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from the editors



If Satan would leave families alone, it would be much easier to live our Christian lives and raise our children to be Christians. But, of course, Satan does not leave us alone. The challenges and obstacles he throws into our way are nearly endless. We consider some of those in this issue, such as adultery and divorce. If Satan can break up a marriage, he might have accomplished even more if the children are not raised as Christians or if the innocent spouse turns his or her back on Christ. But, with God's help, adultery and divorce can be overcome—as the story of Fredrick Klein will show, and a strong marriage and family can be built!

Robert and Iesia Brown also contribute to the strength of our marriages in the first of two articles on improving our communication. The stronger our marriages are, the weaker Satan is!

Paul Holland & Moisés Pinedo

Christianfamily

Helping families become stronger in the Lord

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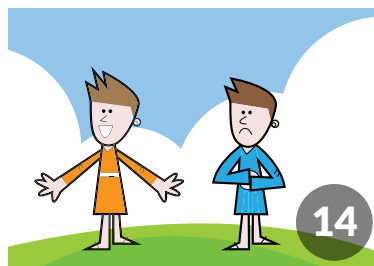
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GOD KNOWS US BEST

Maintaining Hope in the Middle of Disappointment, Adultery, and Death by **Freddie Klein**

family.

Soon after marriage, I joined the military. It was not long after my wife and I had arrived on base that we were on the search for a new church. We immediately gravitated toward a small Baptist church in town because it is what we had always known.

Thankfully, God knows us best. We had not established any deep ties with folks in the Baptist church before we received a piece of Bible literature in the mail called *House to House / Heart to Heart*. It was this material, presented in a simple but straightforward fashion, that caught our attention. We contacted the local church of Christ for more information.

Doug, the preacher for this congregation, studied with us for several weeks. Through these studies we grew deeper in our knowledge and faith in God and His Word. There came a point at which we knew we needed to make a change.

Earlier in our lives, we both had said a prayer of faith and asked Jesus to come into our hearts. This was in contradiction to the Word of God that teaches that one must hear the Word (Romans 10:17), believe it (Romans 1:16), repent of all past sins (Luke 13:3,5), confess Jesus as Lord (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38). We understood what needed to be done and we were baptized one night. Sadly, the coming months after our decision to become Christians would be some of the most difficult in my life.

After our conversion, we were energized. We told our family and friends about our new-found faith but were met with skepticism or indifference. The people we loved most seemed to care the least about this change in our lives. It was a hard lesson, one of many that we learned early as babes in Christ. To our dismay, the preacher that had worked so diligently to help us come to the knowledge of the truth was asked to leave by the elders. There was still more devastating news to come. It was around that same time that I learned of my wife's adultery.

Thankfully, God knows us best. It was also at that time that I was asked to preach for a small congregation outside of town. I had no training or experience, but I loved the Lord and I allowed that passion to drive me through the toughest of times. I was so hurt, so crushed. I cannot imagine what I would have done had I not been a Christian during this trying time.

Meanwhile, my wife had transformed into something I did not recognize. The world had taken hold of her and she wanted out of our marriage. She had moved out and moved

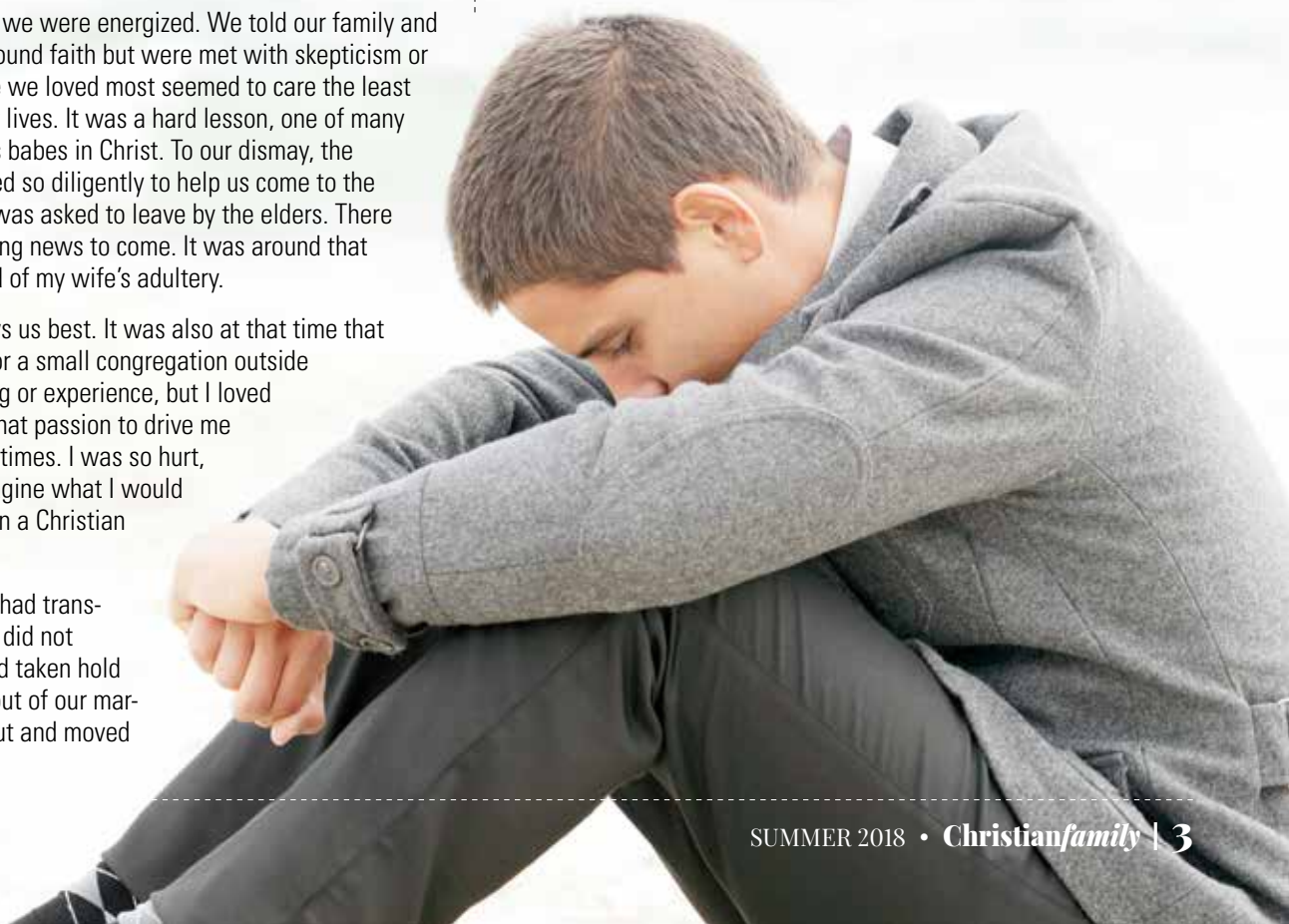
on and the only obstacle to her so-called freedom was a signature on the divorce forms from me. I needed to know what the Bible said about divorce and what this meant for my future. So, I turned to one who had so faithfully guided me to the truth of God's Word in the past, Doug.

We looked at the doctrine of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. After our discussion, I realized that the Word of God was clear. As painful as my situation was, it was also clear as to where each one stood in the eyes of God. The Bible tells us that "God... hates divorce" (Malachi 2:16). When we marry, we make a covenant or a vow with each other and with God (Proverbs 2:17). Christ taught in Matthew 19 that our marriages should be held in high regard (vss. 4-5). What God has joined, let no man separate (19:6). Christ went on to teach that divorce and remarriage can occur for a single reason: adultery (19:9).

Through the course of many months apart, I tried to bring my wife back to me. Those efforts were fruitless. She had made a decision based on a feeling, but I would continue to allow my life to be guided by the Word of God.

Thankfully, God knows us best... ■

Read more about this story on page 10.



parenting.

Maintaining Focus While Raising Children as a SINGLE FATHER

by **Tim Holland**

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials (James 1:2).

Some years ago, my family's life was upended and we had to start over. Divorce is an ugly thing and something that God truly does not wish for His people. I hope our story will uplift some to know that God conquers all.

Raising two daughters, as a single dad, has been challenging. I could not have done it without God's power, grace, and mercy. Working for a living outside of the home, then trying to make sure the home runs is a challenge unlike any other. Doing all of this while maintaining a focus on God's will for the family has helped. I had to remember that first and foremost, it is my obligation to "...bring [my children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). This helped me. Why? If my focus was to let my children see God and His Son and to teach and have them taught about our Father and Savior, it simplified things for me. If I am spending time with them to help them see this world for its beauty and its tragedy, then I am doing the will of God and it helps me understand

His ways more perfectly. This helped my girls. Why? God's path for us is straight; things are clearer when we focus on Him rather than the world.

Until recently, the girls were with me nearly all the time. Things were difficult with their mother for years, and that drove the girls to be closer to me. It also helped them have a fantastic relationship with our local minister's wife. This is a role that she welcomed, and I am very glad she did! She has been a marvelous influence and teacher to the girls. If I did not place an emphasis on public (corporate) worship and Bible school/study attendance, would they have had that blessing? Their mother's absence also heightened their love and affection for their cousins and aunts. The girls pay attention to them and how they act and what they believe. To see them worship in assembly and in private has been such an impact to my daughters' lives. Their great-grandmother, possibly one of the strongest women I know, has always driven them to be women of high moral character and challenges them to work hard and to be charitable.

Through all my inadequacies and my failures, my family survives. It does not just survive, but thrives! This is only attributed to following God's path for us and the family. When the world seemed like it was crashing down (it still does at times), and I did not fully understand that a father's role was more than a provider of material things, God's plan saved. My role as a father is to teach, to love, to protect, and to provide. I must provide more than material things; I must provide an environment that, above all, teaches the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and instills a faith in my children that will not be quenched. This focus on God, this focus on Christ, reduces life's challenges to bumps in the road. I am reminded of Paul's words to the local assembly of saints at Philippi: "and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7). ■



5 Helpful Tips for a SINGLE MOTHER

by **Moisés Pinedo**

Parenting is tough! It is especially tough if there is only one person to carry the parenting burden. Here is some sound advice that will help you raise your children as a single mother.

1. Seek God first.

In this materialistic world, it is easy to forget the Divine for the physical; but trusting God and seeking Him first in everything will help you keep your focus and will open the doors to additional blessings (Matthew 6:33). Be a godly example to your children (1 Corinthians 11:1); never miss an opportunity to take them to church services and Bible study (Hebrews 10:25); teach them the Word diligently and constantly (Deuteronomy 6:6-9); give your children a legacy of faith! (2 Timothy 1:5).

2. Do not forget your children for your “children”.

Today, many people are forsaking their children because they want “better things” for them. With the motto, “I do this for my children,” they go in search of new “opportunities,” more working hours, and busier schedules—and deprive those same children of the time and dedication they truly need. Due to your situation, this will be a stronger temptation for you. Remember that God has not asked you to give your children the best gadgets, the best secular education, the best financial status; He has asked you to train them and teach them His ways (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4).

3. Do not beat yourself up.

It may be the case that you are raising your kids by yourself due to your own past mistakes; but if you have repented of your sins and are truly seeking to do God’s will, believe that He has forgiven you (Hebrews 8:12). If there are things to amend, then take the steps to do it so you can go on with your life and service to God and your family (cf. Matthew 5:23-24). Remember that you cannot change the past, but you can influence the future for you and your children.

4. Seek out male role models for your children.

You may be in the situation you are because your husband betrayed

you in the most undignifying way. However, that does not mean that you have to hate men or that there are no good men at all. If your children are boys, they need good male role models to follow; a grandfather, uncle, preacher, or elder in the church may supply that need (cf. 1 Timothy 3:1-7). Even if your children are girls, they need to learn to appreciate the good in all people—including men. Point out good traits in godly men with the hopes that your girls will learn to love those traits and look for those traits in the men they will someday marry.

5. Seek the help of others.

You are not Superwoman, and that is ok! You are in a difficult situation and will need the help of those who love you—especially your Christian family. Christians identify with other’s needs and problems. Never be ashamed or too proud to ask for help. You may need a young girl to watch your little child for a couple of hours, a man to clean up a fallen tree in your yard, or a wise elder to help you with a child’s rebellious attitude. Just ask! (Matthew 7:7). ■



marriage.

Strengthening Our Marriage—Part 1:

MARRIAGE MISCONCEPTIONS

by **Robert and Iesia Brown**

Marriage is God's idea, and following God's plan for our lives guarantees our success in marriage. There are some misconceptions of marriage that can lead to disappointment and growing resentment against the spouse.

One major misconception is that the marriage vow is fundamentally a commitment to the spouse.

The problem with that is that, when we make commitments to people, the commitment is often conditional, based on what that person does and who they are. That conditional commitment is easily broken when the condition changes. The truth is that the marriage vow and every vow that we make is to God (Deuteronomy 10:20-21). As a servant of God, everything that I do is to and for God (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:17)

We must understand that a commitment to God to be faithful in marriage means obedience to God in the relationship and that obedience is not based on what the other person does; it is not conditional. So, wives, submit to your husband even if he is not loving you as Christ loves the church. Husbands, love your wife as Christ loves the church, even if she is not submitting to you (Ephesians 5:22-25). Since God does not change, our commitment does not change. Any disobedience to the commands in God's Word for the marriage is a broken vow or transgression against God (Psalms 51:4). In this Psalm, David acknowledged that, although he took Uriah's wife and had Uriah killed (a unique case

when David turned aside from God's commands—1 Kings 15:5), his sin was fundamentally against God.

Another misconception is that of the importance of compatibility.

The common thought is that compatibility means enjoying similar things, and this may be true. But, for Christians, it is not compatibility that keeps marriage alive and well; it is the flexibility of humility (Philippians 2:4-8; Ephesians 5:21; Romans 12:1-2). We all have our preferences, and sometimes they match our spouses and that is great! But when our preferences do not match, then we must each be willing to put ourselves aside to please God through our spouses. It is an opportunity to practice Christianity in our marriage. John 10:18 tells us that Jesus chose to lay down His life; no one took it from Him. In the same way, we must choose to lay down our lives for God. He will not force us to serve Him with our lives and our marriages. Each time we die to self, we grow in Christ, and the satisfaction that comes from serving God and pleasing Him far outweighs any feelings we get from having our own way all of the time.

We must choose to walk in the Spirit by obeying God's Word, rather than walking in obedience to our carnal nature. As a result, God will bless us with some priceless advantages, such as peace (John 14:27), the fullness of joy, and pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11).

Christians are always compatible because we have one faith, one Word, and one God (Ephesians 4:4-6). We have one agenda, and that agenda is pleasing God, our Father through Jesus Christ, His Son.



One more misconception is that each spouse is to contribute 50% of the effort in the marriage to make it 100% successful.

The truth is that a successful marriage will require 100% effort from each spouse. Sometimes it may be an equal partnership of responsibility, but other times you may find yourself giving 75% and your spouse 25%, or you are giving all and the other is being carried. Our business as Christians is to do all as unto the Lord. This requires giving 100% and allowing God to balance things out as He sees fit.

I do not stop loving my wife as Christ loves the church because she is not submitting herself to me, and she does not stop submitting herself because she does not feel loved like Christ loves the church. We each will have to answer to God for what we do and do not do, and we will not get to use our spouses as an excuse (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Even if we give 100% of ourselves, we all are still imperfect; we still need the blood of Jesus to cover us (Isaiah 64:6). It is possible that your best does not fully satisfy your spouse because you may have a different love language. One thinks that physical touch is the ultimate show of love and would prefer to not talk so much; the other may feel that attentive listening is the ultimate show of love and may prefer not to touch so much. Neither is wrong; they are just different. So, my giving 100% of what I have to give may not even be noticed by my spouse. I may keep the house spotless as my offering to the marriage, but he may not care about a clean house; he may prefer a hug and a smile when he comes home. So, if I am tired after giving my offering to the marriage and, as a result, I do not feel like smiling or hugging, it may look like I am bringing nothing to the table. That is why we each must live our best before God. Do not harshly judge the other person's contribution; just serve God with your whole heart in your marriage and life (cf. John 21:19-23).

A successful marriage will require patience and communication. We must patiently accept the love offering of our spouse with thanksgiving to God. We must also, in a loving and non-combative way, communicate our preferences without conditions. It takes time to learn one another and to put ourselves aside to serve God through our spouse, allowing God to be our source of comfort and contentment (Psalms 62:5). ■



women.

Teaching kindness to your children

by Kimberley Pinedo

“Kindness” is “[t]he quality of being friendly, generous, and considerate.”¹ It has to do with thinking about others and not focusing on self only. It involves looking for opportunities to help others in small and big ways. Ultimately, it needs to spring forth from a heart that loves and serves God.

Kindness comes from God.

True kindness results from learning about God and realizing that God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus gave us the example of kindness by teaching how to be servants. The Greek word for “kindness” in Galatians 5:22 is *chrestotes* and is used to describe attitude and action: (1) from God toward rebellious humanity, and (2) from a compassionate man towards his neighbor.² We find kindness listed as a virtue in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Just as with the other virtues, kindness has more to do with **being** than **doing**. Sometimes, we can do kind actions towards others yet still lack a kind attitude! For example, we as wives and mothers can easily fall into the trap of serving our families (which is good and kind), but not doing it with kindness in our hearts. We may let resentment or stress be stumbling blocks to our true kindness. We must remember that our spouses and children will be able to see through us.

We do a great disservice to our children when we teach them that the world revolves around them, buy any and everything they want, and do everything for them. We have to teach them early on that they are not in charge, they are not the center of the family, and that life is not all about them! How do we do this? Give them age appropriate chores. They need

to have responsibilities to the family and for the family. They need to feel needed and that they are contributing to the household. Help them find something in which they can use their talents to serve others. If your child enjoys drawing, encourage him/her to draw pictures for others. If your child enjoys knitting, encourage him/her to knit hats and donate to a local hospital. If your child can mow a yard, encourage him/her to help a neighbor or a widow that might need help with yard service. The key to raising an unselfish child is to teach him that life is not all about him and encourage him to find ways to think about others!

But why do we do that? We do not do it for our own glory and praise; we do it for God! “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Kindness, as shown from our God, needs to become a way of life for the Christian. All of our actions and life need to be for His glory.

Am I being kind?

How do I teach kindness to my children? As noted above, one way is to have them do something for others—daily! We often do this in our home by saying, “You need to spend at least 20 minutes helping someone today.” Then, at suppertime or devotional, we will all talk about how we were able to help someone that day. For children, this might be writing cards for others, drawing pictures for others, helping cook something for others, etc.

We can talk about several ways to guide our children to be kind, but ultimately, they might simply copy me, the mother, father, or primary caregiver. Therefore, maybe the first question should be: “Am I showing

love and kindness in the home? Am I showing love and kindness to my spouse? Am I showing love and kindness to my children? Am I showing love and kindness to my neighbors? Am I showing love and kindness to my fellow Christians?”

We do a great disservice to our children when we teach them that the world revolves around them, buy any and everything they want, and do everything for them.

Kindness is to be taught.

Kindness has to be taught to children; they are not born being kind! Children need to be taught to look for opportunities. When they go through a door, they need to be aware if someone is behind them so that they can hold the door open. Children need to be taught not to choose the biggest cookie for themselves. Children need to be taught to be careful with smaller children. Children need to be taught to look for other children that might be sitting alone or that might need a friend. Children need to be taught to look into the eyes of the person they are talking to and show interest in others. This might come naturally for some kids with outgoing personalities, but all children must learn the importance of kindness. Parents are to be patient and understanding and may need to adjust their spiritual instruction to each child’s needs.

Kindness is a way of life.

Matthew 25:31-46 speaks about the separation of the “goats” and the “sheep.” The “goats” were condemned for not giving Jesus food, drink, clothing, etc. When they asked, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?” Jesus answered, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.” Kindness cannot be shown only to the ones we are fond of or when it just comes naturally and easy; it must come from within and be a way of life shown by how we treat all people. Jesus made it clear that the way we treat others is the way we treat Him!

We need to strive to be like the “sheep” who showed kindness to others, without partiality. As James 2:1 reads, “[m]y brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.” As we continue reading the verses that follow, we learn that we are not to show partiality to those who have “fine clothes” and determine what privileges they are to have. If we do so, we become “judges with evil thoughts.”

Conclusion

*Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and **is kind**; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up (1 Corinthians 13:1-4).*

When I apply this passage to my life as a parent in teaching my child love and kindness, this is what I think: Though my children may be good students and make straight A's in school, but have not love, it profits them nothing; though my children are excellent athletes and have won many trophies, but have not love, it profits them nothing; though my children excel in music or another art, but have not love, it profits them nothing; and though my children can memorize hundreds of Bible verses and facts, but have not love, it profits them nothing!

1. “Kindness,” *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxford-dictionaries.com/definition/kindness>.

2. See Jackson, Wayne (2002), *Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications), p. 101.

featured.

the Kleins

Fredrick and Inge Klein have been married for five years and have two boys: Waylon (4), and Wesley (2). Fredrick is the preacher for the Southside church of Christ in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He is also pursuing a Master's of Divinity from Freed-Hardeman University. Inge stays at home and enjoys homeschooling the children and teaching in the Bible class program at Southside.

In this issue, Fredrick shares his story of conversion, marriage, loss, and remarriage.

How did you learn about your first wife's unfaithfulness?

My work schedule placed me on the night shift. I would start work at 8:00 pm. and get off at 8:00 am. Most of the time, I had only enough time for a meal and sleep before I headed back to work. During this time my wife expressed interest in going to cosmetology school. Soon after she started taking classes, she began to hang out with her classmates into the evening. These were young ladies that she was getting to know, so I thought nothing of it. This soon turned into her staying the night at the homes of friends on a regular basis.

One day she needed a ride home from a friend's house. When I got off work, I picked her up. After a brief conversation, she dropped a bomb: she wanted a divorce! I said, "Absolutely not!" We could get counseling, we could work through this, but we would always remain together. That is what a marriage is: two people working together. I was shocked, hurt, and confused. She left home for several days, and then she returned with a

much older male friend. She was there to get some of her belongings. I was friendly to the man because he was old enough to be my grandfather.

As time passed, our communication had waned to the point that I could hardly talk to her for more than a few minutes and she would hang up. I decided to do something drastic. I had a surprise for her. I picked her up from where she had taken a semi-permanent residence and drove her to a small house downtown. We met with a realtor that showed us the home. I could not buy a house, but I could give her the next best thing: a rental off-base. She didn't like the seclusion of the base and had previously dreamed of getting a place of our own in the city. This was the ticket. We could start fresh and work harder on us!

"What do you think?" I asked. "No, I want a divorce," she replied. "Why? I'm trying to make things better," I explained. The words she spoke next cut me to the core. "I cheated on you!" she said



K

in anger. All I could muster was, "You're kidding?" "With Steve," she said, then quickly looked at me to see how I would respond. I was floored when I found out that I had shaken his hand as he helped my wife move out of our house only a month prior.

How did those events affect your view of Christianity or the Bible?

After the news about my wife's adultery, I wept. That was all I could do. Throughout that time, I continued to preach each Sunday. As I looked over my lessons, I saw the wonderful love God showed His people time and time again. It was impossible for me to blame God for any

of this. The Bible is filled with people who had gone through so much more than me. They suffered hardship and loss; they endured persecutions and trials (James 1:2-4; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

As I considered where I was going and where I had come, I could not help but be thankful (1 Thessalonians 5:18). As sad as I was for my wife and for our marriage, my short time as a Christian had taught me that God loves us and He provides for His people (Philippians 4:19).

Teaching the importance of faithfulness to God, despite trials and through all circumstances, is something my current wife and I continually

emphasize to our young boys. We often pray, "Lord help us to do the right things, even when it is hard." Marriage and life in general can be hard. We will face setbacks, but we must remain steadfast in our faith through it all (1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 10:23).

Do you know what has happened to your first wife?

After my honorable discharge from the military, I pursued preaching school at the Bear Valley Bible Institute of Denver. My now ex-wife and I made contact while I was in Denver, and she came back to live with some members of the church. We went to church together and she repented.

While I was away in a gospel meeting, she called and said, "I'm going back with Steve. I'm sorry I've come back into your life to hurt you again." Those were the last words I heard from her. She packed her things and by the time

I returned from the gospel meeting, she was gone.

A year later, I received a call notifying me of her death. The same man that she had left me for several years earlier, had shot and killed her and himself.

Inge, did you have any reservations about marrying someone who had already been married before?

I did not have any reservations because Freddie was straight forward from the moment we started dating, and I was well aware of the situation involving his first wife. At the time we first met, I was not a Christian but began studying with him, and from the beginning we studied what the Bible says about marriage, divorce, and remarriage (Matthew 19:3-12; 1 Corinthians 7). Everything was clear from the beginning of our relationship that I felt good continuing with hopes of marriage at the

end. We both had previous relationship baggage, and this brought us closer to each other. I was able to stand by his side, as his fiancé, at the funeral of his first wife and provide him with the comfort he needed and deserved.

As we began our lives together, we both agreed that we wanted God to be the center of our lives and our relationship (Matthew 6:33). We purposed in our schedules to never miss a worship service or Bible study but to allow the Bible to guide our lives. Every night we have family Bible time which includes singing praises, prayer, memory verse practice, and reading the Bible.

Where and when did you and Inge meet?

We happened to be neighbors. I moved into an apartment complex to be close to school at Bear Valley, and she moved into the apartment underneath me a few

months later when she got a new teaching job. We met in the hallway as she was taking her dog out and I was coming home from classes.

What led her to become a Christian?

With an ended relationship, a cross country move, and a new job, Inge was in a new chapter of her life, wanting to start fresh. It is hard not to say that our meeting was anything but providential. She was a soul seeking truth, and, by God's care, I was able to study with her and baptize her into Christ (Galatians 3:27). The acceptance of the Gospel was only able to take place because she had a heart that was open and she was honest when the Word of God was presented to her. Though she had a religious background, she desired clarity instead of the confusion that she had previously known. This new birth was a breath of fresh air for her. ■

Marriage is a relationship of commitment and trust. These aspects are foundational but come with time. The marriage bond is the most important relationship, aside from being in Christ (Romans 6:11), that we will ever choose. For those who are thinking about marriage, allow God's Word to be at the center and above all else. Read passages together such as Ephesians 5:22-30 and Proverbs 31.

Looking back at our relationship, it is amazing how God works in the lives of those who trust Him (Romans 8:28). Though Inge and I had a plan, God's plan was different for our lives and we are better for it (Proverbs 3:5). The struggles that my wife and I face are nothing compared to what we would face if we did not have the Word of God to join us and to rely upon. Moreover, we realize the importance of the Christian life. We teach our children during our nightly Bible times that true failure is living your life and not going to heaven.

Through life's ups and downs, we need a support system. For Christians, that is found in the church, the body of Christ. Seek a body of Christians, those who have obeyed the Word and that are following the biblical example of the church, and labor alongside them as you strive toward heaven.



3 Ways to Help the Devil By THE WAY WE DATE

by Jeff Miller, Ph.D.

Proverbs 22:3 speaks of the “prudent” or cautious man, who anticipates danger and avoids it. The prudent man is then contrasted with the “simple” or “naïve” (NIV) man, who fails to foresee danger and barrels ahead thoughtlessly, ultimately to suffer for his lack of wisdom and understanding. Paul, in the same vein, warns Christians to “flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18)—“flee also youthful lusts” (2 Timothy 2:22). Rather than trusting in our own strength to be able to resist temptation, Paul warns us to be humble: “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Do we need to take Scripture seriously when it makes such admonitions, or can we ignore God like the world does? When young Christians engage in dating, should they be **prudent**? The devil says, “No. Don’t worry about it. Do what’s fun and feels good.” Here are three ways young people can help him meet his goals for them while they date.

I. Don’t worry about **WHY** you date or **WHEN** you start.

One of the young, college, Hispanic men at my home congregation told me about dating in Mexico when his parents were growing up. Girls were not allowed to begin dating until they had proved they could be a wife—having demonstrated their proficiency in house management, for example. Clearly, dating did not begin until a girl was old enough to actually be a wife! I had already studied other “western” dating practices of the past, like those of Ireland, England, and America, and knew that they had similar mindsets. Such thinking is rare today, but I still asked myself, “Why would societies of the past want their young people to wait to begin dating until they were old enough to begin considering marriage? Did they just make up unnecessary rules to control people?”

While doing youth work in urban Texas in the 2000s, the reason became crystal clear. Our teens were obviously not treating dating seriously. They were interested in having a good time getting to know the opposite gender (as did many of us as teens). However, a high percentage of the time, after a few dates the young people would enter into a “cloud-like phase” (what psychologists call the period of “infatuation,” “euphoric feelings,” or “limerence”) where the relationship uncontrollably and quickly became very serious. In that state, the young people were unable to be reasoned with about their relationship. They could “hear no evil” concerning their boyfriends or girlfriends. “He’s perfect.” “She was meant for me.” Almost inevitably, the young couples proceeded to become physically involved with one another and, in many cases, fell away from the church.

It quickly became clear to me why many civilizations of the past—those who did not use arranged marriages—made up for their looseness in allowing a couple the freedom to choose dates, by having careful rules in place to protect the couples from making unwise decisions while they dated. After all, only the naïve are unaware of the dangerous effects of unbridled, raging hormones coupled with imprudence and a lack of wisdom during the teen years. No wonder civilizations of the past—fathers and mothers—required their children to wait to date until they were old and mature enough to think rationally, and old enough to be seriously thinking about marriage in case the relationship progressed to that point. “Dating for fun” would not have been acceptable, since such flippant behavior would be viewed as “playing with fire.” Based on my observations, this is the first way we can help Satan hurt our young people while they date: let them

date the way Hollywood teaches them to, not worrying about such “trivial things” as **when** and **why** they date. Assume they have complete control over their hormones and emotions, and great wisdom beyond their years. They don’t need to be prudent.

2. Don't worry about WHO you date either.

Whether or not we intend it, a romantic relationship can unavoidably become serious. A person with whom we are in a serious relationship can and will influence us, no matter how hard we try to remain unaffected. No wonder Scripture repeatedly warns against developing strong relationships with those who are not God’s disciples (e.g., Genesis 6:1-2; Exodus 23:31-33; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; Judges 14:1-3; 1 Kings 11:3-4; 2 Kings 8:16-18; 2 Chronicles 19:2; Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13:23-27; Psalm 101:6; Proverbs 12:26; 13:20; 22:3; 31:30; Amos 3:3; Matthew 6:33; 7:6; John 15:19; Romans 8:5-8; 1 Corinthians 5:6; 15:33; Ephesians 5:11; James 4:4).

In the New Testament, God’s disciples—those who have been baptized into Christ for the remission of sins—are called “Christians” (Acts 11:26). A second way we can help Satan hurt our young people while they date is to tell them they are better than the sons of God of Genesis 6, Solomon, Samson, and King Jehoshaphat; they can develop strong relationships with people of the world and escape unscathed. Unlike others, **they** don’t need to be prudent.

3. Also, don't worry about HOW you date.

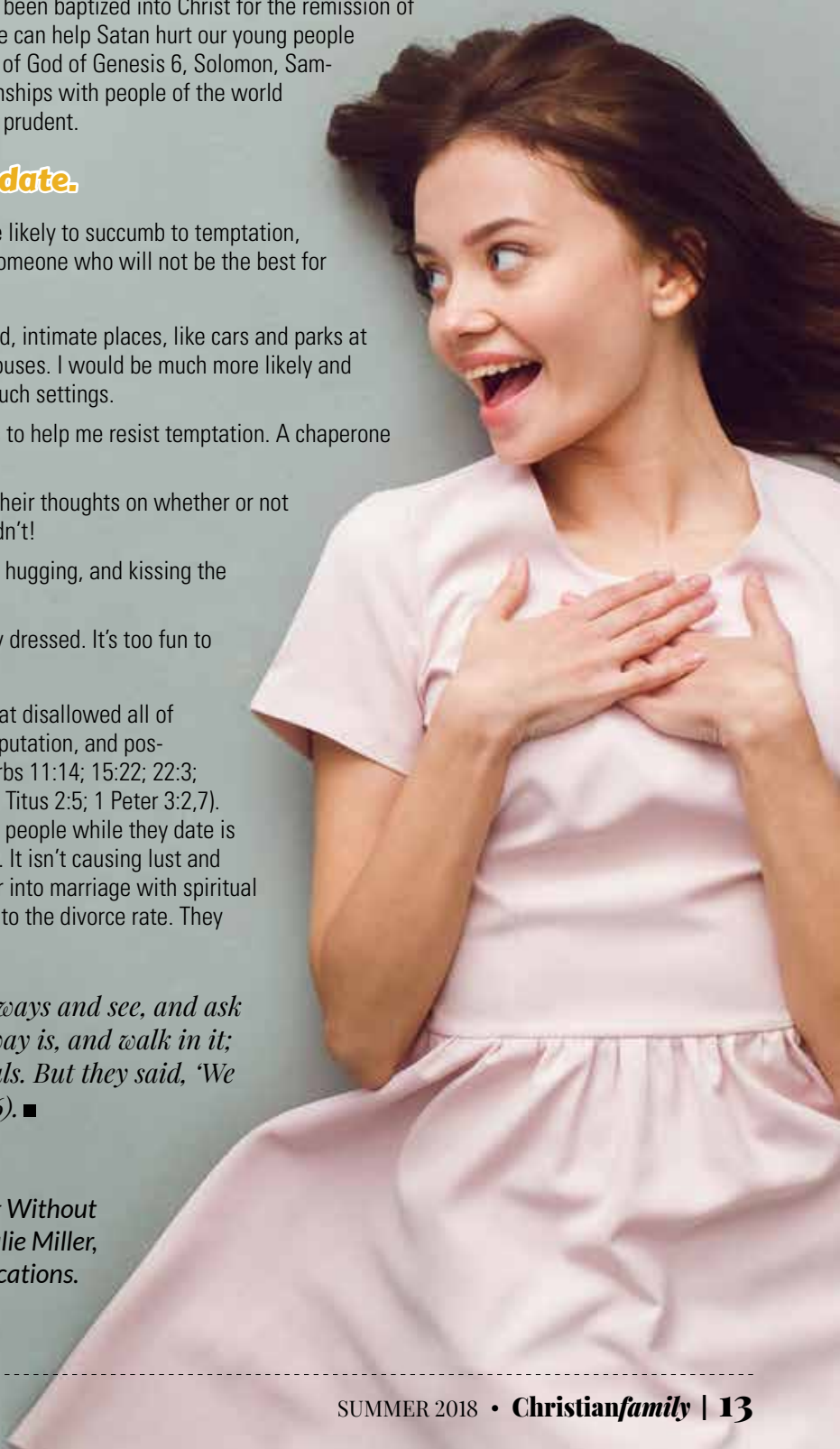
If I wanted to date in such a way that I would be much more likely to succumb to temptation, destroy my Christian reputation, and become serious with someone who will not be the best for me spiritually, what would I do?

- I would not date in public. I would seek dark or secluded, intimate places, like cars and parks at night, dark movie theaters, and empty apartments or houses. I would be much more likely and able to lust and engage in lewd and sexual activity in such settings.
- I would not have a “chaperone” with me in such places to help me resist temptation. A chaperone would just be in the way of me indulging my flesh.
- I would not bring my date to meet my parents and get their thoughts on whether or not I should pursue him/her. After all, they may say I shouldn’t!
- I would be as physical as I can be—the more touching, hugging, and kissing the better. It feels good to get my hormones stirred up.
- I would not be concerned about a girl being immodestly dressed. It’s too fun to look at her in lust and covetousness.

Many “Christian” societies have had dating “proprieties” that disallowed all of the above behavior for the protection of a couple’s purity, reputation, and posterity. Those principles were based on Scripture (e.g., Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 22:3; Matthew 5:16,28; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 10:12; 2 Timothy 2:22; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:2,7). So, a third way we can help Satan spiritually hurt our young people while they date is to tell them that the modern way of dating is not dangerous. It isn’t causing lust and pre-marital sex to skyrocket. It isn’t causing couples to enter into marriage with spiritual scars that generate relationship insecurities that contribute to the divorce rate. They don’t need to be prudent.

Thus says the Lord: “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’” (Jeremiah 6:16). ■

For more information, see *Dating Without Detonating* by Jeff Miller, with Julie Miller, at <http://www.kingsolomonpublications.org/?p=60>.



children.

by Rebeca Mears

Two Brothers With Different Attitudes

Imagine two young men, waking up early in the morning and excited about giving their first offering to God. I am sure that both had received the necessary instruction—whether directly by God or from their parents—on the kind of offering that was pleasing to the Lord (Hebrews 11:4).

These two young men were brothers; the oldest was Cain, and he was a tiller of the ground; the youngest was Abel, and he was a keeper of sheep. They were the children of Adam and Eve, the first human couple God created in the beginning.

Despite the knowledge both had concerning the offerings to God (Genesis 4:7), Cain decided to worship God according to his own will when bringing his offering to Him. He brought an

offering from the fruit of the ground, while Abel brought an offering from the firstborn of his flock. The Bible clarifies that the shedding of blood (in this case of an animal) was necessary as an offering for forgiveness of sins (Hebrews 9:22).

Do you think God was pleased with both offerings? “And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering” (Genesis 4:4-5). Because of this, Cain became furious and envious toward his brother to the point of hate. But not only this, Cain was also angry toward God instead of acknowledging his error!

God knew what Cain felt in his heart; He knows our hearts—what we feel and think all the time (Luke 16:15). But God loved Cain and gave him the opportunity to change his wrong attitude. He told him: “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?” (Genesis 4:6-7). He also warned him that sin would enslave him if he did not repent.

Instead of listening to God, Cain was filled with pride and ignored God’s warnings. His hate against his brother grew stronger, and one day he decided to deceive his brother and kill him (vs. 8). God confronted Cain for his sin, but he did not feel any remorse for what he had done. God punished Cain with a life of increased toil and wandering in the land (vs. 12). Certainly, Cain’s actions caused much pain to God.

What can we learn from this story?

God cares about our heart.

God cared about what was in Cain’s heart. In the same way, He cares about what is in ours. Therefore, we are to give our offerings and service to God with all of our heart.

Today, our offering is not a dead animal, but ourselves. Paul wrote in Romans 12:1: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.”

This means that we are to give the best of us to God—the adequate time He deserves, the daily service and good testimony among others, the reading and teaching of His Word, the constant prayer to the heavenly Father, the regu-



lar communion with His church, and the use of our talents for the extension of His kingdom.

Bad actions have inevitable consequences.

God did not overlook Cain’s sin; his sin had serious consequences. The land would not produce for him the fruit as before, and he was to wander in the land in fear of someone taking his life. Although Cain did not understand the seriousness of his sin, he did understand the seriousness of his punishment (Genesis 4:13).

If we let hatred enter our hearts, we will do things we never imagined doing. Hatred blinds us completely and sows revenge in our hearts. In this life, we may be able to avoid some of the consequences of our bad actions, but if we do not change and begin to do God’s will, we will reap terrible consequences for eternity (Matthew 25:46).

God allows us free will.

As in the case of Cain and Abel, God allows us free will to choose between right and wrong; and even though He wants for us to choose what is right, we are responsible for this choice.

God wants us, as good children, to obey our parents; and if we have done something wrong in a given time, he wants for us to ask for forgiveness and to change. He does not want us to feel

hatred toward others, but to love each other mutually, and especially our own families. This is a choice we are to make to please God (Matthew 22:37-39).

These two brothers had different attitudes: Cain sought to do his own will and fill his heart with hate; Abel sought to do God’s will and fill his heart with love. What will you choose? ■

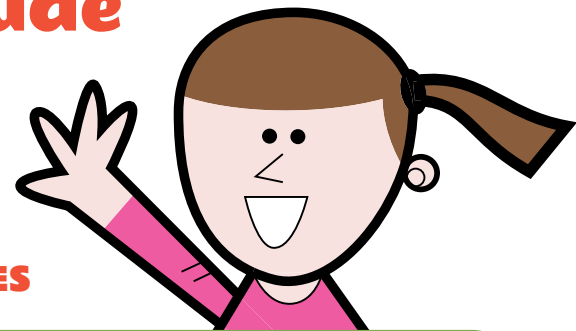


All illustrations in this spread by Ella Pinedo (age 10)

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Choosing the Right Attitude

Having the right attitude is about learning to control your mind and feelings. Circle the right attitude for the following events. If you need help, ask your parents or your Bible teacher.



EVENTS

ATTITUDES

Your parents ask you to do something	Do it now	Wait until later
You did something wrong	Hide it	Confess it
Your class is going over time	Be patient	Leave now
Someone does something for you	Say, “Thanks”	Say, “I deserve it”
Someone corrects you	Say, “I don’t care”	Say, “Sorry”
Someone advises you	Say, “Thanks”	Say, “I know”
Someone is rude to you	Keep calm	Get mad
Things aren’t going well	Get desperate	Pray about it

questions.

Q&A

Q: How do we provoke our children to wrath?

—AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

To a large degree, that depends on the child. Dads tend to expect too much from their children. When children cannot “perform” up to Dad’s expectations and he reacts, then children get mad. On the other hand, Moms tend to expect too little from their children. Moms sometimes act as if children cannot do certain things when they can do them. So, we provoke our children to wrath by expecting too much or too little. We also provoke to wrath when we “tease” too much and when we fail to accept children’s teasing for what it is. So, moderation is the best way not to provoke children to wrath! —PH

Q: According to 1 Corinthians 7:9, can a person who divorced his/her spouse for a cause other than adultery marry if he/she cannot exercise self-control?

—CHIAPAS, MEXICO

In 1 Corinthians 7:9, Paul was not giving an additional exception to divorce with the right to remarry. Jesus had already sentenced in Matthew 19:9 that the innocent party could divorce and remarry **only** if his/her spouse had committed adultery against him/her.

The context clarifies the group allowed to marry. In the previous verse, Paul wrote: “But I say to the unmarried and to the widows...” (1 Corinthians 7:8). He was not talking about those divorced

for any reasons, but those who were **free of any ties** to marry or remarry. On the other hand, in verse 11, Paul talked about a case where a wife separates from her husband when adultery is not the cause, and his inspired sentence was in accordance with our Lord’s: “let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband.” No, 1 Corinthians 7:9 does not constitute another exception for remarriage. Those divorced for unscriptural reasons must exercise self-control as a person who never married must do the same to please the Lord. —MP

Q: In what sense did Jesus come to bring conflict and enmity in the family (Matthew 10:34-36)?

—TOLUCA, MEXICO

Jesus, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), the Lamb of Peace (Acts 8:32), the Teacher of Peace (Matthew 5), and the Redeemer of Peace (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:14-18) came to bring conflict and enmity in the sense that His Gospel of Peace (Romans 10:15) is not necessarily popular in this hostile word, and thus, can generate opposition—even from people who are the closest to us. This is clearly seen in the life of our Lord, Who was betrayed by a “friend” (Matthew 26:50), and Paul, who was forsaken by fellow laborers (2 Timothy 4:10,16).

To obey the Gospel of Peace, a person may have to leave behind a family inherited false religion, an illicit relationship, and worldly

companions and habits. This, of course, will cause friction with relatives who are set in their ways. Those of us with family members outside of the Lord, may testify to the fact that these relatives may be among the toughest people to reach with the Gospel (cf. Mark 6:4; John 7:5). —MP

Q: Should I punish my children physically for not obeying, or is verbal reproach enough?

—ALAJUELA, COSTA RICA

The Bible clearly teaches physical punishment (Proverbs 10:13; 13:24;

22:15; 23:13-14; 26:3; 29:15). We should never strike our children when we have lost control of ourselves. Physical punishment should not leave permanent scars, draw blood, break the skin, etc. All it needs to do is inflict enough pain that the child does not want to experience it again. Slapping the hand of a very small child who grabs your eyeglasses is a good starting point. But, many children respond well to verbal reproach or other means of punishment, such as taking away privileges, “time out,” etc. Know your child and discipline appropriately. —PH

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