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What a wonderful opportunity God has given us to influence the world for good through our families! Despite many challenges, the Rucker family is committed to doing this by raising their children to fulfill their God-given roles. Be encouraged and spiritually refreshed by this family's story in the featured section of this issue.

This issue will also help families to instruct their children to find a mate who will aid them in their goal to get to heaven, spouses to continue to grow in their marriage while raising their children, parents to consider God's sublime ideal for parenting and happiness for children, women to ponder God's great love for all of us, young people to find their real value and identity in Christ, and children to learn how to start shining their little lights.

May the Lord be with you as you guide your family toward heaven's goal.

Paul Holland & Moisés Pinedo

Christianfamily

Helping families become stronger in the Lord

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DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES IN GENESIS...

A Wife for Isaac

by Eric Welch

family.

What advice would you give a young Christian for dating? Only date people you would want to marry? Makes sense. The purpose of dating, after all, is marriage, right? Whom would a faithful Christian want to date for marriage? I hope the answer is obvious. But how does a Christian find the right person? The answer is easy: do it God's way. If you want to avoid a rocky marriage and a dysfunctional family, learn to make the distinction between good and evil. God does that. Before you begin to date, determine that you will only date someone who loves God and shuns evil. The book of Genesis provides an excellent opportunity to study the importance of making distinctions. I call it "the distinction principle."

Moses wrote Genesis during the 40 years in the desert. The children of Israel were recovering from oppressive slavery in Egypt. They needed a refresher course on Who God is and who they were. Genesis provides an inspired history of Israel's beginning and how God brought it about. He made distinctions, separating good from evil. In fact, Genesis ends with the Israelites coming to live in Egypt. For centuries, they remained a distinct people from their pagan Egyptian hosts.

Genesis reminded Israel how the God of their ancestors made distinctions. They learned right from the first chapter. God Himself is distinct from creation because He is its Creator. He divided light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below, and the land from the sea. On the sixth day, God made the first human pair after His own image, distinct from all other creatures. The text bears out two ways in which humans are like God: rule and unity. God delegated to them the dominion over the animal kingdom. Also, this couple could become one flesh in marriage and produce children. Only the heterosexual union can reflect the creative image and glory of God.

Genesis shows two examples in which distinctions were made regarding marriage. In Genesis 6, the sons of God chose poorly and married the daughters of men. The result of this mixing good and evil was great wickedness. Because God could no longer bear it, He brought the great flood as judgment. No fellowship can exist between light and darkness (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:14).

The second story from Genesis 24 is about esteemed father Abraham. Abraham understood the principle of making distinctions. To find a wife for Isaac, he commissioned his chief servant: "Please, put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell; but you shall go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac" (vss. 2-4). Abraham knew that the Canaanites did not worship the living God. [Centuries later, God forbade His people to marry Canaanites, so that they would not be led astray by false gods (Exodus 34:15-16; Deuteronomy 7:3-5)]. Abraham had made a distinction between the Canaanites and his family. He wanted to protect Isaac, his long-promised son. Furthermore, Abraham passed along this principle to Isaac, who, in turn, taught his sons Jacob and Esau not to take wives from the Canaanite women (Genesis 27:46; 28:6-9). However, Esau did not heed that advice, and his choice caused family dysfunction (26:34-35; 36:2).

Arranged marriages in Abraham's culture were different from ours. Of course, we do not choose a certain person for our children, as God's providence chose Rebecca (Genesis 24:15). But parents can still "arrange" marriage by praying for their children. They can teach them to choose good and to shun evil. Will their choice of a marriage partner lead them to heaven or hell? ■

parenting.

by Moisés Pinedo

GAY PARENTS, HAPPY KIDS?

As our society continues its shameful descent toward widespread immorality, lifestyles that once were censured are now being tolerated, welcomed, and even celebrated. This is the case with homosexuality. In our present day, not only homosexuality is advanced as a healthy choice of living for consenting adults, but, in some cases, as a “better alternative” for every aspect of life. In fact, the world is anxious to tell us about the “great benefits of homosexuality,” even for families.

A few years ago, my wife was taking my daughters to their regular visit to the local library. She found some books for the girls and picked out a couple of magazines for herself. One magazine was an issue of *Parents*, a leading publication offering parenting advice from the “experts.” As she read some articles, she stumbled on one with the following propaganda under the title, “Gay Parents, Happy Kids”:

Children raised by two lesbian moms grow into psychologically healthy teens and have fewer behavioral problems than those born into a traditional family structure, according

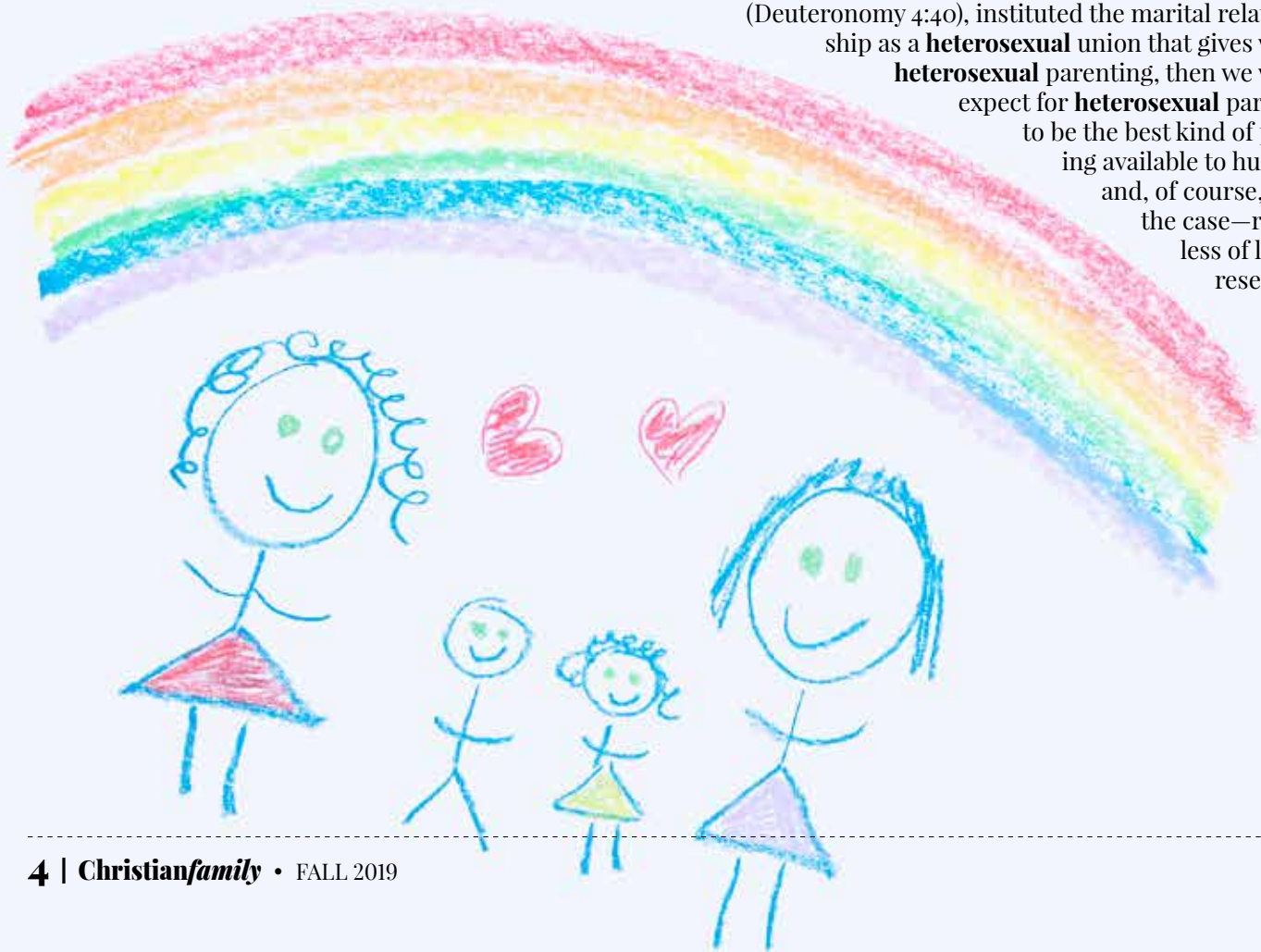
to recent research. “A possible reason for our findings is that the pairs of mothers shared parenting and household responsibilities. And even if moms separated, most couples continued to coparent,” says study coauthor Nanette Gartrell, M.D., associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, San Francisco.¹

There you have it. Now the “wisdom” of the world suggests that gay parenting is superior to traditional parenting—parenting composed of a father and mother based on marriage’s original design as found in the Bible (Genesis 2:24).

Is gay parenting **really** better than, or at least equal to, traditional parenting? And what should the Christian response be concerning “findings” like this?

Take a deeper look at the research.

If the God of heaven, Who gives commandments and statutes for our well-being and that of our children (Deuteronomy 4:40), instituted the marital relationship as a **heterosexual** union that gives way to **heterosexual** parenting, then we would expect for **heterosexual** parenting to be the best kind of parenting available to humanity; and, of course, this is the case—regardless of liberal research.



In the case of the research at hand, *Parents* did not even provide the original source, neither the number of “families” involved, nor the process used in the research. This lack of information casts serious doubt on the credibility of this report.

Additionally, suspicion increases when we consider that Nanette Gartrell, coauthor of the study, is an active advocate of lesbianism, and lesbian herself, who has been “married” for several years to Dee Mosbacher—another lesbian activist and filmmaker of movies saturated with pro-gay content.² Gartrell’s studies heavily focus on same-sex families, seeking to establish the homosexual family as a healthy (and even better) alternative to traditional family structure. Then, what should someone expect from her “findings”? In fact, this is not the first time that she and her peers have come up with this kind of news.³

Take a deeper look at the benefits.

From time to time, we hear or read about the “benefits” of things the Bible condemns. Some tell us that drinking fermented wine is good for the heart, gambling is good for our economy and educational system, abortion is good for women and overpopulation, and even gossiping is good for overall health.⁴ The truth is that this world, desperate to indulge in sin, can find “benefits” for anything.

According to this study, children from lesbian moms grow into psychologically healthier teens than those born into traditional families. Of course, the catch is that liberal-minded researchers are the ones who get to decide who is a “psychologically healthier teen.” For them, children who grow to be “open minded” about homosexuality and are more prompt to involve themselves in homosexuality (as another research from the same author indicates),⁵ are teens with healthier psychological views. You can see the vicious cycle. This is just another case showing that the world is inadequate to judge what is right and healthy (cf. Isaiah 5:20).

The sensationalist title (“Gay Parents, Happy Kids”) also suggests that the “key of success” of such families is their homosexual arrangement. Another of Satan’s subtle lies! Are there atheists who can raise children who are considered “healthy” by modern society? Is their atheism the key of their “success”? Are there children from alcoholic or drug addict parents who grow to be “healthy” teens by modern society? The internet is full of those stories. Then, should there be an article titled, “Alcoholic Parents, Happy Kids”?

Take a deeper look at the Bible.

New “findings” like this change with a different agenda, but the Word of God endures forever (1 Peter 1:25). We cannot let the “wisdom” of the

world make us believe that its way is better than God’s. We cannot think for a minute that their immoral alternatives are better for our families and children. We cannot let the world sear our minds to tolerate, approve, or practice such lifestyles contrary to God’s will. We cannot let the world make us believe that our children can enjoy happiness in the absence of holiness. When Jeremiah preached to the Jews in Egypt, they said:

As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will not listen to you! But we will certainly do whatever has gone out of our own mouth, to burn incense to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. For then we had plenty of food, were well-off, and saw no trouble (44:16-17).

If Dr. Gartrell had conducted a research study on these people and *Parents* magazine would have promoted her research, the title would have read: “Idolatrous Parents, Happy Kids.” In fact, these people claimed to enjoy “happiness” as a product of the idolatrous way they had inherited from their parents, but this is not the kind of happiness God offers (Psalm 32:11; Ecclesiastes 2:26; cf. Hosea 9:1).

In a world that applauds sin, we should remember that God’s Word condemns homosexuality (Romans 1:26-27; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). Therefore, those who engage in homosexuality will be excluded from eternal bliss unless they repent (cf. Matthew 25:21,23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We should not buy into the world’s lies to approve what God condemns, but we should remind and help our children understand that true happiness is the result of following God’s loving guidelines for our homes and lives (Deuteronomy 4:40; 6:1-3,17-18). ■

1. “Gay Parents, Happy Kids” (2011), *Parents*, January, p. 29.
2. “Nanette Gartrell, M.D.” (2010), NLLFS, <http://www.nllfs.org/about/nanette-gartrell/>; “About Woman Vision” (2010), Woman Vision, <http://www.womanvision.org/about.html>.
3. “Publications” (2010), NLLFS, <http://www.nllfs.org/publications/>.
4. Matthews, Rachel (2017), “Gossiping Is Good for Your Health?” *The Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/gossiping-good-health-saying-years/>.
5. Gartrell, Nanette, et al. (2010), “Adolescents of the U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study,” NLLFS, <http://www.nllfs.org/images/uploads/pdf/NLLFS-adolescents-sexuality-2010.pdf>.

marriage.



There are four main concepts in the cosmos: (1) Matter, (2) energy, (3) space, and (4) time. Interestingly, we can find an analogy between the cosmos and the home—since the home is composed of people (matter), dependency (energy), freedom (space), and opportunity (time).

God established marriage in the beginning (Genesis 1:26–28), and with this institution He ensured humanity’s survival through procreation. Children are the product of that union (between a man and a woman), and therefore are considered a “heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3). But if there is not an adequate understanding of the children’s place in the “family cosmos,” the functioning of marriage may be adversely affected. What family lessons can we learn from the four main concepts in the cosmos?

MATTER

Children occupy an important place in the home. As people, they think, feel, and have economical needs to be met. The Bible teaches that parents are to provide materially for their children (cf. Matthew 7:9–11); but children may become a “bottomless pit” if not taught the value of money. Many parents have a goal to give their children **everything** they did not have, and that effort turns out to be a strain on the marriage. Statistics show that financial issues are a main cause of divorce—in some cases surpassing the number of divorces due to unfaithfulness or physical abuse.¹

Knowing this, spouses should have the same mind concerning the financial aspects of the home—taking into

account what God says in His Word concerning material things (e.g., Matthew 6:24; 1 Timothy 6:8–10). Additionally, some practical advice should be followed: (1) Set a budget for the children, so they can learn to use money—giving to the church, honoring parents, and helping those in need (Acts 20:35). (2) Communicate between each other concerning substantial expenses. A spouse should talk to the other to determine the suitability of some expenses. (3) Save whenever is possible. Expending every time there is money should be avoided. Children should be taught that they cannot always have what they want; if they do not learn this lesson at an early age, life will teach them the hard way. (4) If possible, set a budget to invest in the marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:28–29).

ENERGY

Parents exert a great amount of effort raising their children. Mary and Joseph made a considerable effort to protect Baby Jesus (Matthew 2:13–14, 19–23). Children demand a great amount of energy, not only to ensure their physical well-being, but also to ensure their personal and spiritual training. Many fathers end their day without a drop of energy after working outside the home and coming back to spend time with their children. Mothers also use their energies in managing the home—cleaning, cooking, and teaching the children. Taking care of children, especially if the home is full of them, can be exhausting. This can affect the relationship between spouses. They must learn to channel their energy, seeking God in prayer (Isaiah 40:29). They must learn to delegate duties to the children according to their age, such as cleaning their rooms, folding their clothes, fixing their own cereal in the

THE FAMILY COSMOS AND THE MARRIAGE

THE CHALLENGE OF RAISING CHILDREN WITHOUT NEGLECTING THE MARRIAGE

by Daniel & Tatiana Jaramillo

morning, and taking care of their younger siblings. This will give them a part in the responsibilities of the home and a sense of usefulness (Hebrews 13:16). If there are adult children still living at home, then they should help with some of the family's expenses.

SPACE

Space is getting more reduced in our time, particularly for those who live in big cities with small houses and apartments. Concerning the home, some parents do not know how to allow "space" for their children in order not to affect their marriage. Sometimes they overprotect their children, refusing to separate from them even for a minute.

Parents need to learn to protect their own marital space, and at the same time give space to their children. It is true that they must give valuable time to their children, especially in training and admonition (Ephesians 6:4), but they also need to allow them to interact with others and put into practice the training they have provided for them in the home. This will allow continuous growth in the marriage relationship.

TIME

Time is the aspect of life that "flies" at a high speed. One of the greatest gifts parents can give their children is time. But, as all other forces in the family cosmos, poor management of time can negatively affect the marriage. When someone is single, all the time is available for the Lord and that person (1 Corinthians 7:32). Marriage adds a new

dimension, and then time is divided between God and the spouse (1 Corinthians 7:33-34). When children come, time becomes scarcer, especially when they are newborns and need constant attention. During that stage, marriage can suffer due to lack of communication, intimacy, and personal and spiritual growth. Colossians 4:5 admonishes us to redeem time. Although the context of this passage is our relationship with those who are not Christians, we can apply the spiritual principle to the home. Parents should set some time apart for themselves (without their children)—to go to a restaurant, watch a movie, do some exercise, etc. Children must learn that parents need time alone, and that the constant growth of their marriage relationship is important to the general well-being of the family.

Marriage and parenthood are blessings from God in which He manifests His glory and fulfills His plans (Hebrews 13:4; Psalm 127:5). Parents and spouses should follow His advice to fulfill their divinely appointed roles. Let us ask God for wisdom (James 1:5) and let us practice the lessons offered by the Word of God. Doing so will make our family's load easier to carry (cf. Matthew 11:28-30). ■

1. See the studies of Dew, Jeffrey and Robert Stewart (2012), "A Financial Issue, a Relationship Issue, or Both?" *Journal of Financial Therapy*, <https://newprairiepress.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1020&context=jft>; Copur, Zeynep (2014), "The Relationship Between Financial Issues and Marital Relationship," *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 7:683-698.

women.

Lucky
in Love

by Elizabeth Jiménez

I am lucky. I am lucky because in a time full of failed relationships, I have a husband who loves me more now than on the day we married. Recently, as we celebrated our ten-year anniversary, I told him he loves me more than I deserve. And it hit me: God loves each and every one of us more than we deserve!

Sometimes it is difficult to comprehend how my husband can love me so much in spite of all my crazy faults and defects, and it is also difficult to comprehend God's amazing love for us.

No matter what we do wrong or how many times we fail, God will forgive us if we only ask with a humble heart. He loves us so much, in fact, that He gave "His only begotten Son" to die on the cross so that we might have forgiveness of our sins (John 3:16). Most parents would rather sacrifice themselves for their children than watch their children suffer, but God permitted this ultimate sacrifice because of His bountiful love towards us.

Paul considered himself a "chief sinner" (1 Timothy 1:15), yet he understood that the grace of God is greater than all sins. In 2 Corinthians 12:9, He stated, "And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." He also stated in Ephesians 3:8, "To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given..." God understands our weaknesses better than anyone, and He will love us even when we make mistakes.

No matter what your current relationship status, there is One that all of us need to submit to, and that is Christ Jesus our Lord. In Revelation 21:9, Christ is described as the bridegroom of the church. Just as He and the Father love us unconditionally, we owe them all of our love, as well. Most marriages consist of vows, a promise to love each other "in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until death do us part." We need to vow to "take up our cross" (Luke 9:23) and follow Jesus, put Him first, and love Him, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Think back to middle school and all the foolish things you did so that certain boy would notice you. Perhaps you walked out of your way in hopes of running into him, changed the way you talked around him, or even changed the way you looked by wearing attractive clothing and makeup. Christ is a bridegroom who should receive our full time and attention. If we are going to impress anyone, it is Him. As soon as we wake up in the morning, we should dress in a way that He will be proud of us—not ashamed. We should make time for prayer and Bible study. We should make it a priority to help those in need and show them the same love that He has shown

us. We should guard our tongues and speak in defense of Him. We should fight to preserve this precious relationship with our Savior the same way we would fight to save a wavering marriage.

Once we start to understand just how much God loves us and show Him the same love in return, we will reap the benefits—day after day. First Peter 5:6-7 states, "humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." Even in the most challenging times, we can take comfort in remembering that God cares for us. Likewise, on the days that it seems everyone is only bringing us down, we should remember that, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). Which of your friends—or even your husband—can you talk to at any time of the day and know that they will listen 100%? Sometimes we may feel all alone, but we can pour out our hearts to Him, and He will hear us—no exceptions! Can you imagine how glorious it will feel, after a period of waiting and longsuffering, when He "exalts" us? First Peter 5:10 states, "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

There will be difficulties, hardships, and even suffering throughout our lives. But our God can take those hardships and mold them into something more wonderful than we ever thought possible.

I am lucky, but so are you! We are lucky enough to be called God's children, to have a God Who loves us more than we could ever fully comprehend, and a God Who will reward us at the right time. Maybe you are in a rocky relationship, a period of recovery, or nothing at all. All of us have at least One Who will love us unconditionally. When we mess up, when we feel sorry for ourselves, or when we act without thinking, He will still be there to love us and help us see it through. Let us not live our lives in a way that we take for granted how lucky we are to be so loved. Instead, let us embrace this love every day with open arms and a receptive heart.

Once we start to understand just how much God loves us and show Him the same love in return, we will reap the benefits—day after day.

featured.

the Ruckers

Erick grew up in Tennessee, and Mendy grew up in Missouri and Texas. They met at Freed-Hardeman in 1997, where Erick majored in Business and Mendy in Elementary Education. They were married in 2000. They lived in the Nashville area from 2000 to 2003, where Erick earned his Masters from Lipscomb and Mendy taught school at Friendship Christian School. They moved to the Dallas area in 2003, where Erick has worked at AT&T for 16 years and Mendy has been a homeschool mom and homemaker.

They have three children, Michael (14), Lilly (12), and Emma (8). Michael and Emma are both healthy children, while Lilly has severe disabilities and medical concerns, including epilepsy. The Ruckers attend the Centerville Road church of Christ, where Erick and Mendy are Bible class teachers and Erick serves as a deacon. Even though they have a special-needs daughter like Lilly, they are still able to be involved and active within their local congregation and at home because of Lilly's nurses/caregivers and Mendy's parents, who live close by. Some of the activities they help coordinate for their local congregation include the Lads to Leaders program, a local Summer Youth Series program, service projects, retreats and seminars, and men's breakfast.

R

Loving your

CHILDREN

for their unique talents/strengths

Would you briefly let us know how life in your family was before God blessed you with your children?

Before kids, we were working, laboring with a church family, and getting to know each other. We were also learning how to go from being two separate individuals to doing things together as a couple. We only had to learn to compromise on things like what groceries to buy, what congregation to attend, or how to spend money.

In which ways have your children changed your family?

Once we started having children, most individual preferences and schedules changed. We no longer worried only about our own desires and goals; we were now looking out for someone for whom we both were equally passionate. Overnight, children became one of our top priorities, which totally changed our passions and outlook on life. Committing ourselves to the common purpose of getting our children to heaven helped us realize that life is not about making ourselves happy or looking out for self-interests.

In which ways have your children shaped your view of God?

Having children of our own and knowing the great love we have for them enabled us to view God more as a Father and better understand His love for us. We also went from thinking about God in terms of what He could do for us to thinking of Him as a loving Father Who wants what is best for us. Having children helped us see why God would rather teach and discipline us to become like Him than

pacify us with things that give immediate gratification.

In which ways have your children influenced those around you?

We believe God has given our children a unique opportunity to influence others. No one can help but notice and be drawn to our medically fragile daughter, Lilly. As a result, Michael and Emma are also constantly on display as we walk through the shopping center, eat together at a restaurant, or worship together with our church family. They have embraced this opportunity to let their love and compassion for their sister shine through, and others are touched by their actions.

What have you learned as parents from raising a boy and two daughters?

Through our children, we have learned that, even though girls and boys are different, they both possess the capacity and spirit to love God and others. While boys, including Michael, are typically interested in "guy things" like cars, mowing, sports, etc., they have a tender heart

and love their mom, dad, and God with passion. We have learned that boys need a strong male influence in their lives to show them how to fulfill the role God has given men. Girls like Emma, who love dolls, puppies, crafts, and dressing up, can also be strong in their love for God, their family, and their friends. Having daughters, in a society that wants to blur God's roles for women, has taught us the importance of the sentiment found in Titus 2:3-5—that the older women should teach the younger women.

What have you learned as parents from raising a daughter with special needs?

Because Lilly is often confined to home, we have learned what a blessing it is to have a home-centered life. Being at home more has enabled our family to focus on spending quality time together, family Bible study, hosting others in our home, or just being able to sit around the dinner table and talk. Throughout Lilly's journey, we have grown to see that God gave our family the privilege and responsibility of being part of her purpose in this life. The way we love and care for her, along with how we cope with the challenges she presents, has become a fantastic opportunity for us to show Christ through our outlook, attitude, and actions.

Understanding that children with special needs require much time and attention, how do you manage to give each child the time and attention he/she requires?

While Lilly demands extra time and effort, we try to combine her care with spending time with Michael or Emma. We may read a book to Emma while holding Lilly, or play basketball with Michael while Lilly sits in the shade. We also make an extra effort to bring Lilly to church or social events, so our other kids can participate while knowing their family is together. The blessing of having grandparents nearby enables Michael and Emma to receive extra attention. We are also able to leave Lilly with them occasionally so we can take the other kids on a trip or somewhere special. Because Lilly's condition often demands that we meet her needs first, our kids have learned that giving preference to others is more rewarding than fulfilling their own desires.

What are some of the things you do to raise your son and daughters in their God-intended roles?

From an early age, we have encouraged Emma to prepare to be a worker in the home and in the church. By spending

time helping her mother, grandmother, and other godly church women, she has developed a love for writing notes of encouragement, sewing gifts for others, helping to make food for shut-ins and visiting with the elderly. Also, she and Michael participate in the Lads to Leaders "Keepers" and "Providers" activities, which encourage older men and women to teach them skills needed to perform their God-given roles. Michael is also encouraged to join his dad and granddad as they perform church work or "guy" hobbies. He leads singing, gives lessons, visits with the elderly and helps them with chores and yard work.

Would you like to share with us any of your children's unique talents/strengths?

Our children's unique talents and strengths for which we are proudest are the ones that have come about because of their connection to Lilly. They are both very compassionate towards other children and anyone with a special need. They understand how important it is that everyone feel valued and included and have a special heart towards—and will stand up for—anyone who might seem different. ■



The world sets its own standard for what makes a person valuable. As young people, we are often told that if we do not have a certain amount of money, wear a certain type of clothes, speak or act a certain way, or have certain friends, we are less valuable than someone who does. Society routinely defines us by our appearance, our intelligence, our education, our relationships, and our achievements. Sometimes even our families or the church define us by these characteristics.

But if we want to determine how to define ourselves, God's view of us is the only one that matters. What does God say is the source of our worth?

Self-worth, when it's understood as worth derived from the **self**, is a misnomer. In order to have worth derived from yourself, you'd have to create yourself, which is impossible. Rather, it is God Who made us and gave us worth.

Genesis 1:27 reads, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them." We are made in the image of an all-good, all-powerful, loving, and perfect God. Why, then, do we still struggle with our worth and confidence?

The answer is simple: because of the work of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they became ashamed and tried to hide

themselves from God. Humans today spend a lot of time trying to cover our sense of guilt and lack of worth with the appearance of wealth, strength, status, and the world's definition of worthiness.

But these appearances only mask the real problem, which is a damaged relationship with God. Romans 3:10-11 says, "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.'" How do we, who have become enemies of God through sin, restore our relationship with Him and, through that, our worth?

It's all in what God has done for us. God, knowing that our sinfulness separated us from Him, sent His perfect Son to be the sacrifice for our sins and to give us worth and beauty in the eyes of the Father. It's in this new relationship with God, our status as His daughters and fellow heirs with Jesus, that we can find our worth and confidence.

Romans 12:3-5 is the perfect passage on accurately viewing our importance in the eyes of God. Paul writes,

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.

Paul was teaching Christians to consider all the facts about themselves, the good and the bad, and use what they have to make something better, all in service to God. The reason we ought to use sober judgment is found in verses 4-5, which says that we are all members of one body.

God made and designed us after His image and, just like the members of a body, we fit like puzzle pieces into each other. When we use sober judgment to view ourselves and our worth, we realize that society's lens is not accurate. Let us look at ourselves, and others, through God's eyes. Use eyes of faith, knowing that God can work through all of us for His glory. Remember that though there are many members, we are all connected to the body of Christ, and that is the greatest value any person can have. ■



An identity connected to **JESUS**

by Paul Holland

It is a normal practice in life to identify ourselves based on what we do or a relationship which we have. If someone asked you, "Who are you?" you would probably respond, "I'm Wayne's son," or, "I'm a preacher," or, "I'm a student at such-and-such university," or, "I'm an American." Those are normal responses, which vary depending on the context in which we are asked the question, "Who are you?"

There is a problem, however, when we identify ourselves **primarily** or **initially** in those terms. The reason is because many of the ways in which we identify ourselves are temporary and can be taken from us. For example, if I identify myself **primarily** as an employee, say a school teacher, then if I lose my job for some reason, my self-esteem can get hurt substantially. It gets hurt even worse if I have trouble replacing my

job. Imagine you had a job that required a certain amount of physical activity, such as a construction worker. Then, imagine you lost some physical aspect of your health that was necessary for that work. Now, you are not only out of a job, but you have no way of getting another job in that field.

Who are you?

Let's answer that question from a spiritual perspective. A Christian has been baptized into Christ and through that action has become **united together** with Christ (Romans 6:5). The Christian lives, walks, breathes, moves "in Christ Jesus." In Colossians 2:6, Paul told Christians, "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him." Every Christian should find his or her identity **primarily** and **initially** in Jesus Christ. What that means is that our **first** response to the question, "Who are you?", should be: "I am a Christian" or "I am a child of God."

Scan through the New Testament letters and observe how the inspired writers first identified themselves: "Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1), "Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:1), "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 1:1), "James,

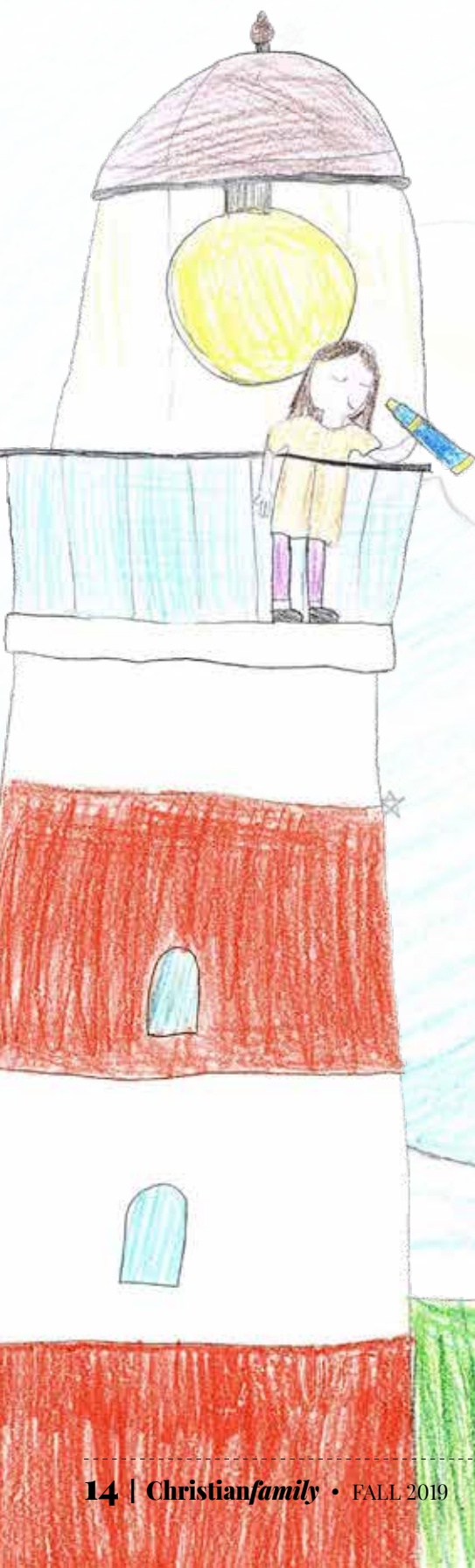
a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1), "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:1), "Jude a bondservant of Jesus Christ" (Jude 1). Notice how each of these men identified himself primarily in terms of his relationship with Jesus Christ.

Identifying with Christ is more than just saying the words, "I'm a Christian." It means that I **identify** first with Jesus Christ. I begin my day with Him, and I try to allow His heart, mind, teachings, and actions to come through my life every day.

What happens, then, if I am a construction worker and have an injury that keeps me from doing **that** job? I tell myself, "I'm a child of God. **He** will provide for my needs." If I experience a death in my family, I tell myself, "I'm a child of God. **He** will see me through this." If I experience a divorce, I tell myself, "I'm a child of God. **He** will never leave me."

If you want your identity to be connected to Jesus, then keep Him at the center of your life and your decisions. When you say, "I'm a Christian," it will mean something. ■





As children, we sing “This Little Light of Mine” often. But, have you ever stopped to think about what the words in this song mean? Let’s take a closer look at each verse.

Verse 1: “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.”

First of all, what is our light? Sometimes Sunday school teachers use a light switch or flashlight when leading this song, but the song is not talking about that kind of light. Instead, this light is God in us. How do we let our light “shine”? By showing others we have God in us through the way we act, speak, and dress.

For example, we can smile, open doors for others, say “please” and “thank you”, and choose good words. Psalms 19:14 reads: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.” First Timothy 4:12 reads: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

So, you might be wondering, “How can I let my light shine in the way I dress?” Glad you asked! If we dress like the world does, with inappropriate pictures or words on clothing, exposed undergarments, or parts of skin showing that shouldn’t be (short shorts, crop tops, low cut tops, or tight clothing), we show that we are no different than the world. So, by **not** dressing like the world, we set

ourselves apart. First Corinthians 6:19-20 reads: “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” Matthew 5:16 reads: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Verse 2: “Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine.”

A bushel refers to a basket; but anything you would put your light under would prevent it from shining. When we hide our light, we don’t show other people we have God in us. This can happen when we try to fit in or give in to peer pressure.

Peer pressure doesn’t just happen to kids in school or on the playground. It happens to older people as well. In Mark 14:66-72, Peter, one of Jesus’s apostles, denied Christ not only once or twice but three times when confronted with being a follower of His. The Bible tells us that Peter wept bitterly when he thought about what he had done. We need to **always** let our lights shine so we don’t have to feel regret like Peter did.

We can also hide our light by ignoring opportunities to do good. There is a story we can read in the Bible that is the perfect example of this. We find it

in Luke 10:25-37. You may have heard of this story referred to as the Good Samaritan. It tells us of a wounded man lying on the side of the road. There was a priest that passed by this wounded man and didn't help him. Another man, a Levite, passed by and he did not help the wounded man either. Then, a man described as a Samaritan, came to the wounded man and helped him. The Samaritan bandaged his wounds, set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and had him taken care of.

The Samaritan let his light shine by having compassion on the wounded man and taking care of him. We should do the same. Matthew 5:15 reads: "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house."

Verse 3: "Don't let Satan blow it out; I'm gonna let it shine."

If we follow the ways of the world and not God's way, we allow Satan to put our light out. Here are three ways we can prevent this from happening. (1) Attending church. Hebrews 10:25 reads: "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves

together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (2) Praying. First Thessalonians 5:17 reads: "pray without ceasing." (3) Reading the Bible and doing what it says daily. Colossians 3:16 reads: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..."

Verse 4: "All around the neighborhood, I'm gonna let it shine."

So, we have talked about shining our light, not hiding our light, and not letting Satan put our light out. Now, let's look at ways to let our light shine all around (not just in our neighborhood). We could invite others to church and visit nursing homes and people that are unable to leave their homes. When we visit these people, we can show them we care (even if we don't know them well) by talking with them, bringing them a homemade card or baked goods.

Also, when letting our light shine, we need to make sure **everyone** sees it and not just our family, friends, or church family. When you see someone new at church or in school, introduce yourself

and ask him/her to sit with you. Even if they don't know you, they will recognize God's light in you. Again, in Luke 10:25-37, the good Samaritan helped the wounded man even though he didn't know him.

So, no matter where you are, always make sure others can see your light shining. ■

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

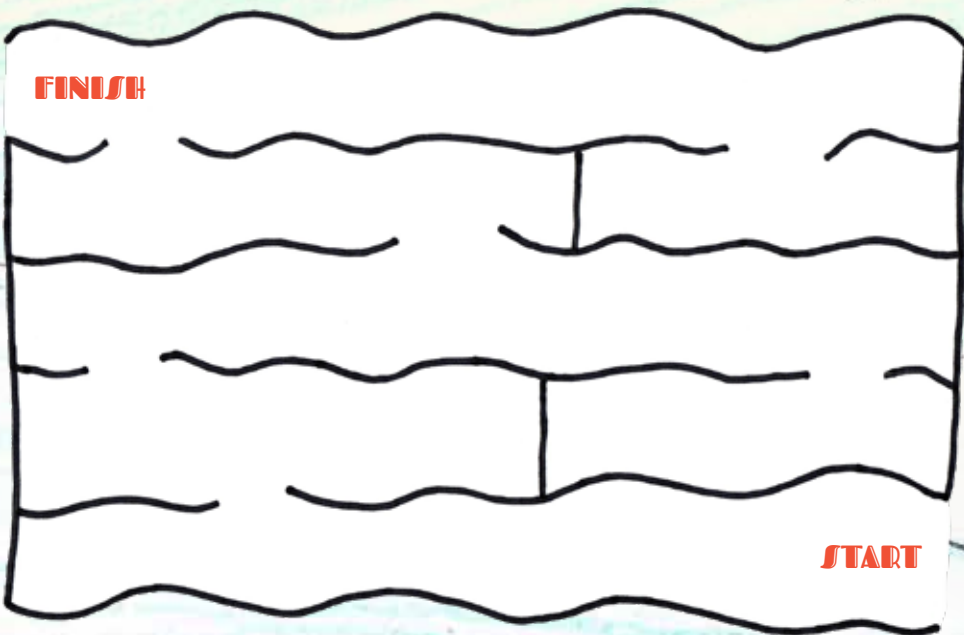
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Finding the Light

Would you help the sailors find their way to the "light" through the watery maze?



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



questions.

Q&A

Q: I raised my children in the church, but now that they are teens, they seem indifferent toward the Gospel, never intending to be baptized. What should I do?

—REYNOSA, MEXICO

One of the hardest lessons for us to learn is that we cannot make someone do what we want them to do. We cannot entice or threaten children into obedience. As they mature, they enter the teenage years when our influence and past relationship is nearly all that will influence them for good. When

they move out on their own, into adulthood, we have even less influence. Their friends, spouse, and the world can often have a stronger influence over them. God has given every human being freewill. God did not force Adam and Eve to stay faithful to Him, and God has never violated that principle. What you can do with your teens is to live a godly life before them, talk about biblical matters when possible, and continue worshipping God. Pray that they will see the importance and make their own decision to follow Christ. —PH

Q: What family in the Scriptures is worthy to imitate? —CALIFORNIA, U.S.

There are many good families in Scripture. We have the example of Abraham and Sarah's family (Hebrews 11:8-12), Amram and Jochebed's family (Exodus 2:1-8), Naomi's family (Ruth 4:14-15), Mordecai's family (Esther 2:7,20), Job's family (Job 1:1-5), Zacharias and Elizabeth's family (Luke 1:5-6), and, of course, Joseph and Mary's family (Matthew 1:18-19). Although these families were not perfect (as no one is), there are many great and faithful aspects of

these families that are worthy of imitation.

But God also instructs us through negative examples (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-11). Therefore, we should consider some "family failures" in the Scriptures as practical lessons to **imitate the opposite**.

Finally, we should remember that not everything that a member in a good family did or said is worthy of imitation. We are to raise our eyes higher and consider the divine Family, and what They have revealed to us as good and sound, for complete and faithful imitation. —MP

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