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Christian *family*

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On the Cover

The *Miller* family
talks to us about
adoption and
fostering.

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from the editors



Time is the measurement of progress from a beginning point to an ending point. Your family time begins when you get married. It ends when death takes one into eternity. How do you spend that time? Time is a theme that runs through several articles in this issue.

How do you spend your time with your spouse? Does it include fun activities? Family activities? What about spiritual activities, like Bible study, prayer, worship with the church, and service activities?

"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:15-16). Walking "circumspectly" suggests keeping an eye on life around you, using your opportunities for good.

Paul also warns not to use your time in sinful pursuits. That would be walking "as fools." Instead, use your time wisely and spend much of it with your spouse and children.

Paul Holland & Moisés Pinedo

Christianfamily

Helping families become stronger in the Lord

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DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES IN GENESIS... Adam & Eve

by Eric Welch

One special mark of biblical inspiration is the fact that the authors do not attempt to hide the messy lives of faithful historical figures. People sin, and sin brings dysfunction to families. By presenting the sins of even God's people in all their ugliness, the Bible shines more brightly on God's infinite grace and holiness as He works through these dysfunctional families to be reconciled to man. This series is all about that. What can we learn from the dysfunctional families of Genesis to help us love God and those made in His image more?

How was God's relationship to man broken in the first place? Consider the awesome power of God's word. When God said "Let there be...", something happened. Things obeyed. God shaped the earth, skies and seas and filled them with living things to reproduce after their own kind. The only creature with which God did not fill the

earth was the one He would make after His own kind, in His own image (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:7). He gave the male and female sovereignty over the earth and the responsibility to fill it. Man is God's representative on earth. To fill the earth would mean to spread God's glory over it.

However, one creature was not under man's control—the serpent. This cunning creature tempted Eve to disobey God by twisting God's words into a lie. This "father of lies" (John 8:44) planted a seed of doubt into Eve's mind: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" Eve replied, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:1-3).

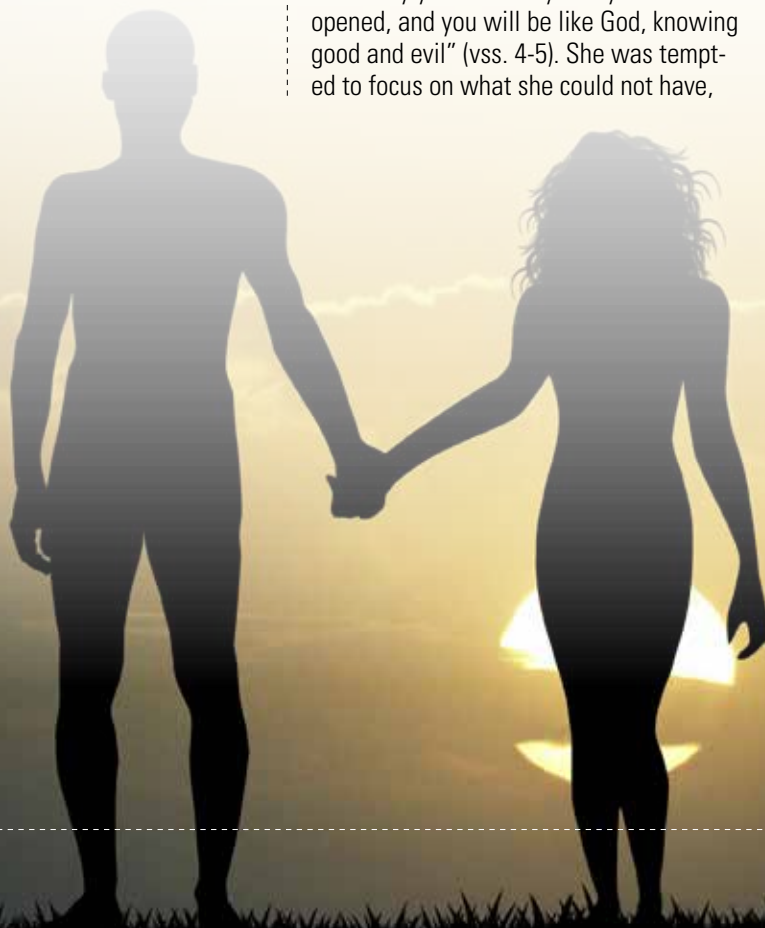
Then the serpent went for the kill: "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (vss. 4-5). She was tempted to focus on what she could not have,

family.

instead of the gracious gifts that she could have. The serpent caused her to doubt God's word. When we doubt God's Word, we begin to doubt God Himself. We think that He must be hiding something. "He does not want you to have what He has," the serpent seems to say. The physical universe obeyed God, but His most responsible beings rebelled. All of God's creation fell into dysfunction. Satan might have won the day, but he did not win eternity. Humanity's hope would come through the woman's Seed (Genesis 3:15).

How might this story relate to modern dysfunctional families? God had told Adam not to eat of the forbidden tree. We assume that he relayed these instructions to Eve. Compare God's instruction to Adam with what Eve tells the serpent. Eve said that she could not "touch" the tree. To keep from breaking the first commandment, she hedged around it a second one. Was this her interpretation or Adam's? We don't know. Either way, she changed God's word. God did not say, "Do not touch it." He told Adam to tend the garden (Genesis 2:15). Could Adam tend the tree without touching it?

In the end, Eve was deceived (1 Timothy 2:14), but Adam sinned knowingly. Most likely, he was with his wife (vs. 6), and he failed to protect her from the serpent. Secular feminists might not like it, but the real Sociologist wants husbands to be spiritual leaders and to protect their wives from Satan (Ephesians 5:25-26). ■



parenting.

What should I teach my child about baptism?

by Allen Webster

Bible concepts should be explained on a level that the hearer can comprehend. Jesus taught “as they were able to hear it” (Mark 4:33; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Bible class teachers learn to communicate complex doctrines in age-appropriate ways using simple concepts and words. As children mature, teachers and parents are able to build on that foundation with more detail and depth. This process continues throughout life as we continue studying and learning as God intends.

Baptism is not for children. Jesus taught that adults needed to become like little children rather than the other way around (Matthew 18:3). In our teaching, we must not make the mistake of rushing our children. They hear sermons on baptism that are designed to reach, in some cases, those resisting God’s command to be baptized. They sense that baptism is important to their parents, Bible teachers, and others they respect in the church. They may hear a statement like, “You cannot go to heaven unless you are baptized.” As we generally mean it, this is true—no normal adult living today can go to heaven without baptism (1 Peter 3:21).

But there will be many in heaven who were not baptized. All the Old Testament faithful will be in heaven though never baptized, since baptism for the remission of sins is a New Testament command. Billions, perhaps, of infants and young children have died before reaching accountability. They certainly will be in heaven (2 Samuel 12:23). Millions of mentally handicapped individuals will enjoy the ready grace of God without baptism.

So, parents please assure your young children that God loves them and that they are in no danger of being lost. Be careful that you do not rob them of their childhood by forcing them to grow up too fast.

At the same time, we should talk to our children of our desire for them to grow up to be Christians. A vital step in that process will be the decision to be baptized. How can we get across elementary lessons about baptism?

Baptism is when God puts us in His bathtub.

All children understand taking baths. After explaining that each person has an outside and an inside—a body and a soul (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Genesis 2:7)—parents can say, “When you take a bath you clean your outside, but when you get older you will get dirty on the inside. Then God will want you to be baptized so He can clean you on the inside.”

For children that are a little older, use your family Bible time to add to this simple foundation by showing that the Bible teaches that sin makes us dirty (2 Peter 2:20-22) and that baptism cleanses us from sin. Saul of Tarsus was told, “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). “Wash away” means “to wash fully, have remitted.” Saul’s sins were washed away—his soul was cleaned—when he was baptized in “God’s bathtub.”

Take time to explain that the baptistery is not filled with “magic water.” The power is not in the water; the power is in Jesus’ blood. In baptism, God applies His Son’s blood to our soul’s sins. We cannot see or feel it happening, but we trust that God keeps His promise to make us “white as

snow” on the inside (Isaiah 1:18). Marshall Keeble used to explain that the power is in the blood by comparing the water of baptism with the water in a clothes washer. Water alone will not clean clothes, but when detergent is added to the water then the clothes come out clean.

Jesus’ blood is God’s detergent. God washes our sins in His Son’s blood (Revelation 1:5). Since Jesus shed His blood in His death (John 19:34), and we are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3), it follows that we gain the benefits of His death in submission to baptism. We are sanctified and cleansed “with the washing of water by the word” (Ephesians 5:25-27).

An Old Testament illustration makes this clearer for children. The leper Naaman went to God’s prophet hoping to be cured (2 Kings 5). He was told to dip seven times in the Jordan River. He correctly assessed that the Jordan River had no magical powers and nearly wasted his opportunity. It was not the water but the power of God and his submission to God’s authority that mattered. Just as Naaman was cured of leprosy when he obeyed God’s command to go into the river (2 Kings 5:14), so a sinner is cleansed from his sins when he is baptized (Mark 16:16).

Baptism is when we get out of trouble with God.

Children understand about getting into trouble. They also know the joy of getting back in a parent’s or a teacher’s good graces.

“God is angry with the wicked every day” (Psalm 7:11; Numbers 22:22), but His anger can be easily appeased by seeking His forgiveness. In the Christian age, that involves faith, penitence, confession, and baptism (Acts 2:38). God is not reluctant to forgive—He is eager to welcome the wayward back home (Luke 15:20-24). Micah wrote, “Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy” (7:18).

An angry reader once marched into a newspaper office waving the day’s paper, asking to see whoever wrote the obituaries. When referred to a young reporter, he stormed, “You can see I’m very much alive,

and you’ve put me in the obituary column! I demand a retraction.” The reporter replied, “I never retract a story. But I tell you what I’ll do. I’ll put you in the birth column and give you a fresh start.” That’s what baptism does for us—it gives us a fresh start. After we are baptized, God remembers our sins no more (Hebrews 8:12).

Baptism is when we get married to Jesus.

Most children have been to a wedding, or at least have seen the pictures on the wall of Mom and Dad’s marriage ceremony. Baptism is a believer’s wedding ceremony. Paul wrote “concerning Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32), and pictured Christ as the bridegroom and the church as His bride (Ephesians 5:25-27). When we become a part of the church, then, we are in a sense getting married to Christ. We love Him and are making a commitment to Him “till death do us part.” Actually, death will not part us because it is then that we will get to enjoy the wedding banquet (Revelation 19:9) and live happily ever after with Him (Revelation 21:4).

Baptism is when God adopts us into His family.

Children understand being a part of a family. They closely identify with their parents and siblings. Many remember when a younger brother or sister was born and became a part of their family circle.

When you are baptized, God acknowledges you as His son or daughter (cf. Matthew 3:17; Mark 1:11). Baptism is the culminating act of the new birth (John 3:3-5). Paul told the Galatians, “You are [present tense] all the sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” because, “you... were [sometime in their past] baptized into Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27; cf. 2 Corinthians 6:17-18). The faith in Christ which leads one to obey Him in baptism also makes that one a son of God (Galatians 3:26-27). As children, we are the heirs of God (Romans 8:14-17). As God’s children, we become part of a divine family—knowing the love God has as a Father toward us and enjoying the love of our brothers and sisters.

Teach the children well. One day they will teach your grandchildren what you have passed along to them (cf. 2 Timothy 2:2). ■

marriage.

THE IMPORTANCE OF

Intimate Conversation

by Rachel Holland

As a new relationship develops, a couple spends hours talking and asking questions to reveal the hidden person of the heart. After long conversations, they think they know one another. But women have a deeper need for meaningful conversations, even after the wedding vows are said.

Women need meaningful conversation so much that they may seek others to fill the need if a husband is not meeting it. “By removing intimate conversation from their daily lives, he removes one of the most important sources of love units into her Love Bank. He risks losing her love for him.”¹ Just like a man’s needs for an attractive wife and a recreational companion, so the woman needs affection and intimate conversation. We need to have our own needs met in order to meet others’ needs. Paul reminds us in *Philippians 2:3-4* that we are to do “nothing...through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Conversation is integral to our emotional needs. We use our words to express admiration, honesty,

and openness. Words can build up or tear down. Do you make time to spend with your spouse daily or weekly? What do you do to show him/her you want to fulfill his/her needs? You can continue to have dates each week in order to keep your marriage strong. It takes effort, but the rewards are great! Not only can you stay married to the same person for life, but you can help your spouse get to heaven by being attentive to his/her needs. That is the ultimate goal of marriage anyway: heaven.

Ladies, be aware of opening your heart to another man, especially if it is complaining about your husband! If you start sharing deep, emotional things with another man, you open yourself up for him to be that conversationalist you are yearning for in your husband. Every couple has problems in their relationship—we are human! You may feel resentful if your husband is not fulfilling your need for conversation, but you need to express this to him so you can work on your marriage together. Be attentive to his needs and remind him of your needs. You may have specific requests for each other that are not mentioned here.

Two people will have different views about life’s concerns, but if the couple goes to God’s Word for guidance, they will become stronger for it. Even Jesus is the Word sent from Heaven. God uses words to share His love with us. Do we talk with Him in prayer? Praying with your spouse to the Father will strengthen you like nothing else can! We made a great commitment to our spouse when we married him/her that we would be his/her life partner in the fullest sense of the word. We have a responsibility to encourage, support, and fulfill his/her needs. What have you done today to make him/her feel good?

Practically speaking, a good conversation will deepen the relationship, will not be full of anger but will express care and concern, will be balanced with both listening and talking, and will give attention to the other so openness will be easy. Do not dwell on past mistakes, but seek ways to alleviate any stressors in your relationship. Seek to understand one another. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7). ■

1. From Harley, Willard, Jr. (2011), *His Needs, Her Needs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell).



The husband and wife relationship is the first human relationship God created (Genesis 2:18ff). It was for the stated purpose that man should not be “alone” that God designed the woman (2:24). The marriage relationship, then, is to be one of companionship.

“Abimelech king of the Philistines looked through a window, and saw, and there was Isaac, **showing endearment** to Rebekah” (Genesis 26:8), and he knew that they were married. That verb “showing endearment” can have many different meanings as a search of different translations will verify. But what it does show is that Isaac and Rebekah were spending time together.

Recreational companionship provides a laboratory in which your love and communication with your spouse can be tested, strengthened, and improved. King Solomon told his audience, in Ecclesiastes 9:9, “Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.” Enjoy your life with your wife!

Football games? Perhaps. Hiking? Walks along the beach? Art museums? Maybe. A concert? An opera? Watching movies? Hunting? Fishing? Possibly.

When you and your friend are dating, you give in to these requests and do such things because you are interested in spending time with your friend to build a relationship. But if you do not have inherent interest in such activities, once you get married, you quit. You might not begrudge your spouse the right or the time to do those things with his (or her) own friends, but you quit participating.

There is a danger in doing that. You swallowed your pride and sat through a three-hour football game (or a two-hour concert) when you were dating in order to **build** the relationship. It would do your marriage some good if you went back to do the same types of things in order to **sustain** the relationship.

If we view a husband and wife relationship in terms of a bank account, every **positive** act of one towards the other is a **deposit**. Every **negative** act is a **withdrawal**. If you make too many withdrawals, the marriage can end in divorce. The **ideal** then, would be to make as many deposits as possible. If you have a huge bank account with your spouse, those inevitable withdrawals are barely felt.

Spending time with your spouse, then, in recreational activities that you both can find enjoyable can make **huge** deposits in the relationship bank. If a man loves fishing, how much more would he love fishing if he could take his wife and she would enjoy fishing too?

So, how can you develop mutual interests? Communication and humility. Each spouse should make an extensive list of activities that he and she enjoys. Then, take a look at the two lists and see where there is some overlap. Ideally, you would come up with four or five. You will not have time for more than that. Of course, you might have to forsake doing something alone or with a friend for the joy of doing something with your spouse.

You might also try something new for his/her sake. Be patient. But if at the end of a trial period your spouse does not enjoy it, have the humility to try something else. In the end, your entire marriage relationship will thank you for it. ■



the **IMPORTANCE** *of* **FUN TIME** **TOGETHER**

by Paul Holland

women.

Moms and TEEN-AGED BOYS

by Cherry Chesser

From the very moment of conception, a couple's life is forever changed. The nine-month incubation period ends; the baby is entrusted to the arms of very nervous, totally inexperienced parents; and life as they have known it, is turned on its axis. The care and nurturing of this little one is the sole responsibility of these new parents, and for the most part, it is "on the job training." The hospital does not send a "How to Be a Parent" book home with the young couple. However, God has given them the best "how to" book possible: His Word. If parents base their child rearing on the precepts of God, they will be successful parents. The day-to-day care, feeding, clothing, health and medical needs, etc. are not specifically addressed in the Bible, but the most important injunctions regarding their spiritual nurturing and well-being are set forth in God's Word.

Infants soon become toddlers, and toddlers all too quickly morph into teen-agers! This is the demographic that I will be addressing in this article, specifically moms and their teen-aged sons. A page is turned when our children become teens, heading rapidly toward adulthood. We are given a short window in which to instill in these young hearts the tenets necessary for their becoming sound, productive, and faithful Christians. Of course, the foundation should have been laid from the moment the newborn gasped its first breath of life. Bible truths and godly living must be instilled from the very onset of parenthood (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

The primary responsibility for spiritual guidance in the home belongs to the husband and father (Ephesians 5:22-23). However, the mother also bears a grave obligation to teach and instruct her children in the ways of the Lord. Fathers and mothers have different roles to follow with regards to their teen-aged son (or daughter). Dads typically guide and instruct their sons in how to play ball, fish, hunt, and learn "manly" things. They bear the major responsibility of instructing their sons about the "birds and bees" (much to the relief of the moms!). Mom's role during this crucial period of growth and development is to enhance their teen-aged sons in the "softer side."

I will focus on the "T's of Guiding Teen-aged Boys."

Thankfulness

The first "T" is **thankfulness**. We live in a society of ingrates. The spirit of gratitude is alien to most. Of course, it was evident in Biblical times as well. The Israelites were an ungrateful people. So frequently they "forgot the Lord their God" (1 Samuel 12:9; Judges 3:7). They were commanded to "set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments; and may not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation that did not set its heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful to God" (Psalm 78:7-8). We have the

example in New Testament times of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus. Nine of them went on their merry ways and never looked back. Only one “fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan” (Luke 17:16).

Mothers need to demand at a very early age that children feel and express gratitude. Teach them that God expects us to glorify Him and be thankful unto Him in all things. “Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name” (Psalm 100:3-4). Our petitions to God should be filled with love and appreciation for all His many blessings (Philippians 4:6). Children should be taught to express thanks and show appreciation for the food, clothing, and shelter provided to them by parents. Instruct your teen-agers to express gratitude to others for favors shown to them. Drill in them the necessity of taking the time to **write** thank you notes...boys and girls! This is a lost art in modern society! It is a rarity today when notes are written in thanksgiving for graduation gifts, wedding or baby presents. Parents also must set the example in this regard.

Thoughtfulness

Teen-aged boys (and girls) also need to be taught the importance of being **thoughtful**. Current society is steeped in the “me” mentality. “Looking out for number one” is the mantra of the day. Teens must be taught thoughtfulness, respect, kindness, and care for others. Thoughtlessness leads to selfishness and disregard for others. We are instructed to “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another” (Ephesians 4:32). We should teach our children to be concerned and solicitousness toward the elderly and less fortunate. Jesus had compassion on the hungry multitude (Matthew 15:32), for the widow whose son had died (Luke 7:13), and on the devil possessed man (Mark 5:19). Moms, teach your teen boys to have compassion and consideration for others, especially the less fortunate.

Thriftiness

The next “T” is **thriftiness**. Most young people today are clueless about finances, because they have never been taught how to handle money by their parents. Unfortunately, too often parents are poor role models in this regard. The “Depression mentality” is characteristic of a generation that grew up with appreciation for frugality and hard work. Today’s society “wants what it wants when it wants it.” Young couples expect to have a house filled with the finest furnishings, two late-model cars with all of the “bells and whistles,” closets filled with designer clothes, and wallets filled with credit cards.

“You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter” (James 5:5) describes many, even some Christians today.

Sons should be taught to become heads of their households, upholding Christian principles of respect for material possessions, realizing that God has granted them to us “on loan,” and that they must be good stewards. Teens should be taught to follow three guidelines in properly handling their financial situations. They should put God first, savings second, and then discretionary spending with the remainder of their allowances or jobs. They must realize that God is the Giver of all blessings (James 1:17) and that He expects us to be prudent in utilizing them.

Trustworthiness

Finally, teen sons (and daughters) must be taught **trustworthiness**. First of all, they must develop from an early age an implicit trust in God (Proverbs 3:5). Parents should live in such a way that children can have total confidence in their veracity. The old saying, “Let your word be your bond” should be the standard of trustworthiness. The precepts of Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 should be ingrained in their consciences. Children should never witness parents prevaricating or defending “little white lies.” Lies are not categorized as “big” or “little.” “[A]ll liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). Therefore, lying is serious business, and truthfulness and trustworthiness should be demanded by parents. Once trust is breached, it is most difficult to regain. Implicit trust of parents and children produce wondrous rewards.

Parenting teens is a daunting task that must not be taken lightly. Moms and Dads have specific roles in this regard. Both should strive to bring their children up “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). They should work in tandem, each providing their expertise in the realms in which God divinely implanted in them.

A page is turned when our children become teens... We are given a short window in which to instill in these young hearts the tenets necessary for their becoming sound, productive, and faithful Christians.

featured.

the Millers



Tom and Ronda both work at a high school in Flint, MI. Tom is a paraprofessional in the Corrective Behavior Room, and Ronda is the athletic secretary. They have adopted one son, Alex, who turns 10 this year. For several months, the Millers were foster parents to Joe (13) and Lainey (11) when they were toddlers but now they are considered part of the family, along with their sister, Paige (9).

Throughout the years, Tom, Ronda, and their entourage have taken trips to zoos, hotels with pools, movies, Detroit Tiger games, Chuck E Cheese outings, and other fun places for kids. Tom and Ronda are big kids themselves, so whatever they could imagine to have fun with the kids, they will do. They enjoy Sunday dinners at Ronda's mom, a highlight to start the week off right.

The kids enjoy Lads to Leaders and VBS. Joe attended Horizons Leadership Camp at Freed-Hardeman University last year and they are planning to send him again this year. They try to be involved in activities with the congregation.

M

Why did you get involved in adoption?

Tom and I were married late in life, and after a few medical tests it was proven that it would be difficult for me to get pregnant. We knew there were other options for us to have a family.

At what point did you decide to be foster parents?

Tom and I were married in July of 2003. In the summer of 2004, we were introduced to a toddler named Shane whose mother had passed away. We fell in love with him and he was able to stay with us for a few months. At the beginning of December, his grandmother, Crystal, took

him home with her to live in Columbus, Ohio. Thankfully, we still keep in contact through Facebook. Because of Shane, we took the steps to become foster parents.

How many children have you fostered?

We have fostered three children and have adopted one of the children. We took care of twin infant boys one night and quickly realized that we were not ready for multiples!

What are the challenges in adoption/fostering, especially for Christians?

Feelings toward biological parents. With our first sibling group, we watched the mom work her way to having the children back in her home and we supported her then and still do today. The other set of parents brought on

stress to us because they did not try, and the judge kept giving the mother chances. It brought on doubt with our faith that we would never be able to adopt Alex.

How can you impact foster children in a spiritual way when they are only under your influence for a short time?

We believe when we bring children into our home, they immediately become members of our family and go along with our daily activities including attending Sunday services and Wednesday night Bible class. We try to be the Christian example Christ deserves.

What do you do to bring Christ into the lives of these children?

In order for them to attend on Sunday, they spend the weekends with us and we pick them up for Bible class each Wednesday. Even though they live with their mom and step-dad, we still consider them "our kids," and want to be there for them as they grow up.

For someone considering adoption and/or foster kids, what advice would you give?

Have an open mind and an open heart. Be an encourager to the biological parents. You never know when your attitude and actions could be the reason they would consider attending church. As one of my close friends told me once, whether you have natural children or adopted children, they are not ours but God's children. God put them in our life to nurture and love them, but they are His. ■

What the KIDS say...



ALEX was three years old when the Miller's adopted him.

He says, "It is exciting to be adopted because I know my family loves me." If he had not been adopted, he wonders if he would be in church or even in school. Even though his parents are of a different race, he says: "I don't think about it. It's just normal."

If a child was being considered for adoption, Alex would say, "Don't be nervous! You will have a good time and the family would take care of you, provide the stuff you need (like clothes), make sure you eat properly, and help you stay healthy."

If you are considering adoption, Alex would say, "Good! Help the children. They can learn, find new friends, go to church, and know about God."



LAINEY is 11 and has been a part of the Miller's family since she was three months old. She describes her "foster" family as:

"Happy, friendly, nice, and kind. We get to see movies, go to hotels, vacations, and other fun places." She is involved in the Lads to Leaders program at church. Because of Tom and Ronda, Lainey believes she will grow up to be nice, good, and careful, "like Ronda."



JOE is 13 but has been with Tom and Ronda since he was three years old. He and his sisters, Lainey and Paige, spend the weekends and Wednesday nights with the Millers. He plays football and is in the band.

He would not be coming to church or know about God, maybe not even believe in God, if it were not for the Millers. Due to their influence, he says: "I expect to be baptized one day and be active in the church when I am an adult." At church, he is involved in Lads to Leaders, Horizons, Bible classes, VBS, and summer devotionals.

BREAKING THE CHAINS OF pornography

by Robert Murphy

Pornography is one of the largest issues that has emerged from the information age. One used to have to go to an adult store to purchase it; now one can view it on his/her smartphone at anyplace, anywhere, anytime. Churches need to be equipped to fight this new drug. While there are many sermons on pornography, the actions taken to extinguish it are futile or none at all. If you are struggling with pornography, you understand that it is extremely difficult to overcome it regardless of how hard you try. You may want help but you do not know how to go about it. Here are some steps that I have taken in my struggle with pornography that have helped me overcome this addiction.

Do not hide your fight.

Satan wants you to be isolated from God and from others. He masquerades porn as pleasure but afterward it leaves you ashamed, lonely, and empty. When you are addicted to porn, the last thing you feel like doing is telling someone else. But this is exactly what you must do. James writes, "Confess your trespasses to one another,

and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (5:16). It is lamentable that the church has deemphasized confessing sins. Perhaps church leaders want to make the church appear more holy, and that it is full of good people and no problems exist. They fear showing that the church is also full of recovering sinners. I exhort all to take off the mask and reveal their sins. The truth is what sets us free (John 8:32)—not just showing off our good side. Taking off the mask of hypocrisy includes the ministers and elders who struggle with sin. This takes courage but ultimately it is the first step toward recovering.

Do not fight alone.

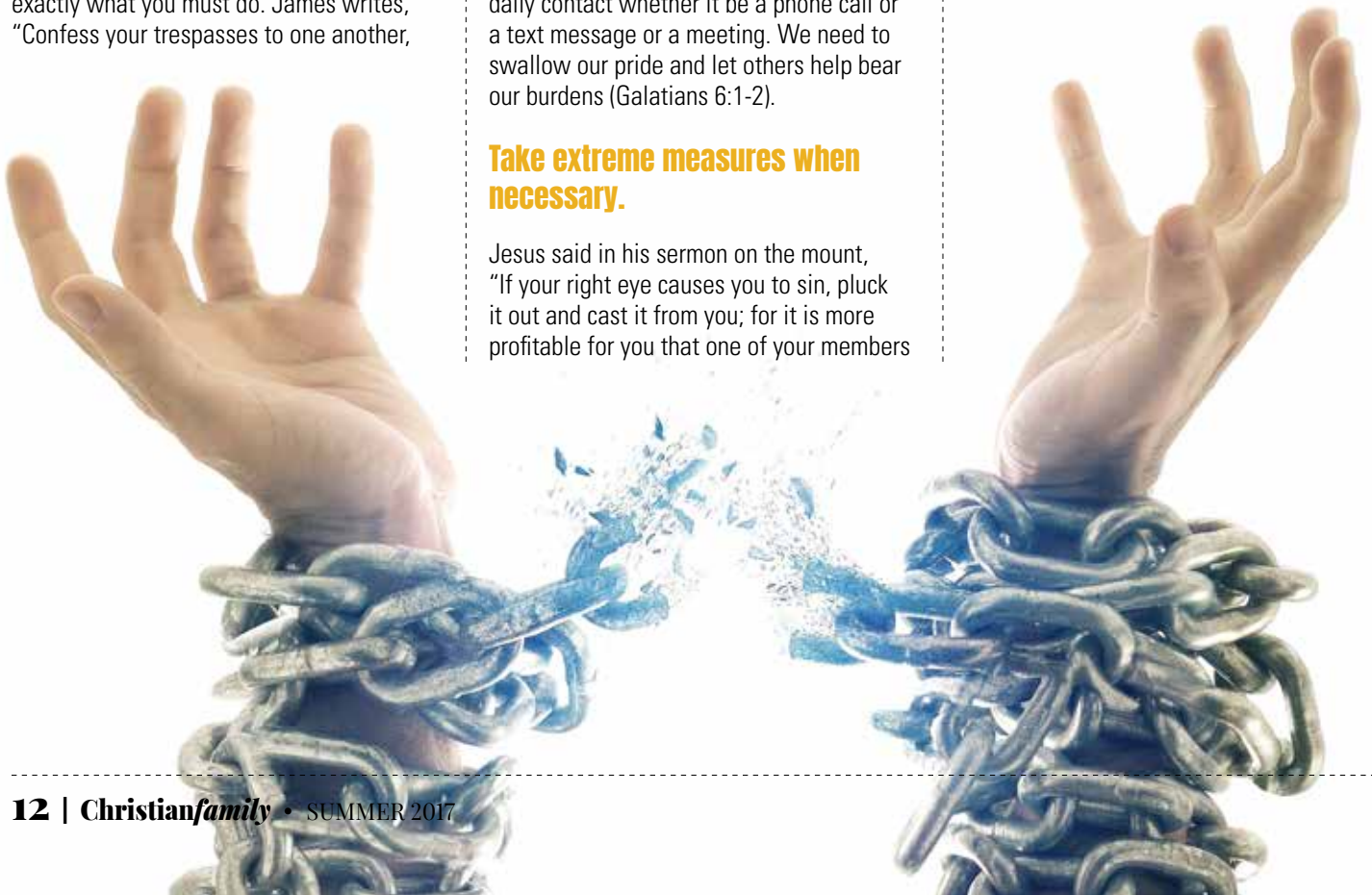
Because of the shame that you have and the awkwardness of the situation, it is easy to not bring it up and talk about it with others, especially when you need it the most. However, it is imperative that you have someone to keep you accountable. This can even be another person who also struggles with porn addiction. It is important to have daily contact whether it be a phone call or a text message or a meeting. We need to swallow our pride and let others help bear our burdens (Galatians 6:1-2).

Take extreme measures when necessary.

Jesus said in his sermon on the mount, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members

perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Matthew 5:29). While this is a hyperbolic statement, the principal is, "Do whatever you have to do to stop sinning." One of my friends who struggles with pornography addiction destroyed his phone and made his friends put a filter on his computer. You might need to do the same. Depending on how deep you are into your addiction, you may need to see a counselor or seek treatment. Do not be afraid to take radical action when purging sin from your life; it will be worth it.

Porn is just a cheap substitute. The reason I used to be addicted to porn was because I was lonely, tired, and stressed. I used porn as something to fill me up even though it left me feeling empty. I knew that I needed to stop watching porn, but I also had to realize that I needed to give my life fully to God. God is He Who "fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:23) and will leave us satisfied. The final key to overcoming this addiction is to strive toward God and seek Him above all else through prayer, Bible study, and the church. ■



Pure in MIND, HEART, and BODY by Kimberley Pinedo

What does it mean to be pure? It is defined as “[n]ot mixed or adulterated with any other substance or material.”¹ Synonyms are “unadulterated, uncontaminated, unmixed, undiluted, unalloyed, unblended.”²

As Christians, we need to strive for purity in our minds, our hearts, and our bodies! How can we aim for this?

PURE IN MIND

First, we must decide to be pure in our minds. As a man thinks, so is he (Proverbs 23:7). We must think on pure things. Philippians 4:8 exhorts: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.” God has well equipped us with His Word so that we can fill our minds with good and pure things. We must take the time to read, study, and meditate on His Word. On the flip side, if we fill our minds with worldly or contaminated things, our minds will dwell on these things and it will negatively affect our actions!

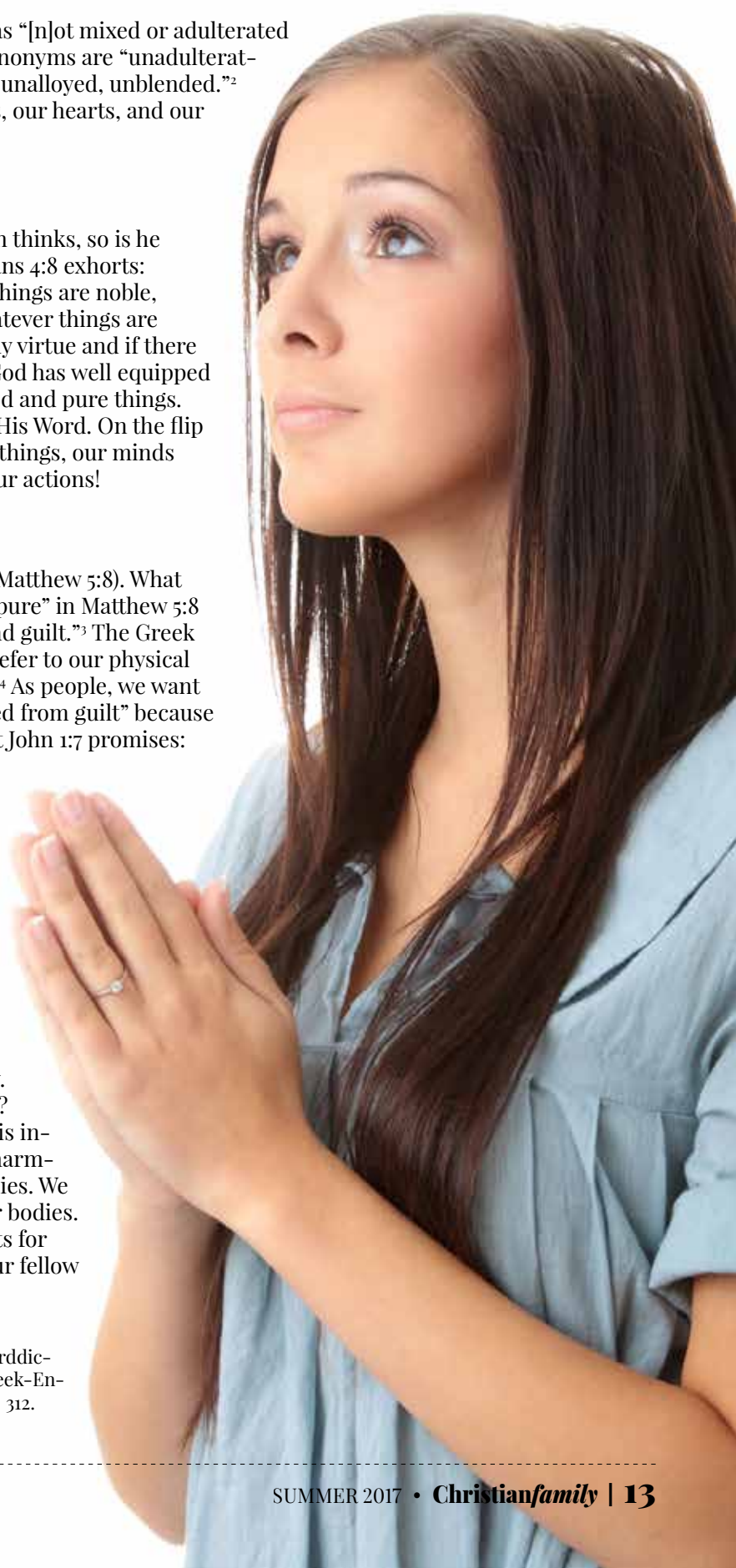
PURE IN HEART

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8). What does it mean to be pure in heart? The Greek word for “pure” in Matthew 5:8 is *katharos*. It means “clean, blameless, free from sin and guilt.”³ The Greek word for “heart” in this verse is *kardia*. This word can refer to our physical heart, but it can also refer to the center of spiritual life.⁴ As people, we want to be blameless; and as Christians, we can be “unstained from guilt” because of the continuous cleansing of the blood of Christ. First John 1:7 promises: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” We can keep our hearts pure by continually walking in the light! We are to persevere in our Christian walk with God by keeping our focus on Him. Psalm 51:10 says: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

PURE IN BODY

If we are wholeheartedly trying to keep our minds and our hearts pure, being pure in body will logically follow. Physically, how are we to keep our bodies pure for Him? We will be careful with what we put into our bodies. This includes the food choices we make and abstaining from harmful drugs and/or substances that would pollute our bodies. We will also need to be mindful of how we are dressing our bodies. Dressing modestly will not only help us be shining lights for God (which is a commandment!), but it will also help our fellow Christians to keep their minds pure for Him! ■

1. “Pure” (2017), *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/pure>. 2. *Ibid.* 3. cf. Thayer, J.H. (1977), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker), p. 312. 4. *Ibid.*, p. 325.

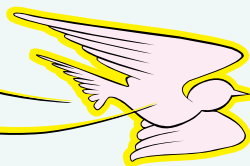


children.

JOHN BAPTIZES JESUS *by* Moisés Pinedo

AS you may have read in the Bible, Jesus was and is Someone very special. He was not only a great Teacher and Prophet, but He also was God's holy Son (John 1:1,14). He came to earth and took human form with a very special purpose: to do God's will by dying on the cross to save humanity from sin (John 3:16). When He was about to start His ministry of preaching, healing, and sacrifice, Jesus went to Galilee to be baptized by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. John was God's servant who prepared the hearts of the people for the coming of the awaited Savior: Jesus! (Matthew 3:3). He was known as "the Baptist" or "the Baptizer" because God had commissioned to him the baptism of repentance as part of his preaching (Matthew 21:25; John 1:33).

Now, you may be thinking: "If Jesus was God's **holy** Son and had **no** sin, then, why did He need to be baptized by John?" Excellent question! This probably went through John's mind, since he refused to do it, and asked Jesus: "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" (Matthew 3:14). Jesus replied that this was God's will and that they were to fulfill it. Then, John baptized Jesus, and when Jesus came out of the water, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, and God's voice from heaven was heard, saying: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).



Here are some reasons why Jesus was baptized:

1. TO SHOW HIS OBEDIENCE AS SON.

Since Jesus was on earth in human form, He referred to God as "His Father" (Matthew 10:32); and since He was a Son, He submitted to the Father's will in all things—even those things that involved suffering (Luke 22:42). Baptism was God's will, and Jesus submitted to baptism to please His Father; He always did what was pleasing to His Father (John 8:29).

2. TO BE PUBLICLY RECOGNIZED AS GOD'S SON.

Jesus' baptism was a special opportunity in which the Father publicly confessed Him as His Son—God in the flesh. The Spirit descended upon Jesus, and the Father's voice was heard. Interestingly, God also confesses as sons those who come to baptism in repentance and become part of His family (Galatians 3:25-27).

3. TO BE THE HIGHEST EXAMPLE TO HIS FUTURE FOLLOWERS.

Although Jesus did not need baptism to show repentance or to receive forgiveness of sins, future believers would (Acts 2:38). As in all things, in this case Jesus taught and led the way that believers were to follow (Hebrews 12:2).



Jesus submitted to John's baptism, but after He died and resurrected, He instituted a new baptism: Christian baptism under the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). Any person who wants to receive salvation must submit to this baptism (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21). Of course, children like you do not need baptism since they do not have sins. Jesus said that "of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:13-15). But all who reach an age of accountability and sin, must be baptized to receive forgiveness.

Then, what personal lessons can you learn from Jesus' baptism? Like Jesus pleased His Father in all things, you are to try to please your parents, and, above all, you are to try to please the heavenly Father as you learn His will in the Bible. Like Jesus, you can be an example of good works to others—to your younger siblings, your classmates in school, and your friends in your neighborhood. One day, you will also come to an accountable age and will have to decide to take this step, and like Jesus, I hope you will choose to do God's will. ■



Top: Jesus' baptism by Dylan Jaramillo (7)
Bottom: Preacher baptizes believer by Lucy Jaramillo (9)

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WHO WAS BAPTIZED?

The book of Acts tells of many people who became Christians by being baptized. Find them on the word puzzle on the right. Read the references provided to learn more about these conversions to Christianity.

1. Three Thousand (Acts 2)
2. Samaritans (Acts 8:4-12)
3. Simon (Acts 8:13)
4. Ethiopian (Acts 8:26-39)
5. Saul (Acts 9:1-17)
6. Cornelius (Acts 10)
7. Lydia (Acts 16:11-15)
8. Jailer (Acts 16:16-34)
9. Corinthians (Acts 18:1-8)
10. Ephesians (Acts 19:1-5)

C	O	R	I	N	T	H	I	A	N	S	C	S	D
O	S	I	M	O	N	E	L	F	E	P	J	A	S
R	J	A	R	T	S	U	I	H	W	M	A	M	I
N	Y	C	U	V	E	T	H	I	O	P	I	A	N
E	P	H	E	S	I	A	N	S	K	L	L	R	O
L	B	L	N	A	D	B	F	R	I	X	E	I	N
I	O	I	O	U	T	H	G	A	M	N	R	T	U
U	I	Z	K	L	O	I	Q	L	Y	D	I	A	F
S	T	H	R	E	E	T	H	O	U	S	A	N	D
C	O	R	I	N	T	H	D	V	A	G	T	S	P

questions.

Q&A

Q: If an elder/pastor divorces, can he marry again and have a new family?

—PUERTO VARAS, CHILE

There are two factors that must be considered in answering this question. First, is it **biblical**? Second, is it **practical**? If an elder's wife leaves him and engages in sexual immorality through fornication or adultery with another man/woman, then Jesus gives him the right to divorce that woman and marry a second woman (Matthew 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12). If the cause of the divorce is any other motive, then he may not remarry; he must remain single (1 Corinthians 7:10-11).

The practical side of the issue is whether he may continue to serve effectively as a shepherd in the Lord's church. He is the husband of one wife, presuming the divorce was biblical as we have indicated (1 Timothy 3:2). The elder must also have the respect of his children (1 Timothy 3:4), the congregation which chooses him (vss. 2-3), and the broader community in which he lives (vs. 7). He, and the church, must honestly evaluate the conditions that led to the divorce and ask if he may continue to serve effectively and have the godly influence he needs. —PH

Q: How can I lead my children?

—LA ROMANA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Begin when they are little. Pray with them and teach them to pray. Read Bible stories with them and

allow them to see you reading the Bible. Serve your neighbors and help your children serve. Take them to worship and engage in worship yourself. Take them to Bible class every opportunity. Live like Jesus would have you to live, every day. When you err, apologize and keep trying to live right. —PH

Q: How can we keep joy in our families as taught in James 1:2-4—when facing family conflict, economic needs, sickness, and even church difficulties?

—TOLUCA, MEXICO

First, to keep joy in our families we need to understand the nature of our joy. Biblical "joy" refers to internal contentment due to our relationship and reward with God (Matthew 5:11-12; Philippians 4:4). This does not depend on material stimulus or favorable physical circumstances. Therefore, we can **have** and **keep** joy in our families in the face of difficulties (cf. Philippians 4:11-12).

Second, we need to understand the nature of our negative circumstances. If those circumstances are due to our wrongdoings, then there is nothing to be joyful about; but if we have not caused our suffering or we are suffering for Christ's sake, then there is much reason to have and keep joy (1 Peter 2:20). In this point, understanding that difficulties in life are temporary but our reward is eternal will help us keep our joy (Romans 8:18). Also, understanding that,

as Christians, our calling includes difficulties (1 Peter 2:21) will help us rely on the Lord's strength when facing these inevitable situations (Philippians 4:13). Remember that you and your family are part of a greater family that can strengthen your hands in the Lord (cf. 1 Samuel 23:16). —MP

Q: In 1 Timothy 2:15, what does it mean that the woman "will be saved in childbearing"?

—TEXAS, U.S.

It needs to be acknowledged, first, that this is a difficult passage

and no hasty interpretation that conflicts clear biblical teachings should be advanced. In line with the context, it is more likely that "childbearing" here is a figure of speech for "keeping faithfully her role as wife and mother." The woman is to be allowed to exercise this most important domestic role despite the apostolic instruction not to teach in the public assembly (vss. 11-12). Biblical examples of women faithfully keeping this role are found in Sarah, Jochebed, Hannah, Mary, Lois, and Eunice. —MP

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