so they are:

1. strengthened for the task of confronting and conflict that will naturally take place,
2. built up so the family will not fall apart, but be able to stand in a difficult age,
 - a. able to bring the lost to Christ, and
 - b. able to bring their youth up in godly, dedicated living for the glory of God.
3. Often the Christian who confronts his society individually, and as families, becomes an unwanted person of that culture, a person who in many ways no longer fits, especially in a culture that has reverted to pagan thought and position. God has called us to be different, to have an impact -- and we can *expect* to be misunderstood.

Does the church help the family to stand in this hostile world? Do we have a ministry to help it become salt and light?

We are not permanent members of this society; we have our citizenship in heaven. Nevertheless, we are to have an impact for the KING while we are here in this life. It is imperative that we understand *why, how, and where* we are to have such a ministry for the King of Kings.

The family is in tremendous need today! Several years ago, over two thousand Christian leaders met for a week-long Congress on the Family that attempted to analyze and suggest ways to solve some of our most pressing family problems. Participants attended many sessions led by the experts in North America.

In spite of all this activity, problems still are common, the divorce rate is high, and family unity appears to be rare. Counselors are kept busy working with dysfunctional families, and pastors repeatedly discover that the homes of some of the most prominent church members are torn by strife and discord. Even the family of counselor' and Christian leaders themselves often face tension, communication breakdowns, and interpersonal problems which militate against their homes.

The church needs answers, and church leaders need to face honestly the problems of today and to implement the kind of church family ministry that will make the difference.

It is my intent to share answers in this presentation of "Church Family Ministry."

-- Dr. Edward Watke, Jr.
December, 1992

SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS THAT CHRISTIANS FACE!

Possibly Christians face more pressure, stress, frustration, and bewilderment today than at any time in the past fifty years. An amalgamation of many things has brought new pressures in our affluent age which have all but totally unraveled our society, and have brought a profound effect upon the individual Christian and his home.

It is imperative for the pastor, deacon, and leader in the local church to understand some things that are involved in today's world in order to have the kind of total family ministry that is needed today. We must "get a grip" on some of the basic problems faced by the average Christian in the work force and in his home in today's culture. If we are to have a ministry to today's Christian home as we ought, then we must be on the "cutting edge" of understanding some of the basic pitfalls that lie in the path of the Christian on a daily basis. The church must "speak" to the problems that face the home (and the leaders of the home unit especially) or fail to have a meaningful and acceptable ministry to the homes which make up the local church.

The Problem of the "RAT-RACE" Age:

Why do Christian families drift away and end up far from God and his will? Often it is the "rat-race" age in which we live. The family wants affluence, a large home, two newer if not new cars, boats, and on and on. They work to fulfill their dreams, while all along the deadlines, quotas to beat, and self-imposed pressures of every kind cause them to drift far from God and from each other. Soon one marriage partner or the other has entered into an affair, or just moved away, totally confused. Confusion exists about how to achieve the desired effect -- the abundant life we are to have in Christ. (See John 10:10.)

Paul asked the question in Galatians 5:7, "*Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?*" He went on to write, "*This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump*" (Galatians 5:8, 9). Paul was much aware that the hindrance and persuasion to fall away did not come from God who had called them, but it were the effects of leaven, or sin.

The questions we ought to face:

What is the purpose of my life? Why do I exist? How do I find meaning? How do I satisfy my need to be significant? Is that a bonafide desire? Why are my relationships in shambles? How did I get so far in debt? Whom am I trying to please, anyway? How did I get caught up in this rat race in the first place?

The dichotomy we must face:

There is a dichotomy between God's order and the order of the world, which produces a strain on the Christian trying to sort out his thinking. Are there absolutes? If so, what are they? Do Biblical principles really address the twentieth-century day-to-day problems that families face? Is it possible for us to sort through our problems and build a workable model to live by? Can the church truly speak to my problems and understand what I face? Do we pastors have answers to problems that our people face on a day-to-day basis?

The standard-of-living fallacy:

We Americans enjoy unprecedented material success. Yet it's deceptive to measure our standard of living in only one dimension. It is this so-called "material success"

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that has brought so much pressure to the American Christian family, and it is not often looked at nor is it fully understood as even being a problem.

To comprehend the standard of living we have achieved, we must first look at some of its component parts and at concepts that brought us to where we are today.

Today people are consumed by desires to buy things they don't need, with money they don't have, to impress people they don't like. There is a desire for instant gratification that has taken the place of deferring to a time when we can pay cash for our wants.

While our material standard of living has soared over the past forty years, our moral/spiritual/relational standard of living has plummeted. They have, more or less, actually traded places.

The technology explosion of the past eighty years marks this century as the apex of human potential and achievement in all of history. We are blessed with technological enhancements in our creature comforts, our travel, our communications, and our jobs. We have prospered, but at a terrible price. We have a winning score, but have injured the team, the family, in the process.

Results: Many who have chased their dream have lost their families. Many children have grown up with absentee fathers. Bills for things we do not need and don't use may reach our mailbox monthly.

The impact of our dominant economic theory in America.

The material prosperity we enjoy is a miracle of our modern times, but it is all gain at a terrible price.

Forty years ago -- Television was new and not in color; no one had a computer; Greyhound was how America traveled; the interstate system did not exist; space exploration was an abstract idea, and nuclear power was a mystery. Madison Avenue was still in its infancy, and millionaires were few in comparison with today. Since then Americans have achieved a remarkable standard of living. *What has brought this about?*

1. The dominant economic theory in America for the past forty years or so has been consumerism. Consider -- Webster's dictionary defines this as "the economic theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is beneficial." Is this true? We have been told in every way possible that we must consume more, help raise the gross national product use, and have a higher standard of living -- all, at any price.

In 1957 Vance Packard wrote a book, *The Hidden Persuaders*, which shocked and alarmed our nation. He discovered and blew the whistle on a large-scale effort -- to channel our unconscious habits and manipulate our purchasing behavior. The Madison Avenue pin-stripers formed an unholy alliance with the practitioners of psychology to manipulate the American consumer.

At the end of World War II, our industrial machine had the capacity to produce far greater amounts of products than people were buying. So the pin-stripers probed the question of how to stimulate people to buy more, and the science of motivation research was born. -- P. M. Morley, *The Man in the Mirror*, p 11.

2. The Madison Avenue manipulators have found many ways to make us feel ashamed for not consuming more and more, and to feel dissatisfied with what we have. We have been **programmed** to consume, for we have been taught that a progressively greater consumption of goods is beneficial.

In late 1955 the church publication *Christianity and Crisis* commented grimly on America's "ever-expanding economy." It observed that the pressure was on Americans to "consume, consume, and consume, whether we need or even desire the products forced upon us." It added that the dynamics of an ever-expanding system required that we be "persuaded to consume to meet the needs of the productive process."

The influence of the media.

No greater influence impacts our thinking than the media. Unfortunately, our media in America are largely controlled by secular humanists, so the slant of most print copy, programming, advertising, and news coverage portrays a secular life and world view.

Secular humanism is the view that man establishes his own moral values apart from the influence of anyone (including God), and that he self-determines his destiny, for he is the master of his own fate. Everything is relative, and tolerance is the order of the day. In this life view there are no absolutes, everything is relative-- it has no eternal reference point. We can make up our own rules as we go.

SO -- Why should family values be more important than a career? Why shouldn't we cheat in business if we can get away with it? How do we know if sexual promiscuity is immoral or not?

Paul was concerned about being overcome by the world of his day! He wrote some very graphic words in I Corinthians 6:12; and 9:19-27.

Watch TV commercials and programs one evening and ask yourself, "By these standards, who am I and what am I?" The life portrayed on the tube loves pleasure, sensuality, doesn't deny itself anything, and has a right to whatever goal it sets. I believe you will come to the same conclusion I have in the past. The prime-time heroes of our contemporary society (TV) are shaped by the creative penmanship of many morally bankrupt humanists.

We are to desire the "wrinkle-free" life!

We can define the rat race as the pursuit of a beautiful, wrinkle-free life. We are to dress right, be sure we have the right name on the product, and be a good consumer so we can be accepted, be a part of the "in crowd." Unfortunately, many are trying to achieve the Madison Avenue *lifestyle*. A lack of contentment pervades the life of the American consumer. That's because forty years of consumerism and media influence have caused a basic shift in values. Often Christians allow this same pressure to dress right, buy right, and own the right things, in order to be up-to-date.

This lifestyle and image we may strive for is a *media-generated, artificial standard of living*. The media create the lifestyle image that producers of goods and services want to sell. It is unrealistic, artificial, and only a weary few achieve it. I think that most saved people continue pursuing this lifestyle to some extent and do not fully realize they are doing it. Trying to achieve this wrinkle-free, beautiful life of having the right things brings some rather devastating results.

SOME RESULTS ARE:

1. Development of excruciating anxiety levels. The more people are exposed to our consumer-oriented society the more discontent intensifies. (See Ecclesiastes 5:10.) The more people get, the more is wanted. *Anxiety* is the natural byproduct of chasing this *illusive* and *exclusive* life style of "wanting it all."

2. Debt pressure. Borrowing has become a national pastime. Easy credit *seems* like a good idea. If we could control our desires, the problem might not be so serious. But in the pursuit of the "good life" we are lured to stretch a little farther for happiness via having all we can get.

3. Fractured interpersonal relationships. As they chase this destructive lifestyle, debt pressure makes people angry and bitter, and families crumble under the stress that debts have brought into their lives.

4. Fractured spiritual relationships. Even on the part of many Christians, the desire for things appears to have become more important than a meaningful, Biblical life philosophy, or godly life-style. (See Hebrews 12:1-3.)

Focus Questions

1. "Most families are caught up in the rat race." Agree _____ Disagree _____
2. In what ways has your material standard of living gone up since you were a child, or in comparison to your parent's home? In what ways do you think your moral and spiritual life, and your relationships have been affected? How do you think this has impacted the average Christian home and the ministry of the church?
3. It appears that many Christians have been lulled into mental and spiritual complacency. How have consumerism and the media impacted your own values and the way you spend your time and money? How have these affected the church and its ministry?
4. What is your philosophy of a church ministry that will relieve the pressures that our families face? What can be done about the world's impact upon our families?

Quote:

The following quote is a prayer from Peter Marshall, the great Welsh preacher, who was chaplain of the senate many years. It is actually a prayer that he prayed at the opening of a Senate session.

"Forbid it, Lord, that our roots become too firmly attached to this earth, that we should fall in love with things. Help us to understand that the pilgrimage of this life is but an introduction, a preface, a training school for what is to come. Then shall we see all of life in its true perspective. Then shall we not fall in love with the things of time, but come to love the things that endure. Then shall we be saved from the tyranny of possessions which we have no leisure to enjoy, or property whose care becomes a burden. Give us, we pray, the courage to simplify our lives. So may we be mature in our faith, childlike but never childish, humble but never cringing, understanding but never conceited. So help us, O God, to live and not merely exist, that we may have joy in our work. In thy name, who alone can give us moderation and balance and zest for living, we pray. Amen."

The Problem -- Is It Biblical Christianity or Cultural Christianity?

A. W. Tozer wrote, "A whole new generation of Christians has come up believing that it is possible to accept Christ without forsaking the world."

Another acute problem facing Christians today, and especially the church and its ministries, is the problem that so many Christians have embraced a neo-Christianity. A new cultural Christianity says you can be saved and have a good portion of the world, too. Surely this has an impact on the local church and the kind of ministry that will be carried on by the church to impress, excite, build and develop the family toward a godly home and life.

In his book, *How Shall We Then Live*, Dr. Francis Schaefer noted how changes in art, music, drama, theology, and mass media have negatively affected our values.

Dr. Schaefer underscored that the majority of people have adopted two impoverished values: *personal peace* and *affluence*. His perceptive insight has a ring of truth. He wrote:

Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the street or across the world -- to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren. Affluence means an

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overwhelming and ever increasing prosperity -- a life made up of things, things, and more things -- a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.

Many a family is being desperately entangled in a bankrupt, impoverished life with values that have gone askew. According to a 1986 Gallup Poll, an incredible 32% of Americans classified themselves as Christians, but the price of being identified as a Christian has gone down.

Religion in America is popular, but it has not had much impact on our society. The sad reality is that claims of religious commitment run high, but the impact is at an all-time low. Our culture has sunk into a moral sewer, and many a Christian is being deeply affected by the immorality of the age via TV and the ready availability of video and other media.

We have an impoverished cultural Christianity which we could define this way: Cultural Christianity means pursuing the God we want instead of the God of the Bible who is. It is the tendency to be shallow in our understanding of God, wanting Him to be more of a gentle grandfather type who spoils us and lets us have our own way. It is sensing a need for God, but on our own terms. Sometimes it is wanting the God we have underlined in our Bibles without wanting HIM to control our lives. It is a relative God instead of a God who is absolute!

GOD HELP US! *Cultural Christianity is a Christianity made impotent. It is a Christian life with little or no impact on the values and beliefs of our society. The secular life view is merged with the Christian life view and Christianity does not survive.*

What kind of Christians do we have?

Today we have Biblical Christians and Cultural Christians, the latter being greatly and submissively molded by the society about them. The parable of the sower reveals these two kinds of professing Christians who are in our churches today.

Group 1 --The non-Christian. (See Luke 8:12.) These are they who hear, and the devil snatches away the word of God and they will never believe, nor are they saved.

Group 2 -- The Cultural Christian who has a counterfeit faith. (See Luke 8:13.) He has prayed a prayer, prayed right words; but prayer does not save, faith in Christ does. (See Matthew 7:21; II Corinthians 13:5.) It seems that many have prayed a prayer and therefore think they are saved. Not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," will enter into the kingdom of heaven. Some have a defeated faith, and many others have a spurious faith. (See II Corinthians 13:5.)

Group 3 -- The Cultural Christian, who has a defeated faith. (See Luke 8:14.) There is little difference between the lifestyle of the unsaved, secular society at large and the average Christian. The typical U.S. family spends 23 % of its after-tax income to repay debts. When Christians are bogged down with debts and run the race to acquire material possessions, the worries that follow choke the Word and make it unfruitful. This Christian lives for the basic goals, priorities and values as the average unsaved person. And, of course, many of this group never were truly saved.

Group 4 -- The Biblical Christian, who desires to live for Christ. (See Luke 8:15.) Truly, Biblical Christians do not live by their own ideas, but by understanding and applying the Word of God. They experience the peace of God as they seek to live, by the power of the Spirit, in obedience to Bible principles. As a result of saving faith, they desire to submit to the authority of the Lordship of Christ.

Far too often there is only a marginal difference between the way the saved live and the way the broken, hurting world lives. Does my life offer hope to the lost or does it offer disillusionment? *Many Christians have slowly been neutralized by the world and it's impact; they are neither hot nor cold.*

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A man working on his doctrinal thesis interviewed 350 Christian leaders. At the end of his tour he made a discouraging observation.. He said "I found a great deal of zeal for God's work, but very little passion for God."

Maybe the biggest problem for the average family is that its members have accepted the idea that there are no absolutes. *The world says "There is nothing more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes."* Cultural Christians are apt to think that truth is relative -- that it changes over time as circumstances change.

AS PASTORS, then, *SOME RESULTS ARE:* we must face this kind of world, and know how to minister to this kind of society.

1. Christians are under pressure to conform, and to be tolerant to the place of their own personal danger because of the lack of a personal standard.
2. Many are so "busy doing" that personal relationship with God is lost. We are out of tune with the Lord. It is very easy to be defeated in the personal life. (See Revelation 2:2-4.)
3. Most Cultural Christians live by their own ideas and the ideas of others. The 51% majority rule is the law of their minds. (The Biblical Christian in contrast lives by the Word of God and the counsel of the Holy Spirit. He allows the Word of God to penetrate his heart and mind with the intent to fully grasp its depth and meaning and with the desire to obey it.)
4. Many Christian families have embraced the desire for affluence and a cultural acceptance largely to the destruction of their personal walk with Christ. *Obedience is the hallmark of a Biblical Christian.*

FOCUS QUESTIONS:

1. Think of a Christian couple having marriage problems. In what ways do you think their conformity to cultural values has contributed to their struggle?
2. Do you think or feel that *cultural Christianity* is truly a problem in the church today? If so, how would you face this, deal with it, or minister to meet that need?
3. How would you define a *cultural Christian*? As a pastor, do you feel that many of your members are largely impacted by the world today? If so, what kind of ministry is needed to counteract this problem?

The Problem -- The Search for Meaning and Purpose

A man's highest hope

It is a normal thing for a person or a family to desire meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in life. The problem is that most people, even the saved, seek to fulfill these needs in the wrong way and in the wrong places.

What is man's greatest need? Someone recently mentioned they would like their tombstone to read, "He made a difference." Possibly the desire to feel significant has caused many a Christian to labor to fill that desire at the world's fountain.

1. Maybe we as churches and pastors have not noted the importance of the family's having fulfillment which is godly, Biblical, meaningful, and God honoring.
2. Maybe we have not taught, preached, and organized to bring about a meaningful experience for our people as individuals and families so that they feel dedication and service truly are fulfilling.
3. People do have a desire to --

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- a. have life bring meaning, and for it to be significant;
- b. have an impact and make a contribution;
- c. do something important with their lives;
- d. conquer, achieve, excel, and prove themselves;
- e. do something significant and fulfilling as a family.

The problem we face

The difference in families is how we go about satisfying our need to be significant. Some families, eager for the spoils of this life, pursue significance by gratifying only their own ambitions. If we are trained by the Scriptures and obedient to God's will, then we will find significance in obeying God.

A life full of meaning and blessing comes from having a life hid with Christ. (See John 15:4.) Without Christ, we can do nothing! If we truly believe that then we will also embrace the fact that significance in any lasting way cannot be ours apart from full surrender to Him. To satisfy Christ is to have a life purpose that endures.

There is little *quality* and *durability* of significance outside of yieldedness to Christ alone. Many champions or winners in the world's competition soon find that they are forgotten about as fast as they are heralded. Memories of greatness in this life are very short. In terms of fame and worldly accomplishment, we will have an identity that will fade like sun-bleached furniture.

The Results

1. As the scales in our society are tipped toward individual rights and away from Judeo-Christian values, **we have a world that is more and more in pursuit of self-gratifying activity.** (See Matthew 16:24-26.)
2. **The focus on personal peace and affluence** (previously defined) has largely replaced deeply held, self-sacrificing convictions which benefit the human race as a whole and the unsaved in particular.
3. **The difference between self-gratification and godly significance** is found in *motive* and *attitude*, more than in the *task*. Two people working side by side can be doing the same thing and have totally different impact, based on the differences in their motives and attitudes.

SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS THAT MUST BE FACED IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY!

*"Sometimes news happens close to home. As Americans head into the 21st century, the family itself has become one of the biggest stories of our generation. At once venerated and vulnerable, this, the most basic of society's institutions, is facing unprecedented change." (So writes Richard M. Smith, editor-in-chief, *Newsweek Magazine*, 21st Century family edition, spring 1990)*

Following are excerpts and condensations from the above mentioned magazine. This coverage gives a brief but comprehensive overview of what the world is saying about the family.

What Happened to the Family?

"The American family does not exist," so they say, as it once was at the turn of century. We, as Christians, would say that a small percentage of families are as they were at the turn of the century, much to the shame and loss of our nation. They go on to write, "Rather we are creating many American families, of diverse styles and shapes. In unprecedented numbers, our families are unlike: We have fathers working while mothers keep house; fathers and mothers both working away from home; single parents; second marriages bringing children together from unrelated backgrounds; childless couples; unmarried couples, with and without children; gay and lesbian parents. We are living through a period of historic change in American family life." (Newsweek special issue, p 15)

"What is a family? a mommy, a daddy, a couple of kids and maybe a grandma, right? Well, yes, but that's not the whole picture anymore. The family tree of American society is sending forth a variety of new and fast-growing branches. Gay and lesbian couples (with or without children) and unmarried heterosexual couples are now commonplace. What's surprising is not so much that these offshoots of the main trunk are flourishing but that the public seems more and more willing to recognize them as families. Earlier this year (1990) the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Co. asked 1,200 randomly selected adults to define the word "family." Only 22 percent picked the legalistic definition: "A group of people related by blood, marriage or adoption." Almost three-quarters instead chose a much broader and more emotional description: "A group of people who love and care for each other." As usual, the American people are changing old perceptions much faster than the courts are. But in many parts of the country lawmakers are now finally catching up and validating the legitimacy of the non-traditional family." (same, p. 38.)

Note: Three things come to focus here: 1) These articles basically were written not to validate the position of the masses but to influence the thinking of the masses to accept the non-traditional family, especially gay and lesbian so-called families. 2) People making up the 1,200 chosen probably were people of a certain educational selection, as well as a certain geographical area. 3) The secular, humanistic viewpoint is apparently that which dominates and permeates all the articles written by those who set forth what the twenty first century families are expected to be or to become.

Pastors and churches who desire to reach the modern day family must face the changes, understand and relate to them, yet keep the Biblical mandate.

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Note some of the changes from the statistical viewpoint:

The New Mix -- Minorities are out pacing whites. From 1980 to 2030, if the Lord tarries, it is expected that there will be the following projected percent increase, by ethnicity and race: *Whites* will increase 24.8 %, *Blacks* 68.3 %, *Others* (Asian, Pacific islanders, American Indians, Eskimos plus Aleuts, etc.) by 78.7 %, and the *Hispanics* by 186.8 %.

Women in the work force --

<i>Year:</i>	<i>% working:</i>	<i>% married,</i>	<i>% widowed or divorced,</i>	<i>% Single</i>
1890	18.9	13.9	17.9	68.2
1940	27.4	36.4	15.1	48.5
1987	56	54.7	19.4	25.9

General facts:

Fifty percent of marriages begun since the mid-70's are likely to end in divorce. For second marriages the estimated divorce rate is 60 percent. The offspring of divorced families are far more apt to consider divorce when things get tough.

Stepchildren make up 20 percent of all children in married-couple families. As many as one-third of children born in the 80's may live with a stepparent by the age of 18. In 1980 there were almost 6.1 million children living with step families in 1985 6.8 million children lived with step families.

When mothers can't or won't take care of the children, more and more it is the grandparents who come to the rescue.

The Youth Cult -- A Worship of Youth

"Youth are hooked on a premature affluence. They get used to an unrealistic level of discretionary income they can't maintain when they leave home."

"These days, adolescents want to do everything sooner -- everything but grow up."

"Preoccupied with their bodies, youth has lost touch with mental disciplines."

"Something has happened on the way to the 21st century: American youth, in a sharp reversal of historical trends, are taking longer to grow up. As the 20th century winds down, more young Americans are enrolled in college, but fewer are graduating -- and they are taking longer to get their degrees. They take longer to establish careers, too, and longer yet to marry. Many, unable or unwilling to pay for housing, return to the nest -- or are slow to leave it. They postpone choices and spurn long-term commitments. Life's on hold; adulthood can wait." (*Newsweek*, p. 54)

Experts on the family say they've never seen anything like it. *"Young people are growing up with much less commitment of any kind,"* says Rutgers University sociologist David Popence, author of *Disturbing the Nest*, a comprehensive study of family life. *"Never before has it been so hard to leave the period of youth."*

It wasn't supposed to be this way, or so some experts initially thought. Surveying the vaunted "Youth revolt" of the 60's, anthropologist Margaret Mead concluded that the young had become "pioneers" of a brave new future for which their elders could no longer serve as trustworthy models. But the pioneers, it turned out, were not headed toward adulthood. What was happening, observed psychologist Kenneth Keniston, was the emergence on a mass scale of a previously unrecognized stage of life, which he labeled "youth." By 1972 sociologist James S. Coleman had discerned the regressive character of the burgeoning new youth culture locked into a world of their own creation. With their own music and money and a license to do as they wished, the young saw no reason to abandon this "pleasing surrogate for maturity." The age of extended adolescence had arrived. And it shows no signs of going away.

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(Newsweek, p. 54, 55)

Note: Like love, work, too, has become an opportunity for immediate gratification, rather than for long-term growth and commitment. Young people have become expert consumers long before they were ever taught how to produce. They lack the understanding of the value of meaningful work, thrift, and responsibility for others. Teenage employment for the most part has only intensified the adolescent drive for immediate gratification. Instead of learning how to delay desires, students are indulging what University of Michigan researcher Jerald Backman calls "premature affluence."

Ultimately, it is a question of cultural values. What the young see enshrined in the media and malls of America are, after all, the values adults put there: consumerism, narcissism and the instant gratification of desire.

Concerning Sexual Problems

Physically, today's youth are maturing earlier than previous generations, but emotionally they are taking much longer to develop adult attachments. They are marrying later than their parents did -- partly for economic reasons -- and many college graduates are postponing marriage beyond age 30.

They live in a permissive society that tolerates teenage sex. According to a 1986 Harris survey, 57 percent of today's adolescent boys and girls have had sex before age 18. By the time they reach their mid-20's, many no longer regard sexual relationships as a matter of values or commitment. "*Sex outside a relationship is not so much a matter of right or wrong to them. Is it really worth the hassle.*"

1. Out of it are many unwanted pregnancies; currently more than one American child in five is born out of wedlock, 40% of them to teenagers.
2. Another result is a soaring abortion rate. More than two thirds of all abortions are performed on single women under the age of 27. "The ease with which they choose to abort reflects a disturbing indifference to the moral gravity of their actions and an inability to make commitments."

Cohabitation

Today half of all men and women in their 30's cohabited before marriage, many of them on the assumption that it is better to look -- deeply-- before they leap. But studies now demonstrate that couples who cohabit before marriage are more likely to divorce than those who do not.

While divorce is eroding marriage on one end -- the termination of marriage -- the sexual revolution is eating away at the other end -- the beginning of marriage. The sexual revolution had its beginnings in the 1950's and 1960's. In these decades adolescents in particular began to strip away the sentimental layers from the romantic experience to get at its hard sexual core, thinking eroticism most precious in what human relationships have to offer us and impatient with the delays that feeling once imposed."

-- Shorter in *Making of the Modern Marriage*, p. 119

Statistics support the view that this revolution took place in two steps. First, there was an incursion of premarital intercourse into the lives of the unmarried late in the eighteenth century. Intercourse once again became prevalent among the unmarried after the mid-1950's. In the 1960's the chances were very great that young people who were strongly attracted to each other would extend their relationships to include sexual experiences. "And if these things did not go well in the realm of sexuality the couple would dissolve and the dance of courtship would recommence with someone else. And that would have been unthinkable in times past."

The Geezer Boom

The generation that once counseled not to trust anyone over 30 will begin turning 64 in 2010. By 2030 the entire baby boom -- 77 million people, one third of the

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current U.S. population -- will be senior citizens. Perhaps no other change in the 21st century will have a more profound effect on how American society looks, feels, thinks and behaves. The church must face this need, looking for many ways to reach the seniors who abound in number in almost any community.

This group swelled the schools in the 1950's, protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960's, jostling one another for homes and jobs in the 1970's and 1980's and are obsessed with their own family concerns today. -- *Newsweek*, pgs. 62-68

Many find themselves in the *sandwich generation* as they are hard pressed to support their elderly relatives while at the same time they are caring for their own children's college needs and other burdens. Many divorced, women working, parents having fewer children later in life and relocating to distant cities -- these factors have all threatened the fabled *extended family* who took in aged relatives in decades past. More and more families will feel squeezed as their elderly members retire.

The church needs to have an ongoing, meaningful ministry to help meet the needs of both the growing numbers of elderly and their families who feel pressed to help meet needs while under their own personal pressures.

Behind all the statistics lie some wrenching emotional changes and problems. Reversing roles, caring for parents who once cared for you and watching them grow frailer can involve guilt, sadness, anger, resentment and fear even in the strongest families. The challenge of how to relate to the aging loved ones will become one of the powerful themes of the coming decades.

Many Christian families contend with the same basic problems that the unsaved face. Often the local church ignores the problems, or seemingly does not feel it necessary to address the problem or relate to the needs. Surely everyone will find their own way. But do they not need compassion, understanding, and assistance?

The Day-Care Generation

A large number of the children of homes across America are gotten out of bed early and shuttled off to someone's house, to a day-care center, local church, or some place where they will spend many more hours than the parents have with the same child.

There is always the disturbing question that lurks in the back of every working parent's mind: *what is this doing to my kids?* The simple and unsettling answer is, nobody really knows for sure. Experts say they're just beginning to understand the ramifications of raising a generation of youngsters outside the home while their parents work.

Now a majority of mothers work, and they go back to the office while their children are still in diapers. In the past, mothers worked out of necessity. That is still true for the majority today, but they have also been joined by mothers of all economic classes. Some researchers think we won't know all the answers until the 21st century, when the children of today's working mothers are parents themselves. In the meantime, results gathered so far are disturbing.

1. One set of researchers argue that babies who spend more than 20 hours a week in child care may grow up maladjusted.
2. The turnover rate in many day care organizations create an unstable environment for youngsters who need dependability and consistency.
3. For the Christian there is the concern about the character of the person who is caring for the child, the impact of the lack of quality and quantity time spent with the child or children in many cases, and the stress that the parents are often under in their own work.

Churches must also address these concerns, or at least have some kind of help planned for the parents. There could be times of discussion, input, and possibly even helping families organize and maintain good day-care facilities in a home, etc., if the local church does not carry on this kind of ministry. Also the pastor and staff will want to be aware of the kind of pressures these families face and understand their need to possibly

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have minimal responsibility within the local church. Such families will probably have maximum needs while they give minimum assistance to the work of their local church. They need much understanding and patient leadership.

Focus Questions

1. How should the local church minister to families in the light of the foregoing problems?
2. How do we relate the gospel story to such families in order that we might reach them where they are and help them where they are? How do we relate to them properly, so that we can get a hearing for the gospel?
3. Does a hearing for the gospel and its application to the lives depend upon our understanding of what the modern family faces? If so, why?
4. What are the issues of modern life that the pastor must address in messages, teaching, and input on a personal level?
5. How can the church best relate and minister to families in order to meet those problems?
6. How can the church better meet the needs of the senior citizen or the young adult family under stress from both working and children being cared for by others?

SIGNIFICANT ILLS OF THE MODERN FAMILY

My wife and I traveled full time in meetings for nearly twelve years (1978 - 1990) as we held approximately four hundred meetings over those years. Our major emphasis was marriage, home, child rearing, and family living.

We arrived in Illinois for meetings and during the week with others, we journeyed to a neighboring town for a day-long preachers' meeting. One of the pastors said, "My, I wish that you were coming to our church right now. During the past few months we have lost five families due to divorce and/or separation." His tone of voice and inflection signaled deep concern and he went on to exclaim that he did not know what in the world to do. The situation was another of many that reveals the burden and concern for *family ministry* which is greatly needed in church life today.

Twenty-five years ago you could have held in one hand the books written by Bible-believing writers on the subject of the family. There is still some resistance to *family-life ministry*, but pressing needs for such a ministry are fast overcoming the indifference and resistance. The need for the local church to have a *family-life ministry* is so urgent that the church's ministry to the family often resembles a rescue effort more than it does an educational venture. As an institution the family is truly facing a crisis.

Dr. Charles S. Sell in the book *Family Ministry* quotes Regina Wieman, who in 1937 sounded this warning in *The Modern Family and the Church*: "The family is going through a long and perilous crisis. Nobody noticed just when it started; nobody can say just how long it will last; nobody knows what the outcome will be."

Scores of writers agree with this assessment. "The home is falling apart and wall-to-wall carpeting will not hold it together," quipped a Methodist bishop. Kenneth Gangel paints a dark picture of family disintegration and disorganization as a backdrop for his biblical answers to family problems in *The Family First*; and Howard Hendricks implies that the family is in a critical state with his imploring title, *Heaven Help the Home*.

Family Instability

1. Fragmentation, disintegration and disorganization of the family is the order of the day. Many of the families or family members whom we will win to Christ will come from dysfunctional families. They may be distraught with many basic problems in their family life which render their functioning as a Christian nearly impossible.

2. Instability in the family is evident, first of all, in the fact that there are more people terminating their marriages through divorce than ever before. Many books have been written addressing this distressing problem.

3. Marriage is more fragile than it was previously, for marriage as a normative institution has lost its taken-for-granted, lifelong quality. The loss of commitment between marriage partners is a matter of concern for both the church and Western society as a whole. Commitment in general in many areas of life and society needs is greatly lacking today.

4. A high divorce rate is a sign that there are many unhappy marriages and that couples are not using necessary skills in human relations. The misery within such homes and the resulting breakup of families are immeasurably destructive to the emotional life of children. Family weakness and instability is one of the church's great challenges.

5. One factor in this problem of divorce and its effects on the family is the disregard for the biblical views of marriage as a permanent bond.

6. Another factor of family instability is the growing number of single parents as we considered earlier in the *Newsweek* magazine report. Twenty years ago it was reported that if the divorce rate continued, one child in six would lose a parent by the time he or she was eighteen. It has surpassed that record.

Breakdown of Traditional Roles

Another major ill of the modern twentieth century family is a lack of perception and submission to the traditional role of a husband and wife. Parents have not taught their children by example and precept the understanding of biblical roles.

And another variance between the church's ideals and the circumstances of the contemporary family is in the matter of roles.

1. The industrial revolution brought about change to the family in many ways. At one time the family unit was the center of all of life, but now the family is fragmented. The parents are largely gone during the day and there has been a decline in the importance of the parents to the family unit. The cohesiveness that once was an integral part of the family because they worked together and lived in a close environment is lost today with the passing of the agricultural, rural life that most people lived some generations ago.

2. While most everything at one time revolved around the family unit, now people are dependent upon industry and government outside the home. Industry and government cater to the individual rather than to the family as a whole.

3. Many women have a pronounced dissatisfaction with the traditional role of a woman. The women's liberation movement has strongly expressed their determination to change the perception of a woman's role. They want the woman to be liberated from the traditional role of being a wife, homemaker and home-keeper. This unrest with the traditional role of women puts a severe strain on the family as a whole.

Powerless Parents

Deprived of clear-cut roles, modern parents seem hard-pressed to achieve one of their major functions -- the successful rearing of children, if they are even willing to have children at all.

The avalanche of books on parenting, some of them best sellers, is a testimony to the many troubles parents have in rearing their children. If the home fails its children, it fails society. *Radical social engineers maintain that the home has already failed in this task and that alternatives to the nuclear family must be found.*

1. Tension between parent and child is also evident from the numerous cases of child abuse. Physical abuse that involves bodily injury or emotional injury is at epidemic proportions, according to some experts.

2. At every age and grade level, children today show a greater dependency on their peers than they did a decade ago. Such peer orientation and alienation from parents has resulted in the rising rates of running away, dropping out of school, drug abuse, suicide, delinquency, vandalism and violence.

3. No matter what we conclude concerning the power of parents, **we can say that they are having difficulty fulfilling their child-rearing task.** For many years their cries for help have brought a response from the church as well as from secular agencies.

Considerations for the Church and Pastors

The church today wants to help the family in training future generations in the faith but it is also interesting to see how home life affects church life. Some evangelicals (and maybe some fundamentalists) maintain that programs to rescue the home are in turn necessary for the survival of the church.

1. The family needs the church and the churches need the family. As goes the family -- so goes the church -- is also a correct statement.

2. The biblical church and the Christian home, as institutions, are as closely bound together as Siamese twins. If they are cut apart, a major artery may be severed and cause one or both to die.

3. The church cannot function as it should in a disordered world if it cannot rely on the home to play a major part in Christian nurture. And the home cannot function as it ought without the instruction, support, encouragement, and fellowship of the local church.

4. The family serves a particular and apparently indispensable role within the church.

Family Enrichment Needed, but Not Met

Despite the strong case for family ministry, it has met often with indifference and resistance. On the basis of one survey by Norman Wright, churches that had a concentrated ministry to the family were the exception rather than the rule. Out of five hundred directors of Christian education and youth directors who received Wright's questionnaire, ninety-six responded. Among these, only one-third indicated that their church members had received any sermons on the family during the previous two years. And one-third reported that there had been no program related to the family during the same period of time.

Sixty-six percent of twenty-five hundred of the marriage counselors and family-life educators in America agreed that the churches are not doing an adequate job of promoting and maintaining family life as a contemporary concept.

Contemporary marriage and family experts are reminding us that in previous generations the important factors holding families together were largely external and brought on by economic necessity. But today marriages can no longer be held together by external coercion. People are needing more than that. What will hold them together is internal cohesion, based on improved interpersonal relationships, and that can be taught. The Bible has plenty to say on that subject.

*Families can change, but change requires two processes. There must be **insight** (which interprets information to enable us to explain and understand our functioning) and **action**, which is necessary before insight can be put to use. **The church is in a position to wonderfully meet these needs.***

Church and Family Conflict

Historically, there has often been a tendency to focus on either the church or the home and there has been little blending of the two. Churches outstanding for their large membership and growing Sunday Schools are not, by and large, correspondingly known for a strong focus also on the home.

Much of this tension has probably been due to the fear that the church's programs would die if too much attention was given to the needs of the home. Positions of leadership in the churches and Christian schools has often taken up the time of faithful church leaders, and this often involved sacrificing family life for church service. When laymen begin to give priority to their families, there is the fear that key programs of the church will be threatened to collapse; so a competitive spirit is fostered between the two.

One church leader told how far misguided zeal for the church's ministry can go. He had motivated a man in his church to devote more than thirty hours a week to the bus ministry. This situation alienated him from his wife and eventually brought about their divorce. Hopefully, such examples are becoming fewer in number.

There needs to be a growing sensitivity in the church to the needs of church leaders' families, pastors' families, and a realization that church programs should be constructed so they cooperate, rather than compete, with the home.

BIBLICALLY -- WHAT IS A FAMILY?

There seems to be a lot of confusion today as to what a family is. The word *family* has been stretched, pulled, changed, maligned, and even hated until it has ceased to mean anything at all to some people. To others, the word *family* means a great deal, for it is associated with all that is meaningful and blessed in relationships.

One human being committed to another human being in some way does not make a family. A church, a commune, single people sharing a house, a people committed to other people does not make what is basically meant by the term *family*.

We sometimes speak of a "church family," a "neighborhood family," or the "camp family" in referring to the warm, close relationship of the larger group, but all these broader meanings have no reality without a well-defined basic meaning of the word *family*. These terms are dependent upon a clear, concise and biblical meaning of the word *family*. We will consider some basic aspects of what makes a family.

1. Essentially, a family consists of a man and woman who are married to each other and the children they have borne. This is a biblical definition and the outworking of the plan of God. Psalms 127 and 128 give us some clear statements about the family. Here God calls children a heritage of the Lord and describes the family structure in vivid terms. The framework continues generation after generation in the relationship of the parents and children with grandparents and great-grandparents from whom they have descended. Even though not everyone has been nurtured by their natural or birth parents, that does not alter the meaning of the word *family*. Everyone has been begotten by a father and born of a mother; notwithstanding, the family is far from what it ought to be. Solitary individuals are not helped by attempts to redefine the family.

God created the family, making first the man and then the woman, and giving them reproductive capacities. God put them into a perfect place, but they fell into sin before even the first child was born. None know what it would have meant to live in a perfect place and home without sin and failure.

So what does it take to make a godly family?

- It takes imagination, commitment, hard work, love and time to become what a family is meant to be.
- How much time? It seems to be, a lifetime is needed, for a family is a complex blending of relationships, minds, personalities, and emotions. A family is an ever-changing blend of people, never two days the same in age or development.
- A family is held together by, among other things, the threads of history and experience. A family is a daily work of art that needs long years of tending and must often be repaired. When the family is torn or vandalized, the talents of an expert -- the Heavenly Father and the Word of God -- are available for repair.

2. A family is to be a perpetual relay of truth. God makes it clear in so many places in the Word of God that His plan is that children are to hear the truth from their parents. Truth about God was meant to be given to children by parents and grandparents for they were to instruct their sons and sons' sons. (See Deuteronomy 6:1-7; 11:18-23; Psalms 78:1-8.) The command of God is to *tell your sons and your sons' sons*. "And when your son asks. . ." (Joshua's true answers were to be given about all aspects of Bible knowledge. Truth would not have been lost if it been handed down at the breakfast table, at lunch, at dinner, at bedtime, when out walking together, or when sitting together before a sunset or a fire.)

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To the family God handed the responsibility for passing on to the generations of the earth knowledge about Him, sin, Satan, and all facets of Biblical truth. Fathers and mothers are cruel to their children in neglecting to make truth known, and in neglecting to make it exciting and applicable to their daily life. The excitement and reality of all the Bible teaches should be a normal part of discussion; the Bible and other books should be read aloud together in the family.

The reality of the family's dependence upon God in prayer for guidance and care cannot be supplied by the church. It must be lived day by day, as the family prays together concerning a crisis, problems, or the trivial incidents.

3. A family is a museum of memories. Memories can *happen*, but for the most part memories are also planned. A schedule is splendid, but on occasions, making a memory take place is better than meeting certain schedules, such as a child going to bed on time.

Memories can be made by buying them -- such as attending a symphony concert, the warmth of sharing favorite moments of music in conversation afterward, stopping for a hot chocolate on the way home. Memories should be *collected* for the family by planning picnics, going to the zoo, birthdays, school days, games, Christmas, etc., The list is endless. In the midst of all this we must teach sensitivity to another's needs and feeling, sympathy, understanding, compassion, and forgiveness -- primarily by example. Much of the teaching, training, and molding of character can take place when we as a family are working on memorial times together.

4. A family is a shelter in the time of storm. This is a picture of what God is to His family: "*Hear my cry, O God . . . For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy* (Psalm 61:1, 3). If our earthly family is really a shelter, we can help our children understand the faithfulness of God. The storms of illness, handicaps, old age, death, accident, psychological upset, disease, etc., can be weathered in the shelter of the family.

Sickness and hurts, whether physical or psychological, need proper loving care. I think there is great ignorance as to what constitutes loving, kind, good care. One needs to know when one is neglecting to give the best care to sick children, distressed adults, or elderly people. "*Doing it unto the Lord by doing it unto the least of these*" should be the reality first in the family.

The storms of bankruptcy, fire, polio, hay fever, cancer, or broken legs are not interruptions of family life -- they are a part of it. Weathering storms together draws a family closer to one another. Helping during difficult times cements emotional ties rather than splitting them and becomes a shared experience that represents love and concern. Such an atmosphere provides shelter from outside persecution, as well as from illness and pain.

5. A family is an economic unit. God gave Adam and Eve the possibility of leading a perfect existence -- with creative work as a source of unity and joy. We know what took place and how work outside the garden of Eden was part of the curse. "*In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground*" (Genesis 3:19). To this day people must work to provide the necessities of life, although through inventions and discoveries, God has allowed people to ease their work load.

In sickness and health, for richer or for poorer is more than a marriage vow; it is a statement about family life. The ups and downs are to be shared. Working to provide for a family is to be shared, and this is a matter quite apart from whom works outside the home, etc. Both marriage partners must work, whether inside or outside.

The family, as an economic unit, is not a matter of dollars and cents, but a matter of having the greatest freedom to produce that which is needed and appreciated, with both parents meeting the needs of the family as a whole.

6. A family is a creativity center. The home should be a rich source of inspiration for all kinds of creativity -- taking violin lessons, learning to make flower arrangements, starting to grow lean sprouts for a Chinese dinner six days later, writing a play, and putting it on in the living room, etc. Artists, sculptors, scientists, engineers, inventors, musicians, painters, poets, writers, cooks, designers, -- all these and more have found the home fertile ground in which to grow, or where the early budding of interest took place.

Creativity needs appreciation and affirmation from another person. Criticism should never be given at the important moment -- the unveiling of the completed project. Creativity in the home is worth the mess, the problems, and the extra work.

The Bible does not rule out creativity as a spiritual experience. The instructions for the tabernacle, given to Moses in the Book of Exodus, included fantastic works of art. Obviously, people needed creative skills to produce these things. This artwork had beauty, as well as spiritual meaning. God's house was meant to be beautiful. The works of art were made in family groups, and skills were developed in a home atmosphere in ancient times.

7. A family is an educational control. Here I am thinking of the word *control* in the sense of a monitoring system. Parents should keep a careful watch over what is taking place in the developing education of each child. Schools can help or hinder, and an informed parent can create a necessary balance in a child's home environment to counteract or support the school's influence.

Parents need to show children the connection between their education and their Christian faith. The two cannot be separated, for God is God of the whole person. Open discussion and communication at home is very vital. Encourage your children to read by reading aloud with them, perhaps at set times each week. Include a wide variety of subjects -- music, gardening, fishing, and sports and as they mature subjects such as childbirth, drugs, abortion, sex, etc.

Education in life and education in the Word of God should never be compartmentalized. The family can nurture trust and belief in the existence of answers for those who believe in a personal universe created by a personal, loving God.

8. A family is an orderly place. God has a plan of order for the family, and in the family there must be a *head*. The wife of Proverbs 32 had great latitude to use the talents that God had given her. But doubtless these were fulfilled as a virtuous woman under her head, her husband. The man as head is also a servant who seeks to meet the needs of His family. A complete study of other materials would possibly be in order at this point.

9. A family is a formation center for human relationships. Here, more than any other place, we all learn human relationships. What and how we learn can possibly be either a blessing or a curse for life.

How to treat people is not a subject to be lectured about; it should be taught in the middle of real life situations within the family. Tiny children can learn that people are more important than things, and that human beings are made in the image of God and are therefore very special.

Expressions of love are an important ingredient in human relationships, and the family circle provides daily opportunities to demonstrate love in action. Love is not just a feeling; love is a choice. One chooses to love another person, and the choice must be made over and over again, day by day. Feeling is not the criterion for love. Love is a matter of reason, intellect, and decision.

Love for one another and love for the Lord grows when we nourish it. The feelings and emotions of love are a result of daily choices. Love does not hit like lightning and last forever; it grows with time and care. Seeds planted in lush soil still need sunshine, water, fertilizer, and weeding to grow into healthy plants free from

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destructive problems and the same is true about godly love.

Time is an essential ingredient in growing loving family relationships. There must be time for the family to build the love walk together.

10. A family is like an open door -- but with hinges and a lock. God clearly commands Christian families to use hospitality. (See I Peter 4:9; Hebrews 13:2.) Families are to share their life with strangers, people in need, the elderly, the lonely, the lost, the handicapped; but it is impossible to share what one does not have.

At specific times the doors need to swing shut; a portion of every day must be just for the family to be together; vacations, private times, fun times, building relationship times, etc., are very vital. The family must be strong in order to have anything to share.

What can the church do to help build these basics?

1. How does your church minister to hurting families?
2. How can a pastor, with the deacons and other leaders, build an ongoing ministry that will make it easier for the family to nourish its members?
3. What does the Word of God say about families that ought to impact your own pulpit ministry?
4. Does the average pastor actually preach and lead in such a way that the family's needs are met?
5. What biblical basis do we have for a family life ministry?

THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY

Surely, if God has revealed Himself supremely and completely in His son Jesus Christ, then God in Christ offers to us the model, the standard, or the pattern for living the Christian life in our families. And how does He do this? -- by revealing to us how He relates to people. The purpose I have in this chapter is to share an understanding of how to relate better to one another from the way God relates to us. This should help pastors have insight into some of the areas to be addressed in preaching, seminars, and other aspects toward having an effective family ministry. At the risk of looking at some things from a bit different angle and a more thorough perspective, I share the following.

A Theology of Relationships

All Christians have a theology (a set of beliefs) about God. Particularly, pastors ought to have a theology about God, the interrelationship of doctrine and many practical applications to family life.

We should not give a negative connotation to theology since we are really talking about doctrine. God commands us to have *sound* doctrine. Certainly *sound doctrine* is basic and essential. Also, at the heart of the Christian faith is right relationships. These begin with our relationship with God and extend to our relationship with people. The Apostle John made it clear that a correct profession of faith in God must be balanced with a proper relationship with others, or else the profession is false and meaningless. (See I John 4:20.)

A person's theology includes many aspects: doctrinal truth, worship of God, emotional responses, morality, personal decisions; and it must also include the dimension of relationships. The nature and character of God should tell us this. It is in the area of relationship that families often are plagued with heartache, tragedy, division and strife. If newly saved people would know early how to better relate to family members, many could be spared divorce at the worst and family heartache at the least. Our churches would be much stronger, for we would have victorious families who are truly disciples and ready to become reproducers.

God: The Creator of Relationships

The God of the Bible is a God who relates -- not one who is distant, aloof, and uninterested in us.

When God created Adam, He recognized that something was missing, so Eve was created to complement Adam's social nature and personal need. Adam was created in the image of God, which is relational. (Gen. 1:26.) From the beginning when God sought Adam in the Garden of Eden, until He sent His Son to call us to fellowship with Him, God has been and is a God of relationships with His people. Man needed relationships; therefore, God brought the first family into being. The family reflects the social nature of God. We need each other because God made us that way.

It is sin that muddied the waters of human experience. The first family had its share of problems, pain, hardship, and alienation. God set about to be a redeemer of relationships. This is the story of the remainder of the Bible. The Christian family is the eventual result of God's redemptive plan for the human race. When God redeems us from sin through Christ's provision on the Cross, His loving actions includes transforming our relationships with others, especially our families. The family, being the basic institution and foundation of all society, needs the correction of Biblical truth.

God: The Criterion for Family Relationships

God's plan for the salvation of sinners includes not only their individual salvation but also their relationships with others. He set forth Himself as the criterion, the model, or the pattern for relationships including those in the family. No one lives unto himself or dies unto himself, for all of us are a part of a family and have an impact on that relationship.

God's revealed Himself fully in His Son Jesus Christ. (See John 1:1-14; II Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3.) When we notice how Christ lived, acted, and related to others, we are seeing how our God behaves toward others. He is giving us a pattern for us to understand and to follow. (See Ephesians 5:1,2.) A thorough study of the Epistles would help us to understand that the Biblical writers were keenly aware of this and often gave instructions regarding Christian behavior by using Christ as the model.

1. Paul used this method for showing the proper Christian behavior. As Christ . . . so should we. The measuring rod was "*according to Christ Jesus*" (Romans 15:5). Several illustrations are found in Paul's writings. A familiar one is in Ephesians 5:21. The servant hood model of Jesus is set forth as the criterion for both wives and husbands to follow. Notice specifically verse 25: "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it.*"

2. Relational virtues are urged upon Christ's followers, using Christ's nature and behavior as the model: This includes forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32), love and sacrifice (Ephesians 5:2, 25), servant hood (Ephesians 5:22), responsibility, since *head* means source and thus *responsible for* (Ephesians 5:23), nourishing and cherishing (Ephesians 5:29), welcoming and accepting (Romans 15:7).

God is our pacesetter and standard for behavior in relating to others. God, our heavenly Father, as revealed in Christ, is our example for behavior in all our personal relationships. Paul wrote that we are to be imitators of God, as beloved children, and walk in love as Christ loved us. (See Ephesians 5:1, 2.)

How God Relates to People

The way God relates to people ought to be a challenge to us individually, to our families, and to our churches. God relates in a variety of ways depending upon the persons involved, the needs, and the circumstances in each situation. There are some definite patterns set forth in Scripture that are important for us to briefly examine, for they will help us to formulate ministry as we build families in a biblical way.

When God Relates to People He Loves Unconditionally.

He loved the Israelite nation when they behaved at their worst. Exodus 34:6-7 indicates that God is compassionate, gracious, and abounds in love and in faithfulness. God maintains love to thousands and forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin. (See Numbers 14:17-19.) The prophecy of Hosea is full of reminders that God's love for His people is an unconditional love. In spite of Israel's adulterous ways, God will take her back to Himself in love and compassion. (See Hosea 2:19.) God truly loved Israel regardless of her failures. Read Hosea 11:1-11 for an inside look into the heart of God. Jeremiah also spoke of God's love as everlasting. (See Jeremiah 31:3.)

The ministry of the Lord Jesus is replete with unconditional love, as expressed toward many kinds of people in a wide variety of circumstances. Think of the way He redemptively treated the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11, and the way He opened up and accepted the immoral Samaritan woman, as found in John 4:4-42. Christ restored fellowship to Peter, who denied Him three times. (See John 21:15-19.)

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God the Father demonstrated unconditional love by giving Christ to die while we were yet sinners -- ungodly, undone, and enemies in our minds.

God does not command us to clean up our act before He will love us. He does not say that when we are good enough, then we will have earned His love. God is love and He expects us to exemplify *unconditional love* in our relationships, as well.

Families who learn to practice God's love will learn how to love one another unconditionally. This will be evident in words, actions, and attitudes. It will be seen in the little things that make up daily living.

God's unconditional love will set limits and establish standards, yet will not be withheld when those limits and standards are ignored or failure takes place. Such love penetrates the rebellion and disobedience with understanding and guidance, working for correction and growth.

When God Judges, He Does so Redemptively.

Because of the character and nature of God, He does not ignore sin but deals with it seriously. God is judge of His people. (See Genesis 18:25; Hebrews 10:30.); but His judgment always has a redemptive end in view. God evaluates our behavior and describes it for what it is, good or bad, right or wrong, but He does so because He wants the best for us. God's judgments are always good.

Christ's death is the primary biblical evidence that God judges us redemptively. Jesus' death on the cross was God's once for all judgment upon our sins, and its purpose was to bring us to God. (Read I Peter 3:18.) There was no compromise with sin -- God dealt with it justly. God dealt with sin seriously but with the objective of bringing us back into right relationship with Him.

Families that practice God's love will follow the Heavenly Father's example in using correction with a redemptive purpose in view. Parents who do not follow such a pattern will tend to embitter their children, causing them to become discouraged and possibly to rebel. (See Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21.)

A pastor's pulpit ministry, manner of life, and pattern through his own home relationships can have a great impact upon the people God puts under his care.

God Relates to People by Communicating Openly and Honestly.

From the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Bible, God communicated with His people openly and honestly. (Note Hebrews 1:2 3.) It is God, who cannot lie, who promised salvation in Christ. (See Titus 1:2.) God has not left us guessing about His will, desires, purposes, or plans. He has fully manifested His heart to us so that we can know His concerns for us and for our relationships.

The family should be the one place where you can trust people to say what they mean and mean what they say. God's example of revealing Himself is applicable to family conversation -- open and honest communication.

A pastor also sets an example of openness and honesty by having no hidden agendas, half-truths, vague statements, secretive intentions, assumed messages, outright falsehoods, or *mind-reading* expectations. *And what should be true about a pastor ought to be true in regard to the family.*

I am confident that a pastor's conduct in person and ministry goes a long way toward showing families what their relationships ought to be. This is especially true when he tells them he desires his life and ministry to be an example.

God Accepts People by Grace and Not Merit.

God is kind and loving, and He relates to us on the basis of His own mercy and not on the basis of our personal righteousness. (Read Titus 3:4, 5.) He saves us by grace alone and not by works, and accepts us as we are and not as He would want us to be.

Families practicing God's love will *grace one another* in family relationships. This will mean an active acceptance that is *felt*. *There is an old saying, "Home is where they have to take you in."* You do not earn your way into the family's front door. Each member is a vital part of the family, regardless of present or past behavior. (See the

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account of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-31.) The father had every right to reject his wayward son who had already claimed his inheritance, signifying his independence from the family, but the father *graced* him back into the family circle.

Many families operate on the basis of merit. Children or spouses feel approved *if* they are good enough or have fulfilled a certain expected standard. The condition of merit always leaves us guessing whether we are really accepted, prized, or approved. Relating on the basis of grace leaves no doubt that we are accepted, *warts or not*. *The amazing thing about grace is that it is a powerful motivator to put forth our best effort and work at our best behavior.*

Pastors need to understand how to *grace their people* or to affirm them in such a way that they feel acceptance and approval. This very need must be addressed in the church relationships, and especially in the home.

God is Not Only a Truth worthy God; He Is Also a Trusting God.

Even when we are faithless, He will abide faithful. (See II Timothy 2:13.) Faith and trust are closely related words. Therefore, God trusts His children by giving them the freedom to grow and mature. There are many things that God will not do for us. He expects us to take care of our basic responsibilities in day-to-day living. God trusts us to be responsible people to the extent of our natural strength and ability and at the level of our present maturity.

We should relate in a positive way in the home as we extend to our children faith, trust and expectation; that they will endeavor to do right. In the same way, the pastor ought to give the church attenders a sense of confidence that they can do right, and that he has a wholehearted expectation that they will do right. Positive, affirming comments can go a long way to bring positive responses. We help others to feel compelled to live up to God's expectations because they sense He trusts them to do so. Distrust engenders a negative response, while trust motivates us to do our best.

Perhaps as pastors we have not helped our families in their mutual relationships of trust because we have not given them an understanding of such trust, affirming and approving relationships. Could this possibly be a problem to many? Is this something that we pastors ought to address?

God Listens to Us in Our Needs in a Non-judgmental Way.

All through the Bible we are told that God is a good listener. God hears because He is compassionate. (See Exodus 22:27.) Countless are the promises to encourage us to pray because God is a prayer-answering God who listens to our heart cry.

The Gospels clearly teach us that Jesus listened to those who approached Him. A random reading of any of the Gospel stories shows Jesus listening to people with a non-judgmental attitude. He expressed interest in people's concerns. He eagerly sought to answer their questions. He responded to their requests. His own behavior matched James' advice to be quick to hear and slow to speak. (See James 1:19.)

A pastor's ministry to his people must also mirror Christ's example. The family needs to practice God's love in non-judgmental attention. Correction and direction must be given, but we must not form the habit of responding to family members in condemnation and judgment. We will find others *tuning us out* completely if they feel that their comments will be judged.

Non-judgmental attention allows another to express his or her true feelings or beliefs in an atmosphere of freedom. When we listen respectfully we do not have to condone what others say, think, feel, or do. Some of our *unanswered prayers* indicate that God may not agree with the wisdom of our requests. God nevertheless hears us out without condemning us. God's **no** is often His best answer for us. Yet He continues to listen to us as a loving and concerned Heavenly Father. *Praise God for this.*

When God Relates to People He Extends Forgiveness and Reconciliation Toward Ruptured Relationships.

The reconciliation we have in Christ ought to be a pattern for our willingness to be reconciled with family and others in daily relationships. Knowing forgiveness and

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reconciliation with God is extremely important. God has given to us a ministry of reconciliation that ought to be exercised in the home. (See II Corinthians 5:17-20.)

Harsh words, broken promises, rage, anger and resulting bitterness are often found in the family. All families know something about ruptured relationships. The Bible offers God's reconciling forgiveness as the motivating pattern for dealing with such difficult problems. We are urged to *be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving as God is in Christ*. (See Ephesians 4:32.)

Families practicing God's love will patiently learn how to forgive one another and be reconciled to one another when relationships become frayed and broken. God told Hosea that if He could forgive Israel's unfaithfulness, then the prophet could forgive his unfaithful wife, Gomer, and take her back. (See Hosea 3:1.) Hosea responded in forgiveness that was motivated by God's example of forgiveness to Israel as a nation.

God Relates to People With Affirmation, Encouragement and Strength.

There are many examples of God's affirming people for great tasks. Such is the case when God changed Abram's name (exalted father) to Abraham (father of a multitude) as God established His covenant with him. If we had the time to study God's call of many of the leaders of the people in Old Testament times, we would see God's encouragement and affirmation given to them.

In similar manner, Jesus encouraged various ones. Peter is just one of many who stands out as a person to whom Christ ministered in a special way. All of John chapters 13 through 17 are full of words of affirmation and encouragement.

God is the great encourager of His people. Who can forget His charge to Moses, Joshua, or to King David or Solomon as they took leadership over Israel?

Families who practice God's love also encourage, affirm, and strengthen one another. One primary way in to do this is to build the right kind of self-esteem, self-worth, and a positive self-image.

Christ is the Supreme Teacher and Model

We have been looking at how God is the criterion for family relationships, and that the way God relates to people is an example for us to follow. Christians take the position that God revealed Himself supremely in His Son, Jesus Christ. Therefore Christ, our Savior, ought to be our supreme teacher and model for all relationships, including the family.

A *Christian* family should follow what Jesus Christ said and the way He lived. The Gospel stories offer us rich resources for developing a model of interpersonal relationships in the family.

The following are examples from Jesus' life which illustrate how to relate to one another in the family:

1. The call of Matthew, a despised tax collector (Matthew 9:9-13) portrays His non-judgmental acceptance.
2. Jesus' blessing the children (Matthew 19:13-15) affirms the high value of children.
3. The raising of Jairus's daughter (Luke 8:40-56) reveals compassion for hurting parents.
4. The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) describes the importance of forgiveness, acceptance, and the restoration of damaged family relationships.
5. The wedding feast in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) depicts the importance of joy and celebration in family life.

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6. The account of Jesus' washing the feet of His disciples (John 13:1-17) dramatizes the theme of servant hood that Paul later applied to husband and wife relationships. (See Ephesians 5:21-33.)

Questions for Consideration:

1. From above -- what are some major themes for preaching and teaching that you as a pastor, feel are extremely needed among families today?
2. What truths do you think are foundational for strong family relationships?
3. Do you feel that some of the above-mentioned examples from God the Father and Christ the Son are paramount as models for molding family life? If so, how do you think you would use such truths?

Assignment:

Work on a minimum of three messages from the materials in this chapter and how you would relate it to help families. Or possibly work on a longer series that you would use in a retreat for your families, or at least for the spouses.

BIBLICAL VALUES -- THE NEEDED FOUNDATION FOR FAMILY MINISTRIES!

The potential for satisfying family relationships is far greater among Bible oriented families than among those who do not share a faith. The alternative to faith in a transcendent God is faith in self. Our ailing society proves constantly that answers to life's perplexities and problems are not to be found in one's self.

If the Christian faith is passed on to our children, it will be because families see some direct benefit toward raising the quality of life together.

Consider the questions:

1. Does it work? Can a family ministry in the local church enhance these needed qualities?
2. Does it make a difference in daily life?
3. What are the effect of Christian qualities on the family?

Some Qualities that are Needed

1. A sense of purpose and meaning. Christianity is goal oriented. It has a way of giving purpose to life. It helps to make and maintain meaning in life. The behavioral and social sciences fall woefully short here. We all ask, "What does my existence mean? What is the purpose of living?" In the Bible the psalmists wrestled with these questions. The Books of Ecclesiastes, Job, and other Biblical writings also address these questions. *Our ultimate purpose is to glorify God.* The depth and far-reaching implications of that statement are hard for any of us to fathom. But I believe faith in a transcendent God who loves us and who saves us gives each one of us good reason to live.

Christian families ought to see God's order, purpose, and meaning should make a lot of difference in the way they live each day. Few things we say or do will live forever, but what we teach our children about God and His plan for us can have eternal effects. A church carrying on a family ministry to meet these kind of needs makes a lot of sense.

2. Support and Strength Strong families usually attend church often and participate in religious activities together. They become more and more committed to a spiritual, biblical lifestyle that flows through every dimension of the family's relationship. They are able to draw strength and support from a lifestyle in which the Word of God is applied to daily life.

A Christian family can draw a lot of its support from the fellowship of the church. People who share a like faith can be of tremendous help in sharing burdens in time of stress. When a Christian family moves, its members are far more likely to quickly find a new support system of new friends than those who do not have church ties.

3. Patience and Forgiveness Patience is a virtue that is greatly needed in any family and is basically learned through adversity, if it is learned at all. It is only by the grace of God that patience in times of extremities can be a daily portion of any family. Patience is one of the graces which can be enhanced through an ongoing family ministry within the local church.

The Bible is the story of forgiveness -- God's forgiveness of man and man's forgiveness of his fellow man. Probably the lack of forgiveness is one of the great hindrances to good fellowship and blessed interrelationships in the modern family.

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The ministry of the local church must help the families face this greatly needed biblical quality in daily life. God's forgiveness is a model to work from. When we recall how God treats us, we can see why He commands us to forgive others, or else we are not forgiven.

4. Handling of Anger The family needs to be taught how to handle anger, how to know when it is not sinful, and how to overcome anger, wrath, and bitterness. Anger should never turn into resentment and fester into bitterness and hatred. This basic sin problem and the lack of Scripturally handling it has brought many a family to ruin. Ephesians 4:26, 27 should be lived. When one looks at these needed qualities in the home, it is obvious that an ongoing family ministry would greatly enhance the average Christian family's ability to live up to the potential God desires.

5. Living out positive attitudes A positive, biblical approach and application of biblical principles for the purpose of building Christian character traits is of great value. The church should have a constant purpose of helping the families to build the lives of those who are living under the roof of the home. A thorough study of the Word of God would bring to mind many traits that can have permanent effect upon the lives of the members of any household.

Many other biblical values could be shared here, but for lack of space and time we will not go into further detail.

Prerequisites to Having a Strong Family

1. Decide that you *want* a stronger family. If the families of the church are faltering families, likely they have not really longed for a strong, victorious family. There must be a thirst for, and a willingness to die for, the goal of having a strong family. The church must decide also that building strong families is a prerequisite to having a strong church.

2. Begin doing things that strong families do. One of the most powerful principles of learning is modeling and learning by example. (See I Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 4:9; I Peter 2:21.) If we wait until the time is right or until everybody feels like working on family strengths, we may never get started. We need to make a study of what makes a strong family *tick!*

3. Keep reading books and articles that will help you. A lot of good material is available on building family strengths. A pastor needs to be familiar with the best of materials that are biblical strong and God honoring. Much of what is being written is a rehash of former books, or books centered on experiential living. It will take more than that. But be careful about creating false expectations for families.

4. Pray for God to help you. Change does not come easy. We Christians fail to make contact with the greatest power this universe has ever known -- God Almighty. We believe in His power and then forget to utilize that power. (See Psalm 127:1.) Prayer for God's intervention and power are extremely important. (See Matthew 7:7, 8; Philippians 4:6-8.)

Every family is a unique blend of personalities and needs. What will work in someone else's situation may not work in yours. Pastors must be led of the Holy Spirit as they work with families. We must keep on keeping on, trusting the Lord for the results from all the effort. It will be worth it all.

Pastors ought to spread the good news about what is taking place in the families of his church. We may lose a few battles, but we can see many families salvaged.

FAMILY MINISTRY -- IT IS GREATLY NEEDED IN THE CHURCH!

A woman who had been married twenty-six years sobs uncontrollably as she relates how her husband has left her for another woman. An elderly man, having to care for his wife of over fifty years who has lost her mind and her health, grapples with guilt feelings over his weariness and frustrations. A beautiful teenage girl says with little emotion, "I hate my mother." A young couple with a new baby is already contemplating divorce. A middle-aged husband, who has put his job before his wife and children for fifteen years, stares into open space as he struggles to make it alone. Single again, a young divorcee tries to figure out what went wrong.

These are the kind of everyday occurrences that the average church on the cutting edge of meeting needs will have to face and be prepared to help if they are to have a *family ministry*.

These hurting people are to be found in the church and outside the church. They are businessmen, teachers, workers, homemakers, and clerks; they have been to Sunday School, and some of them have also taught. They are people with needs, and where there are people, *GOD IS*. *As Christians, we are the servants of God's people in a world without much peace.*

Our purpose in these pages is to show that God's Word affirms the efforts of churches and individual Christians who reach out and minister to families.

Family Ministry, What Is It?

I am talking about developing a ministry, a program, not a facility. In many cases it does not cost much money to have a family ministry, but it will require sacrifice in time, devotion to need, an understanding heart, and a willingness to plan and execute a plan in order to meet needs. It requires rethinking the present program and priorities of a church ministry. A congregation of any size can develop some type of family ministry and still stay within its financial capacity.

The term, *family ministry*, is used in the broadest context to mean people who are married and single, widowed and divorced, children and adult. In one sense, every person is a member of a family of some sort.

A family ministry means much more than establishing a counseling ministry, although counseling may well play a part. The most effective answer to the problem of family disintegration is a **preventive approach**.

1. We must also meet the needs of those who are newly saved and are troubled with many problems in their homes.

2. Briefly here, we would mention the need of classes, seminars, workshops, retreats, films, cassettes, videos, and activities of many kinds that are designed to strengthen family relationships.

3. These offerings should be built around stress points in the life cycle of the family --preparation for marriage, arrival of first child, coping with adolescence, the empty nest, retirement, and death, etc. Naturally, **families also face many ongoing problems that are a normal part of daily life and living.**

Some of these factors that put pressure on the family are: moving, job demands, economic problems, job change, accidents, crisis, long illness, and subtle pressures that our secular society puts on us.

Family Ministry -- Why It Is Biblical!

The word *family* is used in the Old Testament some 250 times. The occurrence of the word in any English translation of the New Testament is rare, but that does not mean that much of the Scriptures do not apply to the family. In fact, I hardly know of any subject in the New Testament that appears more frequently in its various manifestations and implications than the concept of family and interpersonal relationships.

Not only can we strongly justify a biblical basis for family life ministries, but the Word would particularly show us the desirability and even necessity of meeting family needs, if the church is to be what Christ wants it to be.

We will look at six considerations why I believe God is concerned about family life and why the local church should be.

God's Care For Families

1. God chose the analogy of the family to convey the revelation of Himself to mankind. Of all the analogies known to man, God chose the concept of *father* in its purest and finest sense to convey His relationship to mankind. The church is pictured by Paul as the bride of Christ. The saved are brothers and sisters in Christ, another analogy to the family. The institution of marriage was the first interpersonal relationship established by God. The family is the building block of all of society. We can then conclude that God in all His wisdom believed that people could best understand His nature and His relationship to His creation through family terms.

2. Jesus was concerned about family relationships and about meeting human needs. To the demon-possessed man in Mark 5:19, Jesus said, "Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee." To the widow of Nain in Luke 7, Jesus said, "Weep not!" Luke records that Jesus' heart went out to her at the death of her only son. "God hath visited His people," the crowd shouted. And so He had. The list could go on and on -- Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, helping lepers rejoin their families, healing sick children, restoring sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf -- all the people were members of families that experienced great anxiety and loss in a crisis. He is concerned about our anxious care about daily needs, and wants us to know His concern. (See Matthew 6:24-34.)

3. Who are the "least of these my brethren" of which Christ speaks in Matthew 25? He is not talking about people we never meet. He is talking about meeting the needs of people we see every day. What about the people you see every day? Do they have any family needs? Do they need to learn more effective ways of relating to their spouses or children or parents or in-laws? Are most of their families hurting and in trouble? I think the answer is obvious. Christ considers that meeting the needs of others in various ways is actually a ministry to Him. Even to that degree we have done it also unto Him. Those needs are emotional and psychological as well as spiritual and physical.

4. The stability of the church depends upon the stability of the family. I believe that the Bible teaches that the family is the laboratory for Christianity. If it does not work at home, where does it work? What would happen in our families if each one of us who lived there resolved to use Ephesians 4:29-32 as a model for our family relations?

Developing A Family Ministry In A Local Church

We note Paul's admonition to Timothy about the characteristics of a spiritual leader of the church. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (See I Timothy 3:4.) If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?

The home is the laboratory for Christian living. There is a decided emphasis in the New Testament on the development of family life. A church with strong families will become a strong church.

5. A family ministry is an effective means of evangelism. Christians are called upon to be light and salt and leaven in a chaotic world. We can decide to have a ministry to families that will make the difference. In one church, over half the 1,100 people who had contact with their family life center in 1980 were not members of that congregation. Many had no religious affiliation. Some of these people are now Christians; others are seeking and learning about Jesus. All of the people sought out the church; the church did not have to search for them.

Church growth experts say that by far the most effective way to evangelize is through family relationships. Family ministry is not some kind of fringe ministry, but the very heart of an effective way to win the lost. *Family ministry lies at the heart of what it means to be Christ's church.*

6. The two main functions of a New Testament church are evangelism and edification. A family ministry blends these two beautifully. What can be more edifying to the body and glorifying to God than for families to learn how to enrich the quality of their lives together?

1. Another aspect of edification is the widespread use of Christian volunteers to work in the family ministry programs. They are able to exercise a variety of spiritual gifts as they teach, counsel, and encourage fellow Christians and others in the community.
2. The evangelistic potentials are tremendous. People are responsive to the claims of the gospel after they have seen that Christian people genuinely care about their individual and family problems.
3. People show appreciation toward a church that is willing to show its faith by its works in a way that will benefit family life.

Some Basic Considerations

There must be a wholistic view of man so that ministry will reach the total person -- spiritually, emotionally, physically, and socially. The Hebrews concept of the essential unity of man -- from which the New Testament view of man is derived -- forbids us to minister to spiritual needs alone and exclude other needs that are interrelated. There is a close connection between man's salvation and his edification, and between one's physical problems and his emotional condition.

We must have a renewed emphasis in the local church on training people in interpersonal relationships. The vast majority of people who get married and have families have received practically no training for the day-to-day relationships of husband and wife, parent and child -- or their communication with each other, their clashing wills, and their needs for fulfillment and emotional security.

Questions to Consider

1. Do you think that God's Word gives some direction along these lines?
2. Do you think that the church has anything to offer hurting families in our day?
3. Do you think there's a biblical basis for a family life ministry?

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*I believe that a biblical basis for a family ministry lies in the fact that God loves people, that people are parts of families, and that He cares very much how they treat one another. I believe that if we are to do the work of God on this earth, we are going to have to focus our attention on family matters, **not because it is the current fad**, but because it is God's will. With God's help and our participation, we will make a difference. Together, the church and the home can build strong families. There ought to be a firm conviction that the church is in an ideal position to lead out and make a difference in the quality of family life in our world.*

It is estimated that 80 percent of those with marriage and family problems go first to see a minister or pastor. The opportunities are great, but the task is formidable.

We do not act with indifference when our economy goes into decline, when our environment becomes polluted, or when epidemics or natural disasters strike. Neither can we afford to act with indifference when our family life is in danger.

FAMILY MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH'S LIFE

Insights needed:

Family-life ministry is not a mere appendage to the church's organization or present ministry. Like missions, it must be integrated into the church's life. Family renewal requires church renewal. At its heart, family-life ministry is related to the very nature of the church, not merely to its work.

1. It is the church that holds the most promise for fostering the needs of the home. The church's ministry to families is greatly needed. Ideally, it would seem that people could best train for family life in their own families. But that would require solid Christian homes in the first place, and there just aren't many of those. The difficulty is that problematic families perpetuate themselves in a vicious downward spiral. That is why the church's role is so crucial. People can be trained for the Christian home and family life in a church that is like a family.

2. No other institution has the ability to minister to the family. Many actually militate *against* the home. The church alone brings the whole family together into one fellowship of people of various ages and circumstances. Important growth for all ages happens at church.

Why the church fails!

The church has been blamed for contributing to the plight of dysfunctional families. The church program, and its time demands compete with the family. And often when the family is at church, its members find themselves separated from one another. For this very reason, some church leaders resist family-life education because they see it as another bundle of programs that compete for people's leisure time. We must look deeper into the problem of the church's failure.

1. The church has often become a task-centered institution. As in other task oriented institutions the result is, that relationships are viewed in the light of the job to be done. Each individual is needed for the performance of a certain task. Each individual's place in the corporate structure is important only for the fulfillment of certain goals and tasks that the church has outline as its purpose. Relationships with others and with leaders is maintained and enhanced to help people function with limited discord with others in order that they might fulfill responsibilities. (work management) Too often the emphasis is upon getting the tasks done or the goals completed and there is little thought as to whether the family life is hindered, hurt, or helped in the process. In fact, in this scenario, the family exists for the sake of the church and its program.

2. Church life is more distinct from family life than it should be. The church thus involves people in activities that are so distinct from family life that these activities contribute very little to the family. The present institutional form of the church is at fault. The church lacks family dynamics. Too often the activities, goals, and functions of the local church are of such a nature that the needs of the families are not met, nor is the need taken into consideration in the planning of the church calendar and work.

3. Often the concern is that the home problems do not upset the plans of the church. Even good relationships can become paramount for the sake of the church's

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program. The average congregation remains a collection of individuals, determined to avoid conflict and maintain pleasant, but largely distant, relationships. Often the concern is about the church needs, not the family needs. Pastors too often lose sight of the need of their families and the dynamic of the home life. In this situation the church families often are not truly close to each other, neither do they minister to one another. Their relationships are on a very trivial basis.

4. *The age-group structure of the church also competes with the family.*

Growing out of the last century, this approach is characterized by a proliferation of programs. Few programs within the church include the whole family. Too often the family is fragmented because so many activities and functions only include a part of the family. The family can become of lesser importance in the minds of parents who give themselves totally to the various programs of the church. They can be so busy *running to the church* for one thing after another that the family literally suffers.

The Family Unit and the Church Family Are Similar

Many characteristics of the New Testament church are like those of a family. We could list the descriptions, exhortations, and images and then compare these with the biblical characteristics of the family.

1. The church family is urged to speak the truth in love. (See Ephesians 4:15, 25.) This could be submitted as evidence that the church should be like a family.

2. The church is called the family or household of God several times. (See I Timothy 3:15.) And this is also seen in the metaphors used of the church, such as branches, body, and sheep, etc. Many familial terms are used of the church.

3. Drawing on New Testament statements that actually compare church and family, we can see exactly how the church is to be like a family. Many of these are also grounded in the Old Testament.

4. The church is to have care and responsibility, just as a family has. Paul said that an elder is to *manage his own family well if he is to take care of God's church.* (See I Timothy 3:4, 5.)

5. There is to be physical care of the needy brother and sister in Christ, as a duty. This is true both of the church family and the family unit. (See James 2:2, 26; I John 3:17.)

6. The apostle Paul thought of the church as family and implied this in a number of his remarks. It is most obvious in II Corinthians 12:1-4, where he compares his relationship to the church at Corinth as that of a father to his children.

7. Family order is used primarily to depict the relationship between God and His church. Peter commands compliance with God's will *as obedient children.* (See I Peter 1:14.)

8. The Word of God has much to say about the parent-child and brother-sister relationships as well as the husband-wife order. (See Ephesians 5:21-33.)

9. Love is set forth as an imperative quality in the church family, as well as in the family unit. We are urged twelve times to *love one another.* We are to let brotherly love continue. This can be applied to both families. Love within the family is emphasized far more than order is. The comparison between love in the family and Christ's love for the church reaches an unmatched intensity in Ephesians

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5:25 and 26 where Christ's love for the church as His wife is expressed in tender and unselfish terms.

10. Being offspring of the same heavenly Father makes us brothers and sisters, whose love for one another is to reflect the love of Jesus for us. (See I John 3:15-18; 5:1,2.)

11. Paul spoke of the loving, maternal relationship within the church and among believers in a striking way. He stresses the loving, rather than the authoritarian, aspect of his connection with the Thessalonian church. (See I Thessalonians 2:7, 8.)

12. Brotherliness extends to sharing material things, showing moral concern, and ministering to one another in a heartfelt way. (See Galatians 6:1-4.)

13. The church as family includes order and a corporate responsibility of the members for one another. Being a family does not negate organization. In fact, the family is viewed as a managed organization itself. All the close dynamic aspects of family life are to be found in the church body: *cherishing, caring, encouraging, rebuking, confessing, repenting, confronting, forgiving, expressing kindness, and communicating honestly.*

14. Church life and family life are closely interrelated, as set forth in New Testament experience. The dynamic relationship between the two is so obvious that it appears to be taken for granted by the New Testament writers.

The Questions We Need to Consider

1. What is the climate in your church for a family ministry?
2. Would your church leaders understand a Family Enrichment ministry?
3. Can you as a pastor create an understanding and an awareness of family needs and how to meet them?
4. Do you know how to begin such a ministry?
5. Does your present church program support and enhance family life?
6. Does your church schedule consider family needs?
7. What is your church already doing to strengthen family life?
8. What is your attitude as a pastor toward Christian growth -- both personal, and relational? Do your families feel that they are growing in their interrelationships?
9. Is your church sensitive to family relationships? Is this evident in your preaching and in your management of the church?
10. On a scale from one to ten, how open are your church and its families to a program for strengthening families?
11. Look at your church's calendar of the past twelve months.

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- a. How many special or direct features highlighted the importance of the home and how to have a strong family life?
 - b. How many sermons and testimonies encouraged families?
 - c. Was your entire programming for families limited to one or two special projects, such as a conference, film series, or retreat?
12. Do you have a short-term view or orientation, or do you have an intentional long term strategy for strengthening the families?

EXTRA MATERIALS TO CONSIDER:

A Strategy For Solutions for Family Problems and Relationships.

1. There needs to be an awareness of the problem. Lift your eyes and see what is really going on in your home. Do you know when and how family members are hurting? Are you aware of possible causes and contributing factors? *Example:* Until Marge and Phil were able to see that they were engaged in a power struggle for family leadership they were not able to understand why they argued so much.

2. Families struggling with problems and facing crisis need to know where and how to begin resolving their difficulties. Insights are needed as to possible ways to effect resolution. Various alternatives need to be spelled out and thoroughly discussed in a family meeting. Families need to be given Biblical truth and methods to bring about change.

3. Solutions in families facing problems and crises call for new relational skills. Communications workshops using such techniques as role-playing have proven helpful to many families. If old skills don't work, then why go on using them? *Example:* Clark and Sandy decided to take a parenting course and they learned new skills in listening and the use of "I" messages rather than "you" messages. Later they studied parenting by grace and found Bible answers to problems in disciplining their children.

4. Any strategy for solutions calls for family members to remain teachable and flexible. Without this growth, constructive change will not likely take place. If you already think that you *have all the answers*, meaningful family solutions will rarely be agreed upon.

5. Solutions call for cooperation with involved family members. Teamwork is vital in family life when relationship problems or crises are being faced. An attitude of *lets work this out together* rather than *we are going to do this my way whether anyone likes it or not* will go much further toward a constructive solution.

6. A Christian strategy for solutions requires discovering insights and strength through spiritual growth. Families practicing God's love not only desire to solve their problems and cope with crises constructively but will envision difficult times as opportunities to grow in the Lord. Spiritual growth is the key to finding the most meaningful solutions to family problems and crises.

7. Families who practice God's love will strive to find solutions within the family as well as from outside resources. There must be firm confidence in God's power for redemptive change.

FOUNDATIONS OF A FAMILY MINISTRY

Perhaps, as a pastor, you are convinced that you *can do* something and something *should be done* toward the development of a family enrichment ministry.

A family ministry is not something you ADD to your regular church program. It must be integrated throughout all the church does, and it should affect every aspect of the church's life and ministry. This will mean that you examine the present ministry to see if families' needs are being met, and that you expand and improve on the existing programs in order to meet these needs.

Maybe your church does have a family enrichment ministry. It may be planned and intentional, or it may be aimless and out of focus. If you are to succeed in building the families, you must have an intentional plan. You will need to plan your work and work your plan.

Family Enrichment is Built on a Few Basic Facts.

- 1. It is built on a biblical mandate, for the church exists (among other reasons) to seek God's ideal for the Christian family.**
- 2. It is built on the idea of a church as a family of families who should support and care for one another.**
- 3. It is built on the fact that the church should be the vehicle seeking to bring people to Jesus Christ for full and abundant life.**
- 4. It is built on the fact that family members do need to learn how to utilize the skills necessary to relate and grow within the family.**

All ministries are built on a set of assumptions, and should be built on a vision and on convictions given by God. Everything the church does has underlying theological and procedural assumptions. Every ministry entered into by a local church ought to be based on *thus saith the Lord*.

Christ spoke of the house built on the sand. Those houses probably looked the same as those build on the rock, except for the foundation. A careful builder will spend a lot of time in planning and becoming aware of the far-reaching implications of what he is about to do. The difference between the house that fell and the house that stood was the builder's understanding of what would place his house on a solid rock. The family must be built on the Rock, Christ Jesus, and it is a major ministry of a church to help bring this about.

Family Enrichment is Built on a Great Need.

Briefly we will look at the foundation, based on some Biblical truths or principles. Truly, family enrichment is the application of the biblical message to the issues that Christian families face. It combines the content knowledge of biblical ideals and the principles gained from learning skills. It is the application of faith in the home. When families examine, identify, discover and apply biblical information and teachings about family life, they can grow and discover their mission and purpose. Then the families can evangelize the community and help people find the abundant life in Christ.

Why have a family life ministry?

1. The family is God-established and ordained (See Genesis 1-3). We are created in the image of God. God made them male and female and planned and brought about the institution of the family. The family is significant because God made it so. God seeks the ideal for the family; vast portions of the Word of God deal with the family and its needs.

2. God wants to bless all the families of the earth (See Genesis 12:2, 3). The blessing came ultimately in the form of Jesus, who came to earth in the arms of a family. (See Luke 2:48-52.) As Esau said, "Bless me, even me also, oh my father," so families are searching for a blessing. Through a family enrichment ministry the church can bless families and share our Lord's command to love one another. (See John 13:34, 35.) The church can introduce others to the One who truly can meet their needs.

3. Family enrichment is at the heart of what it means to be family. The church members as a family of families should support and care for one another. This care helps to build relationships. One relationship will influence another, for as we build the home, the church will be blessed also.

4. The family is the most intimate of all human relationships that God has created. As Christians we probably first experience acceptance, affirmation, forgiveness, and belonging, through salvation in Jesus Christ. God planned that the home would be a place of peace, joy, and fulfillment of all the above-mentioned needs. The church as the *family of God* ought to be teaching the family how to support one another and how to strengthen each one in the home so that acceptance, affirmation, forgiveness and belonging will be a daily experience.

5. Families are to serve, evangelize and minister with each other to reach out to others. Family enrichment is not to be simply a church committee, or some special program or emphasis from time to time. It is an ongoing ministry, with its central focus and thrust to call families to mission, outreach, and evangelistic ministry. This cannot be done by a fractured family. And this ministry needs to be carried out regularly by the *whole family*, not just by a dad or a mother occasionally. Family enrichment ought to result in the Christian faith being lived in and through the entire family.

Family Enrichment Must Be Built on a Strong Foundation.

Family ministry should be primarily preventative.

At the very heart of preventative fence building is the transmission of effective problem-solving techniques. The family must learn conflict resolution skills that will serve to strengthen the family and defuse negative communication problems. The Word of God has a lot to say and teach us about communication -- its purpose, principles, practice, and problems.

A most poignant question is often asked -- "What can we do to stem the tide of family disintegration in our churches?" It is a critical question. The answer is not more counselors, mental health professionals, psychologists, etc. In fact some of these are the reasons for many of the problems. Someone has said, "It makes a lot more sense to build a fence around the top of the cliff than it does to put an ambulance at the bottom," which is graphically true, in view of the needs of families today.

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- 1. Family difficulties are so pervasive that it is impossible for the professionals to see all the troubled families.**
- 2. Many families will never seek out professional help, even if they need it.**
- 3. Most families do not stand in need of that advanced level of help, but they do need assistance with many aspects of family life.**
- 4. The strategy that makes the most sense is to equip families with the many necessary coping skills, so that they may deal with issues effectively before a full-blown crisis develops.**
- 5. An effective family ministry will reflect positive teaching toward focusing on problems and conflicts while they are still manageable.**
We must foster a preventative mode both in the church and in the home.
- 6. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.** We must keep in mind that our primary goal is to keep families and marriages together by providing opportunities for growth and strength and spiritual wellness. Family ministry is a lot more than having a counseling ministry.

Building family strengths should be a major emphasis.

Many books and many ministries have focused largely on what is wrong with families. We have looked at some negatives in this material. Many of the disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, marriage and family therapy, and family studies have too often put their major emphasis on what is wrong with individuals and families.

The dynamic of strong family models ought to be studied as we isolate what those *positive* aspects are which bring family wellness. The Bible speaks much of the very characteristics -- building up one another, encouraging, and teaching positive things -- that make strong families.

A family that is loving, accepting and that gives respect and honor to one another is a family that will impact the immediate members and the extended family, as well as the unsaved around them.

Whatever we plan for families in the church must reflect a positive, edifying, inspiring model of Christian family life, rather than the negative, defeated, and pathological one.

Families Often Need a Strong Social Support System.

Often the church family is the only family many have. The decline of extended family contacts may be a major factor in the loneliness and isolation within many Christian families. Many churches are composed of a significant number of people who are cut off from their kin. We live in a rootless society, uprooted from home and relatives. If the church family does not help meet this need, church members may well find it met elsewhere.

- 1. Due to the isolation, the family turns inward to each other for almost all its members mutual help and support.**
- 2. These increased intimate relationships now have to carry a heavier load than in past generations when many things were shared with the extended family who lived nearby.**

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3. No one is present to help dilute family tensions. Therefore, each friction point has within it the elements of a full-blown crisis.

4. Along with this is the quest for intimacy. With no extended family to share these needs cannot all be met within that small family unit. If the price for family intimacy is the abandonment of meaningful social contacts outside the home, the cost is too great and the potential for the family fragmenting is also great.

5. Individuals have a desperate need for community life, as well as a rewarding family life. The church must minister to people who are separated from one another and must understand the dynamics of their problem. We must be aware that the family may be suffering because it is being cut off from other people. The family enrichment ministry should help alleviate this kind of problem.

In Family Ministry We Must be Realistic.

A realistic family ministry ought to deal with the frustration, pain, disappointment, and conflict, as well as the joys, that come from living together as a family. The struggles are often complicated, and therefore the approach must be realistic and not with expectations higher than people can aspire toward.

We live in a fast-paced world and people struggle for creative answers to their problems. We have many careless and abusive families, carefree and oblivious families, and have a great need for careful and care-giving families. While this may seem to be an over-simplification, we will be looking at many kind of family needs in this material.

Family Ministry Must Serve Many Family Types.

For a Family Enrichment ministry to be comprehensive, family units and relationships within the units must be considered throughout the church structure. Families of all kinds need consideration:

- * Couples without children
- * Single-parent families
- * Two siblings living alone
- * Two-parent families
- * Extended families with aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces
- * Three-and-four generation families under the same roof
- * Older families with children gone from the home
- * Widows or widowers living alone
- * Black and other ethnic families
- * Families with handicapped members
- * Families with adopted children
- * Families who keep children for a short period of time

Then also included in the needs of families there must be the recognition that throughout the life span there are various considerations to be given to different family types. There are the following kinds of families with special needs:

- * Newlyweds
- * Single families
- * Remarried families
- * Childbearing families
- * Families with preschoolers, elementary school age children, and teenagers
- * Families launching children
- * Middle-age families
- * Families just beginning retirement
- * Aging families

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There is a vast difference between the family of today and the family of fifty years ago. The wife, then, usually was not gainfully employed outside the home. Today the key word to describe the American family is *change*. *The nuclear family described above now accounts for less than one-third of the American population.* Single-parent homes and single people living alone are growing in number rapidly throughout our nation. Step families also are on the rise.

In the past, the reaction of the average church to family needs has been neglect, at best, if not outright rejection, at worst.

1. There must be an embracing of all forms of the family in structuring and communicating a family ministry. Even the way we talk about the family may need to be redefined to include all legitimate family forms. Otherwise, we may be misunderstood.

2. Activities must include all kinds of the above-mentioned family types, or we are excluding some to their pain.

3. We must build the church as a family. The church often can function as an extended family to many who have needs. The effects of separation and isolation from kin can be reduced when church members feel part of a church family. This can be accomplished through intergenerational and inter-family groups.

4. Many churches have created special groups to meet special needs, and this has worked wonderfully. People feel the need, at times, to relate to those who are facing similar circumstances. Singles, single parents, those widowed, and older people are among many who will especially benefit from the mutual support.

5. We must deal with family issues and crises. Many modern family changes come about as the result of a crisis within the family. People who have been through traumatic crises need special attention, for example-- those who are divorced, separated, or widowed. Such situations provide a mixture of positive and negative pressures on family members, as is the case for the newly married, new parents, step families, and retired people.

Family Ministry Should be Home-centered as Well as Church-centered.

Basically, churches have not established a family dynamic within the fellowship. This is true particularly among Bible believing churches. The result has been that relationships tend to be superficial, with little training in family-like relationships. Examples held up by many pastors, have tended to be task-oriented, production-conscious people who have had little time for their own families.

The church is to foster strong families and it may be fostering the opposite in its practical effects. The *business* model that most churches have adopted keep the church on the track of an institutional approach.

Then too often the church tries to take the place of the home in the training of the children, rather than fulfilling the role of equipping the parents to train their own children. The church must take the role of aiding the parent in the monumental task of nurturing children for the Lord. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 27, 28; 78: 1-8; and Ephesians 6:1-4.)

Church life is more distinct from family life than it should be. I think that the order should be that the church life is patterned after the home life, rather than the reverse. The balance in responsibility between the two is so often the difficult thing. Either one can take the place of being *over responsible* or *under responsible* in the carrying out of its duties and fulfilling the needs of the home and family.

Family Ministry Needs to Operate from a Theological Basis.

The importance of a theological base cannot be overlooked, as theology should be an integral part of all that the church is and does. Many theological assumptions underlie the family emphasis and will significantly determine the content and direction of the such ministries. (We will brief look at this aspect from a different approach.)

Each church must work out its practical theology. Before a church launches a family enrichment ministry, the church involved must deal with the following biblical issues:

- * the nature, basis and permanence of marriage,
- * the theology of divorce and remarriage and all the ramifications that come from this,
- * determination of legitimate lifestyles -- are they biblical and God honoring, regardless of the pressures put on by the world and its systems?
- * the nature and purpose of the family,
- * the biblical directives concerning parenting,
- * the relationships between the family and the church,
- * the theology of sin, repentance, forgiveness, grace and mercy as it relates to marriage and family matters and concerns,
- * biblical authority as applied to these contemporary situations faced in marriage and the family.

An effective family ministry will bring to the surface many problems which have theological implications. The pastor and other leaders will need to have a solid biblical basis for decisions and ministry. Problems in all these areas must be anticipated, and workable solutions sought out beforehand.

Family Ministry Needs to be Experienced as Well as Taught.

Information is not all that it needed, nor is it a significant means of bringing about behavioral and relational changes.

Too often pastors think that if they get information out, that is all that is needed. The attitude is "What? You still have that problem? Why, I dealt with that in a sermon just last month! And we had some lessons on that last year."

David Mace reveals the complexity and futility of the problem when he points out:

"The barrier to using information to achieve *relational* change is even more formidable, because it is necessary for two persons, acting together, to move from insight to joint action. This being so, I would hypothesize that practically all of the information about marriage that is propagated has no effect whatsoever on the lives of those who are the recipients of it."

It is necessary for the church to work at making the family ministry a very practical thing, with many opportunities to bring application to daily life. This can only be done as the ministry becomes a vehicle for families to truly share what God has taught them, thus bringing an interchange that will change other lives.

Family Ministry Should be Expanded to Reach Out to Others.

The ministry ought not be kept within the confines of the church fellowship, but it ought to be expanded to include offerings to the community.

The family ministry, if handled rightly, is one of low controversy and high interest. If people see their needs being met, they will listen and respond to Christians who offer help in coping with the stresses and strains of their families.

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The week night and weekend offerings could include preparation for marriage, prenatal, parenting, marriage enrichment, divorce adjustment, etc. Spiritual matters should be presented to the community as a choice, rather than a mandate, for a pastor must not use these offerings to the community simply as a front for high-pressure evangelism.

The church should and can present its family life material from a biblical, Christian perspective without being offensive to people who do not share their belief system. God can use this ministry to soften hearts and bring souls to Himself.

An effective community outreach program to families is one good way to make faith come alive through action. The combined attention to church families and to community families is effective and can bring a wholesome, direct opportunity for the saved to minister to the unsaved.

Family Ministry Needs to be Integrated into Every Aspect of Church Life

Churches that rely too much on added activities may produce the effect of putting additional strain on families rather than building them up. And along with this scene comes an additional negative attitude against the church. Family life ministries must be integrated into the total life of the church and have a big effect on what is already being done within the church.

1. The first way that the integration can take place is for the family programs to be developed *within* the existing ministries. This can take place in a number of different ways:

- *The educational ministry can offer marriage and family classes that become a part of the regular curriculum.*
- *Special seminars and workshops can also be planned, with materials that will make it possible for an ongoing application of the things learned and shared.*
- *The youth ministry can plan intergenerational family activities such as parent-teen retreat, family camp outs, family nights -- any activity that involves the children or teens and their parents.*
- *The pulpit ministry toward families could be strengthened by having home Bible classes where the things preached and taught can be shared in the laboratory of shared personal experience.*
- *Ministries could be developed to help the whole family rather than segments of the family. We should work for family togetherness.*

2. A kind of family atmosphere within the fellowship that will meet many interpersonal needs. The church needs a family-like atmosphere that will permeate the church's being and purpose. This takes the style of leadership that keeps the family in the center of focus in all that is done. The church will only be as strong as the families are that make up the church.

The integration of families and individuals with one another will help to counter the secular idea that the happy family is one that focuses inward on its own needs and desires.

POTENTIAL PROGRAMS OF FAMILY MINISTRY

The church can do something to enrich Christian family life! No matter how small the church or how limited the church may be, there are several ideas that can be implemented, many of them nearly cost-free. Surveys have proven that churches of thousands, and some with less than fifty, can benefit from a definite program to meet needs of today's families.

Many churches are now engaged in meaningful ministries to families. It is largely the result of vision, desire, willingness, and determination to implement some of the many creative ideas that are shared in many books today. (Note the text for this course -- *Family Enrichment in Your Church*, Dr. Gary H. Hauk, Convention Press, Nashville, TN., 1988.)

The reader, as a pastor, needs to look to the Lord for creative ideas to initiate in his congregation. Meaningful family enrichment ministry will flow out of much prayer and imaginative consideration, as the Holy Spirit will lay a burden of direction upon the pastor's heart.

I will give various suggestions in this chapter, but much more can be found in the text given above, and every pastor will need to seek God's mind and direction for the known will of God for his people. (See James 1:5-8.)

Education and Prevention

At the heart of all family ministry needs is the prevention-through-education theme. The objective is to equip people with skills necessary to help them work their way through current and anticipated problems.

Many Christians can solve their own problems when they are given solid, clear, Biblical, practical instruction. Most of us learn by doing, not just by being told. Too often we pastors think that, since we *told them* that ought to care for it all; we did cover that, you know!"

When Will it Work?

Some aspects of the church enrichment ministry will adapt well to the Sunday School, Sunday preaching services or midweek service time frame. Others may more appropriately be offered on a weekend format. And there are special speakers who can be brought in for a week of services with special emphasis on family needs.

1. Content, convenience, and identification of the target group will doubtless influence the time choice.
2. Length of time and concentration of the courses will vary and will help to determine the time schedule.
3. The concentrated time frame for marriage renewal, for example, is excellent because people can focus intently on an issue in their families and take the time to work toward change in a positive way.
4. The once-a-week meeting has the advantage of lag time for absorption of the materials and for practical implementation. But it also has the disadvantage that so often teaching comes so slowly, there is little impact toward real change.
5. The overall goals and groups to be ministered to will determine the format and timetable.

In earlier chapters we listed some areas of evident needs among families today. In this chapter my intent is to share some details concerning various ministry potentials for the sake of our families to whom we minister.

What Ministries are Needed?

Marriage Enrichment:

There are many enrichment formats currently in use. In fact, among some evangelical groups this kind of ministry is much more a part of the total church ministry than is usually found among fundamentalists. Even the Roman Catholics have made the Marriage Encounter movement popular. This movement is now under the sponsorship of several religious and secular groups as well. Probably it is well received because it does not have a Bible-based content.

Purpose: Most Bible-based marriage enrichment programs seek to increase intimacy, deepen mutual-and self-understanding, and fit biblical goals of marriage and interpersonal relationships into the couples' lives.

Schedule: The schedule is probably as varied as the content. One popular approach is the weekend retreat setting, usually in a motel or lodge of some sort. Some hold the same kind of meetings at the church, with the families *farming out their children* for the duration so they can give undivided attention to the goals at hand. The chief advantages are a lack of outside distractions and an intense focus on the couples' relationships.

Other schedules might call for class times to be regular Sunday or midweek service times for the church, with assignments given for study between sessions. Homework diligently completed can greatly enhance the goals of the pastor.

Factors to be considered:

1. Such programs should primarily be billed as enrichment, and not therapy. The purpose is to educate and encourage improvement, not to give remedial care.
2. Couples who are in serious marital trouble will likely not benefit from the experience. Their unresolved problems are so fragile that the *enrichment experience* may serve to draw matters to a crisis point rather than to resolve them. It depends upon their maturity, willingness, and determination to change.
3. Marriage enrichment studies, however held, should be voluntary. Some couples or individuals will feel uncomfortable in this setting and will not come, for they see it as a threat. Some must have separate counseling, instead.
4. Guard against a critical attitude toward those who do not attend. Couples who do not participate should not be made to feel inferior.
5. Long-range follow-up is not only desirable, but often a must. Whether a weekend retreat or a course of several months' duration, the idea is to arrange a periodic follow-up on a sustained basis. The effects will be longer lasting if the biblical principles are reinforced periodically. Monthly meetings for group discussion could be organized for ongoing encouragement.
6. In the final analysis change must take place on an individual basis, with growth in attitudes, values, emotions and spiritual perspectives taking place in the heart.
7. It is difficult to bring about significant change in a large group setting. Couples have a tendency to get deeply ingrained in sinful habits of interaction, and unconsciously try to keep things the way they are. While efforts for marriage enrichment are all valid, leadership must keep in mind to have realistic expectations and to realize that special programs will not take the place of helping families in their homes.

Parent Training:

Single parent or dual parenting programs are needed in the local church. While many such programs abound in this country, the diversity of ideas have produced

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some confusion. Most are not based on biblical principles and truth. The approaches range from those purely psychological and humanistic to those that are strongly Bible based. Many today lean heavily on James Dobson, Bruce Narramore, and others who have written best sellers and/or have radio ministries.

Christian parenting is the study most likely to be offered in the curriculum of churches today. The advantage of week night offerings is that parents from the community are able to participate. Schools and other public agencies are more likely to be supportive if they are convinced of the quality of the course.

Purpose of the courses:

1. Building strong families for the sake of helping parents produce *godly seed* for the Lord is extremely important. (See Malachi 2:11-16.)
2. Today many families feel that parenting is extremely difficult, and some would rather not have children. The climate of our nation would greatly hinder the average parent to even carry out reasonable discipline. Parents desperately need help to know how to handle children at all ages, that they might build the children for God's glory. (The goals concerning biblical families shared in previous chapters ought to be encouraging, not unrealistic.)

Ideas for offering courses:

1. One approach is to break the parental offerings into three separate areas. The first focuses on parenting the child from birth to age six.
2. The second covers parenting of children in grades one through six and the third is for parents of adolescents.
3. Each session could be at least two to four meetings, or it could be a course of study that extends over many months in the Bible study class during the Sunday School hour.
4. Another possibility is to offer a three-hour course for each one of the above categories. This could be offered over a period of time so parents with children in more than one grouping could attend. Also, the Bible study hour on Sunday morning could be organized to make it possible for parents to derive the most benefit possible by offering various courses over a lengthened period of time.

Meeting specialized needs:

1. Single parents, while having many of the same problems as dual parents, also have problems that relate to their singleness. Separate courses could be offered, or additional consideration given along with the regular courses, so their needs are met.
2. Single parents could get together for group discussion within the general parenting course or else form a mutual support group as an outgrowth of the parenting course. Also, discussion times with all other parents could greatly aid in giving generally helpful ideas.
3. With a growing number of single-parent homes the church has an increased responsibility to minister to these men and women who are going it alone. Yet care should be exercised that too much attention is not given to their status. Truly, there are more similarities than differences between them and the nuclear home.
4. All families need to be affirmed. The Lord can bring about many good things in all families as the Word of God is applied. There needs to be a focus on the positive, with warm support and encouragement to all families.

Effective Marriage and Family Communication:

Purpose of the course:

1. The greatest problem families face is communication difficulty. There is always a high interest and relevancy of the topic that insure a successful session if the offering is well planned and publicized effectively.

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2. My experience in traveling over a period of twelve years, supports the great importance of teaching biblical principles concerning communication skills.
3. Purposes ought to include helping the couple build a God-centered home, oneness, compassion, companionship, courtesy, and family conversation. The participants need to be able to solve problems, share life lovingly, and build mutual understanding.

Various course potentials:

1. A number of different approaches could be used to generate and maintain interest and to meet needs. Small-group discussions, role playing, case discussions, and family group discussions are some of the methods that produce experiential learning.
2. The format could include a midweek meeting of couples or entire families for a thirteen-week quarter within the regular church educational plans. Or it could involve a series of week nights outside the regular church meetings times.
3. Summer week nights work best in some churches, giving more time for role playing, films, panel discussions, etc., on topics of family communication.
4. A weekend retreat could be offered where families can get together and interact with each other as they seek to apply principles from biblical teaching. At times children and teens could be included.
5. Dr. H. Norman Wright and Dr. James G. T. Fairfield have both written some excellent materials that could be used for in-depth study of communication and to give direction for resolving family conflicts.

Marriage Preparation:

Many different courses designed to prepare young people for marriage could be presented to various age levels among the teens. Actually, preparation for marriage begins even before the birth of the first child. The way the parents interacted, conducted their dating times, etc., has a great affect upon how they train their own children.

Perhaps the most effective preparation for marriage could be developed during the preteen and early teen years before the active process of dating and courting takes place. The basic goals are the same at all levels of development. There must be adaptation of the materials to age and circumstances.

If a church is truly serious about prevention of marriage problems and future family disruption, preparation for marriage should be a top priority.

Since critical times often come to couples in the first year of marriage, even after pre-marriage counseling, it would wise for a church to develop a monthly meeting or weekly class with specialized curriculum to help the young married couples. This type of effort would pay dividends in terms of marriages that begin on a solid footing and are likely to stay that way.

Specific goals for the courses:

1. Biblical goals would include understanding of God's marriage goals, proper God-honoring mate selection, realistic expectations, correct biblical information, and adequate preparation.
2. These young people need to understand the importance of commitment, communication and companionship.

Potential course offerings:

1. Classes for engaged couples should be offered on a periodic basis in the church family ministry. This depends on the size of the church and obvious needs.
2. Courses for teens could be offered in the summertime every Monday evening or some other logical time in the church calendar.
3. Weekend retreats for engaged couples or small group meetings, extended

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weekly meetings for a month or so, also may be workable in many cases.

4. Courses by Dr. H. Norman Wright and other well-known writers are potentials for in-depth studies in this area. (*Before You Say I Do* by Dr. Wright is one of these that have been used successfully.)

Family Financial Planning:

Money matters are often at the top of the list when causes of marital conflict are considered. Some feel that a full forty percent of all divorces are caused basically by money problems and that eighty percent of divorces are impacted by this problem area.

The church's involvement with this problem has traditionally been in the area of stewardship admonitions and teaching to bolster contributions. Many are the messages on the evils of materialism and few the messages, training, or teaching about money management.

It is amazing that the emphasis in the average church is put on the ten percent, and so little help is given in managing the hundred percent of family income for God's glory and for the family's sake. God is concerned about stewardship of all our income.

Potential content:

1. There needs to be instruction on budgeting, credit purchases, consumer debt and fraud, wise investments, insurances needs, and estate planning.
2. Financial planning is needed in short-term (up to a year) , mid-term (from one to three or five years) and long-range (three or five years through ten years) plans.

Potential implementation:

1. These course could be developed and shared by utilizing volunteers within the congregation who are professionally qualified. Workshops can also be offered to the community, using the same personnel.
2. Guests who are particularly qualified could be brought in for ten hours or so of teaching over a three-day seminar period -- Friday evening through Sunday evening.

Family "Together Times":

Helping families build a devotional time, as well as good conversational times, is tremendously vital. Many families have started a devotional time repeatedly, with no consistency.

Family nights are not going to happen on their own by a simple announcement or preaching that such a ministry in the home is necessary. Commitment to the concept and training in the methods are essential. Some of the most meaningful times can take place in any home when there is an unhurried sharing. In this special time, parents can discover better than in any other way which is going on inside their children -- how they *feel*.

Various ideas for implementation:

1. Many writers now urge families to build an extended time once a week during their busy lives where they include extended prayer, Bible reading, singing, and testimonies. Too often the daily time never gets accomplished, and out of frustration it all comes to a halt.
2. The goal is to emphasize family relationships, informal settings, and *applied Christianity*.
3. The family should emphasize participation, spontaneity and flexibility, thus drawing the family unit closer together.
4. Bible themes and spiritual lessons should still be taught with the goal of in-depth teaching, but in the context of informality.

Various concerns:

1. To be successful, both the family and the church must be committed to the

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- concept and give it high priority, or it will not take place.
2. Churches may need to reduce the number of functions, committee meetings, and general activities that regularly take family members out of the home.
 3. There must be an awareness of the need and a general commitment to the concept for it to produce benefit to both the family and the church.
 4. Parents must receive training in how to plan and execute the family devotional night, with emphasis on building family relationships. It may be natural for a few, but will be foreign to most, especially for newly saved or young Christians.

Potential programs:

1. A workshop of a couple of hours may be enough to get the families started. They need creative ideas and resources for additional ideas and for meeting the needs of different ages of their children and youth.
2. A church might want to design its own family activities and distribute them through newsletters.
3. These are focus times of building *togetherness* and spiritual instruction. A pastor or staff may want to put together a source of many different possibilities that families could use for this implementation.

A wholistic approach is important in that families need to learn that development of children ought to be taking place all the time -- while riding in the car, eating a meal, walking, playing, working -- anytime parents are together with their children.

People Helping:

Some writers say that about ten to twenty percent of the average congregation's membership falls into the category of people-helpers. These genuinely desire to sharpen their interpersonal skills and have the ability and dedication to follow through.

The answer for any church concerned with the rise of fragmentation family and interpersonal relationships may not be to hire counselors, but to train mature lay people who have a burden to help families in need.

Courses to train lay persons can either be worked into regular class times, or can be given at other times such as Sunday afternoons or week nights, or maybe a special class in the Sunday School hour or during a training union hour each Sunday evening.

The leadership of the church ought to be involved in such training, even if they are not all gifted for this type of ministry. Deacons ought to know something about what is involved in ministry to families in their acute and varied needs.

Attention to this vital area of ministry will result in a multiplying of concerned helpers who are effective in dealing with people in personal and family crisis. Then pastors are often set free to work with the more difficult cases.

Effective Sex Education:

This training and help ought to be primarily directed toward parents and they in turn, to children of their families. Sex education burden ought to fall primarily upon the parents and not the church, although the church needs to support parents in the training of their own children.

Many parents are reluctant to be involved in such an endeavor, and at times the church must work to fill the void in a supplementary and secondary way. Week night or weekend workshops with proper publicity will attract parents.

At best, the whole area of sexuality is difficult to teach in any setting. Yet the necessity of saying something about the Christian and sexuality in a sincere and informed manner overshadows the difficulty in doing so.

Adults are not always comfortable when this subject is shared. The wise instructor could basically address the training of children in this area and weave in help toward the parents as he skillfully blends the two elements together.

There are many books and tapes that would help in this area of concern. Books

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and tapes could be made available for check-out. In this way much could be done to address the problems families might face.

Other Issues

Many different topics could be dealt with over a period of years. A pastor could develop an overall theme such as -- *Great Issues in Christian Living*. Some ideas of concerns that might be addressed can be found in some of the other chapters of this syllabus. Several other topics need to be mentioned as possibilities for the development of short courses, workshops, seminars, preaching and teaching series, or a part of a larger offering.

Among possible topics are:

- * drug and alcohol abuse
- * coping with death, terminal illness and grief
- * relating to aging parents
- * mid-year crisis and the empty nest
- * pre-retirement and retirement
- * topics dealing with singleness -- widowed, divorced, never married
- * extended family and in-laws

Plan to DO Something!

Nothing will take place without developing a plan and then working that plan. If we do not plan to succeed as pastors -- **we have planned to fail!** Every church needs to do something and start somewhere to strengthen families. The need is urgent and the task is great.

All the foregoing is suggestive and not exhaustive. The doing, praying, working, and analyzing of needs will bring different concerns to focus and to bear upon the pastor's heart. A survey of the families will also uncover needs and concerns that people have wished were addressed.

Pastors will need to take their congregations upon their hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to direct them about family ministry and the enrichment of the individuals and families under their charge.

Most ideas do not cost a lot of money, and in many cases the people will pay their own way.

Each pastor must pray about having a consistent, purposeful program of addressing every kind of need among his people. ***May God help us to do it!***

CHAPTER XI

MINISTERING TO SOME SPECIALIZED NEEDS!

Historically, churches have recognized the need for a youth program of some sort. Certain other groups within the fellowship of the church also have special circumstances that require attention. We will take a look at some of these specialized needs in terms of services that could be offered in a Church Family Ministry. What follows is by no means comprehensive, but will possibly serve as suggestions that can be built on and examples of other types of ministries that could be developed.

Growth Through Mutual Self-Help Groups

Mutual self-help groups, or support groups, are associations of individuals or family units that share the same problem, predicament, or situation, and band together for the purpose of mutual aid.

They can indeed be *growth groups* that labor together to benefit one another in promoting spiritual growth. They are organized to help each other through certain stress or crisis periods and to promote recovery or change. Often these people need sustained support over a period of time in order to make successful adjustment. Churches, especially, are in an ideal position to develop support groups through a sensitive and caring program of family ministry.

Kinds of Support Groups needed:

The kinds can be numerous. They are determined by the needs presented and usually focus around transition and crisis points in the family life cycle. A partial listing includes groups for the following:

1. Widowed, divorced, step families, single parents, children of divorced parents, bereaved parents, and never-married singles.
2. general sharing groups, handicapped people and/or their families.
3. young married, empty-nesters, and marriage enrichment.

Four Basic Ingredients Needed:

1. The meeting should be a time of sharing. People may come to these groups with insufficient or erroneous information about their particular situation. The sharing of correct information may help to clear up some of their confusion and point them toward a speedier solution. Giving advice only is not necessarily good information. They need the input of those who have already gone through the same problems or are currently doing so successfully. Problem-solving techniques are needed so group members can better assume their responsibility for the outcome in their own lives.

2. The meeting should bring a lot of inspiration. The emphasis must be on a positive atmosphere where the participants will have more hope and optimism when they leave than when they arrive.

3. Sharing positive interpersonal experiences is always a key element of a good meeting. It should not be allowed to degenerate into a negative sharing of the worst experience, each trying to top the other. The focus can be directed to the present, the future, and what God is doing for good.

4. An effective leader is an essential. The leader sets the tone for the group as he or she determines to a large degree the information, inspiration, and sharing of interpersonal experiences. The choice of leader for a particular group is a critical one because it often determines the success or failure of the group.

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- He or she should be trained to deal with people in crisis situations.
- The leader needs to be very knowledgeable in the area of concern to the support groups. Formal training is not a must, but would be very helpful.
- The leader needs to be a stable and mature person who relates to others well. If he has gone through the same crisis or problem the group is dealing with, he needs to have recovered fully and not be unstable emotionally, which would only compound the problems others face.
- The leader is a facilitator more than a teacher and should not provide quick answers, but help the group make research into biblical answers.
- Dependability and commitment to the task of leadership is essential to the life of the group. It is often good to have a co-leader who can also give balance and consistency.
- A leader is a volunteer. No money need be spent to hire group leaders. The church worker should look upon this as ministry.
- Guidelines for leaders should be set to ensure that the group meeting is in keeping with the overall philosophy and biblical position of the church's family ministry program. It should be under a pastor's general oversight.

General Guidelines for Support Meetings:

1. The meetings ought to be open to anyone in the community who has needs that the particular group is seeking to meet. Church staff people of other churches and others in the community should be made aware of the meetings.

2. It is helpful to have the meetings on a regular basis at the same time each month. Frequency is usually once a month, but some groups may need more.

3. It is best to have the meetings at the same location each time. Whether on the premises or off the premises of the church buildings is something that will have to be decided. Both have their advantages.

4. Meetings ought to fairly structured, with time limits observed. There ought to be time for information, inspiration, discussion and sharing. An hour and a half meeting ought to be workable in most instances.

5. Since some who attend will be ill at ease and self-conscious, particularly during the first visit, they should not be forced to participate. Leaders should aim for a warm, informal, accepting environment. Participants often need a lot of love, affirmation, support, and encouragement.

One characteristic of a support group is that people will come and go as they have their own needs met. High turnover is a norm for some support groups. The social support so desperately needed by most participants usually brings them back. Common concerns of hurting people usually bring about a cohesiveness to the group if leadership is doing a good job of directing the meetings.

Programs for Older People

The drastic problems of youth and the climbing divorce rate have caused a shift away from attention to the needs of the elderly and our aging population in general. Many churches have done little to meet the needs of an aging population. By the year 2000, the median age in the United States will be 35 years, and one out of six Americans will be over 65. As more people live longer, the church is faced with a monumental task of enhancing the quality and meaning of life through a ministry to older people.

Largely, churches have not tapped the latent potential among their older members. They are a great resource that has gone largely unnoticed and unused.

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Often their needs, brought on by significant life changes, also go unmet.

D. G. McTavish has captured well the myths and misconceptions about aging that plague society and the church. Here is his description of the typical view of older people:

"Generally ill, tired, and not sexually interested, mentally slower, forgetful, less able to learn new things, grouchy, withdrawn, feeling sorry for themselves, less likely to participate in activities (except, perhaps, religion), isolated, in the least happy time of life, unproductive, and loaded down with defense mechanisms and exaggerated neuroses."

-- D. G. McTavish, *Perceptions of Old People, A Review of Research and Methodologies and Findings!*, Gerontologist, 1971, pp. 90-101.

The Great Opportunity

Churches would do well to seriously consider development of a program that would involve activities, instruction, fellowship, and ministry suitable to the needs and abilities of older adults.

The program ought to reach beyond the needs of the church members to include many in the community. A tremendous opportunity exists to minister to these people and to provide ways for them to serve other people as well.

The finest talent, dedication, and wisdom churches have are to be found among their senior citizens, but they are largely ignored and seldom sought out.

Usually these folk have more time, more money and more concern than many who are younger. The church can benefit greatly from organizing and mobilizing its older adults.

Getting a Program Started

A step-by-step organizational procedure is suggested here. Perhaps it will foster other ideas.

- 1. Select one or two couples or individuals** to be coordinators of the program. The minimum age for them, as well as for the group they will lead, is possibly 60 years. Possibly 55 would be a good break, if there are those that age who can come.
- 2. Getting people interested before they retire is good**, for they are then in the habit of being involved in activities.
- 3. The people who head up the program need to be good motivators**, organizers, and have proven leadership ability. It is important that they are free to devote an adequate amount of time and attention to this important task.
- 4. The leaders could excite interest** by having a special emphasis weekend to launch the program. Maybe have a guest speaker who is a motivator for this age group. The church must be well informed about the possibilities of such a ministry. Various committees could be in charge of various parts of the total program and plans.

Various Ideas to Help the Program

- 1. Find out possible areas of interest**, desired involvement, and need -- such as travel, fellowship, special events, visitation to shut-ins, community projects, special needs, telephone, arts and crafts, and Bible study.
- 2. Have a fellowship dinner to launch the program**, with extensive inviting of potential participants.
- 3. Select a group name** -- such as *The Thirty Niners*, *Young at Heart*, *The*

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Classics, the Keen-agers, The Grand People, Caleb's Kin, etc. Group identification and pride are important factors that need to be instilled from the beginning.

4. **Activities that build group cohesiveness and interest.** Monthly gatherings provide an excellent opportunity to invite guests from other churches and to bring in the unsaved and unenlisted.

Program Ideas and Possibilities

1. **A telephone committee**, whose responsibility is to construct a communication network among the older adults, is vital to the ministry. They could also keep in contact with shut-ins and the ill.
2. **Special information** on Social Security, food stamps, Medicare, estate planning, insurance needs, home security, etc., can be made available to the group. This makes good programs that meet needs.
3. **A good, short Bible study**, or preached message at each meeting is a must and there can be a time of good discussion as well.
4. **Caring for the bedfast and calling on those in the hospital** and nursing homes can be a great ministry and program fulfilled on a regular basis. Many times the elderly need help with snow removal, house maintenance, and other tasks that are too difficult for them in their later years.
5. **Traveling** -- long-distant trips and one day excursions -- can be a delight and a ministering experience.
6. **Arts and crafts projects are perennial favorites.** Quilting, ceramics, sewing, woodworking etc., provide quality time for interpersonal contact. Many projects can be adopted that will help hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, etc.

Programs for Young Parents

The transition into parenthood is a crisis point in the life cycle, both before and after the birth of the child. It is a time of mixed emotions and can be a time of concentrated marital stress, where the two, who have become one, now are becoming three.

Young adults are more likely to be open and vulnerable to their own spiritual and moral condition at the beginning of the child-rearing years. The training of their child or children and their future becomes a concern that can draw them to the church, especially when special needs are being met there.

Potential Programs could Include:

1. Prenatal courses, with the emphasis upon husband-wife relationships
2. Changes in sexual feelings and desires, and other emotional costs in parenting.
3. A course for new mothers, a sequel to the first, with a night out with other young moms. Flexibility could be built into the curriculum to allow discussion of many kinds of actual problems that the participants are experiencing.
4. A good program to reach many young moms in a community with great benefit and toward some getting saved