

Christian *family*



Featured Article

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from the editors



We have certainly had a unique year so far. This time of pandemic has changed our entire world, the way we do things, and the way we think about things.

The pandemic has affected the nation, the church, and the family. But in the middle of this crisis, there are many great lessons that families can learn, and this issue helps us to reflect on those lessons to grow closer to the Lord.

This issue also helps families to be positive, and husbands to be what God desires for them to be in their marriage. It helps mothers to engage in deep Bible study and gives them tools to teach their children. It challenges children to see the power of God, and gives young people hope of change and freedom from sin. This is an issue that families not only need in a time of a pandemic, but in all times.

May God bless you and your family.

Paul Holland & Moisés Pinedo

Christianfamily

Helping families become stronger in the Lord

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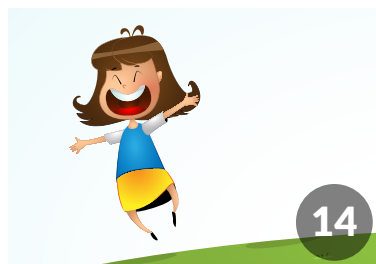
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Problem-Focused *or* Solution-Focused?

by Kevin Williams

One of the great challenges in our relationships today concerns how we go about dealing with our problems that arise from time to time. As is the nature of any type of relationship, there will be issues that arise between us and those around us. Consider the following questions: “How do we go about addressing problems that arise in relationships with others?” “What can we do to keep problems from growing?” “What steps can we take that can both help our relationships now, and also provide us with the tools to help us with other situations in the future?”

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a popular therapeutic model used in counseling. While many other models focus on the problem, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy focuses on solutions to the problem. The emphasis is taken away from the problem because people often get “stuck” in their problems and cannot see a way out. The emphasis is placed on solutions because this opens the door for change.

What does this have to do with us as Christians today? Too many times we have problems and focus on how bad things are, how helpless we feel, and how dim the future looks for us. This can very easily lead to depression, feelings of helplessness, and even loneliness because our focus is on the wrong thing! Think how differently things can be, though, if we change our thinking and focus on solutions to our problems. We open up doors of possibilities that we have never seen before!

The basis for change in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy concerns the “focus” of the model on solutions that would work for our families in solving our problems that arise. Once we agree to the nature of the “problem,” that problem needs to be stated and understood by everyone so everyone will be on the “same page” as to what the problem is, and what it is not. The main focus in this line of thinking is that it is more beneficial

to the relationship to spend significant time in working out solutions, as opposed to being stuck on the problem.

A Bible example of being problem-focused is Judas. Judas was one of the original twelve apostles, trained by Christ, given miraculous power, and even kept the money for the group; but he betrayed Christ. Matthew 27:3-5 says that Judas “was remorseful” because he sinned in betraying Christ. The text informs us that he hanged himself. He focused on the problem to the point that he took his own life!

A Bible example of being solution-focused is Peter. He did just the opposite of Judas; he focused, not on the problem, but

family.

on the solution! Matthew 26:75 says that, after denying Jesus three times, “he went out and wept bitterly.” Although Peter was sorrowful about what he had done, he did not focus on it. Unlike Judas, Peter focused on the solution instead of the problem; and look at the difference it made in his life!

Can you see how our problems might be solved with this type of thinking? This problem-solving technique can work with our own personal problems, or problems with family, friends, fellow-workers, and the like. All that being said, which are you, problem-focused or solution-focused? It may make the difference in issues being resolved or not! Think about it! ■

marriage.

What a great blessing it is to have a copy of God's Word! It is a great blessing because it contains "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). In the Scriptures we find the best advice a husband may follow to have a marriage according to God's plan (Psalm 119:24). Let us consider 10 passages from the Old and New Testaments.

1. Genesis 2:24: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

In this verse each husband finds an admonition from God to remember that, once he marries a woman, she becomes his priority in his family. Husbands who have forgotten this verse have faced problems in their marriages. Remember that you and your wife are one flesh, and, therefore, there should always be mutual care.

2. Genesis 29:20: "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her."

The apostle Paul wrote that "whatever things were written before were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4). There is much to be learned from the Old Testament; and in this verse in Genesis we learn that, as husbands, we are to love our wives, like Jacob loved Rachel. As husbands, we are to be willing to do our best for our wives. If we love and are willing to do our best for them, then there will be no obstacle to our happiness.

3. Proverbs 5:18: "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth."

Joy should always be present in our marriage. Spouses should laugh together and be there for each other, despite the troubles of life. The husband should show his wife that he is thankful that she is his helper, friend, and wife. As husbands, let us try to reflect the happiness we enjoy from having our wives by our side.

4. Proverbs 18:22: "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord."

Husbands need to acknowledge that it is a great blessing from the Lord to have a wife. She is our helper (Genesis 2:18) and our companion in a life of faithful service to the Lord. As a husband and Gospel preacher, I can say that my wife has been a great blessing to my life and a great spiritual support in the ministry. I have certainly found a good thing with her!

10

BIBLE VERSES

for husbands

by Willie Alvarenga

5. Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

This text reveals the intensity of our love for our wives. If husbands loved their wives this way, then their marriages would enjoy success in the Lord. Sadly, this is not the case with many marriages. Let us pause and ask ourselves if we are loving our wives as Christ loves the church.

6. Colossians 3:19: "Husbands, love your wives and do not be bitter toward them."

Being bitter denotes resentment and hatred toward a person; husbands should not allow this kind of disposition in their lives. Remember that "a harsh word stirs up anger" (Proverbs 15:1). Our wives will be hurt if we retain bitterness in our marriage. Love does not leave any space for practicing bitterness. May our speech always edify others (Ephesians 4:29; cf. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7), especially our wives!

7. 1 Peter 3:7: "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered."

The apostle Peter commands husbands to live with their wives according to the wisdom found in God's Word. We are to honor them as fragile vessels. This admonition also includes a terrible consequence if we fail to do so: the hinderance of our prayers. This shows that God considers how we treat our wives as a serious matter.

8. Ecclesiastes 9:9: "Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion"

in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.”

Marriage is a beautiful blessing from the Lord that is to be enjoyed; spouses are not to have a bitter life or one without purpose. If the husband, as the leader of his home, strives to promote joy in marriage, then the marital relationship will be strong and meaningful.

9. Job 31:1: “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?”

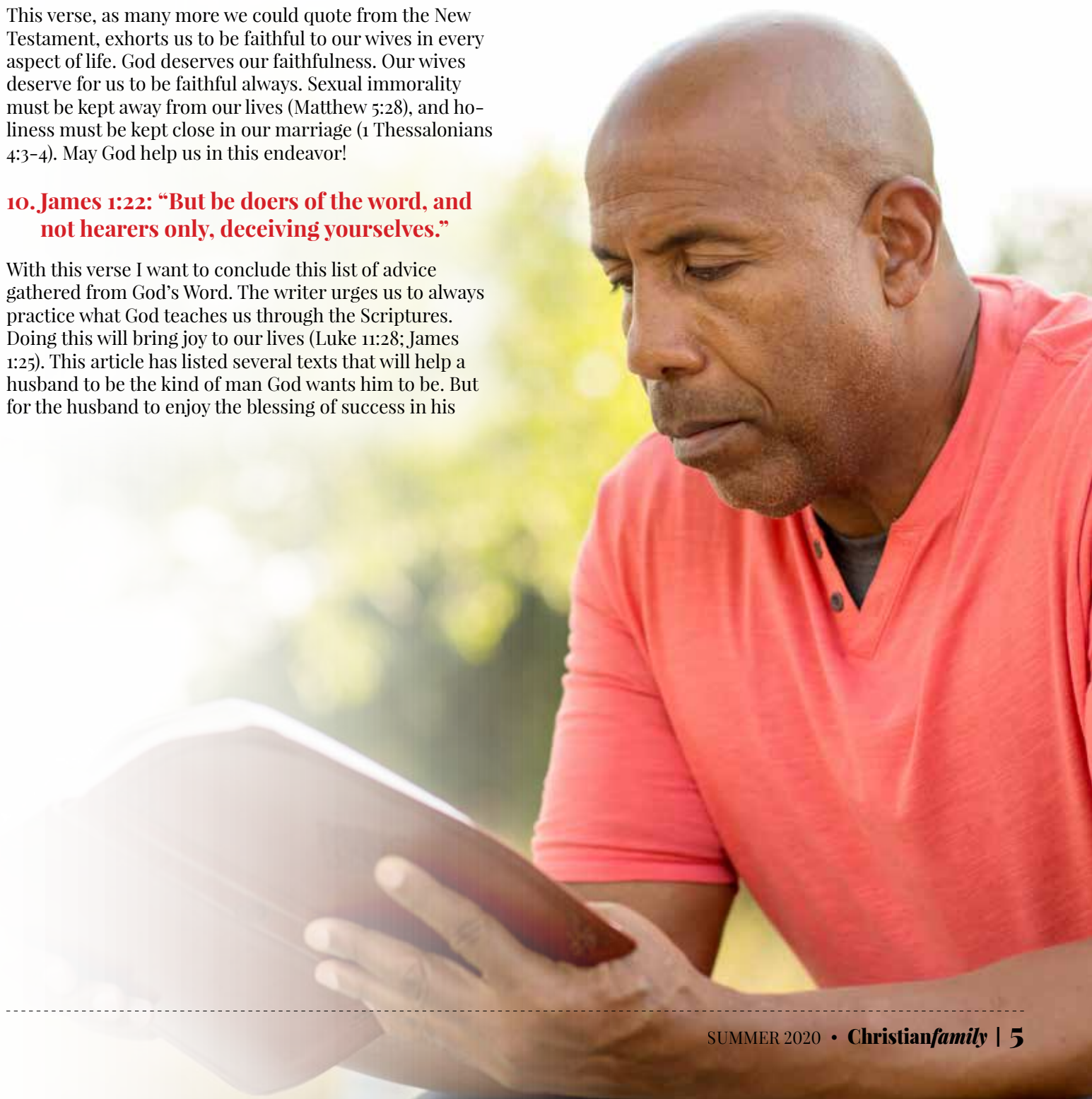
This verse, as many more we could quote from the New Testament, exhorts us to be faithful to our wives in every aspect of life. God deserves our faithfulness. Our wives deserve for us to be faithful always. Sexual immorality must be kept away from our lives (Matthew 5:28), and holiness must be kept close in our marriage (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). May God help us in this endeavor!

10. James 1:22: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”

With this verse I want to conclude this list of advice gathered from God’s Word. The writer urges us to always practice what God teaches us through the Scriptures. Doing this will bring joy to our lives (Luke 11:28; James 1:25). This article has listed several texts that will help a husband to be the kind of man God wants him to be. But for the husband to enjoy the blessing of success in his

marriage, he must meditate and apply what he has learned from the Word.

Let us be thankful to our God for His love and mercy in giving us His Word in written form. Through the Word, we can obtain wisdom and understanding to be the kind of husbands we ought to be. It is my fervent prayer that all husbands will read, meditate, and apply these beautiful principles that God has provided in the 10 verses used in this article. May God bless our marriages, so we may give Him the honor and glory in everything we do! ■



THE BIRTH OF A SAVIOR

by Kerri Epling

In case you missed the last issue, we introduced a new Bible study series for women based on learning grown-up lessons from what are typically viewed as kids' Bible stories. We also established that, for these studies, we are using the word "story" to represent a Biblical account inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Previously, we considered the account of Creation in Genesis in terms of why it is important to us (and to children in our families and congregations). In this issue we will explore another story of a beginning—the beginning of Christ's life on this earth. This is one of the most frequently shared accounts in Scripture, especially around the holidays, when many

in the world focus their attention on an arbitrary celebration of the birth of Christ. Let's mine for hidden gems in this story together. Our primary texts for this lesson are Matthew 1:18-2:12, Luke 1:26-56, and Luke 2:1-39.

General questions to consider when studying any account in Scripture

- What are the basic facts about this book of the Bible? Who wrote it? To whom? When? Where?
- What is the setting of this account?
 - Who are the major "characters" in this account? What role does each play? Why are they important? What is their family background? Are they followers of God or not?
- What is the basic sequence of events/details of the account?
- What can I learn about God from this account?
- What can I learn about man from this account?
- Why do I think God included this account in Scripture?
- What lessons can I take from this and apply to my own life?



women and mothers / bible study.

Specific questions to consider about the birth of Christ

- What is the historical background of the birth of Christ? Pull out a map and find where these events happened. Who were the rulers in authority at that time?
- What was significant about Mary being chosen to give birth to Jesus?
- What were the Jews expecting about the birth of the Messiah? Think about prophecies made in the Old Testament about the Messiah.
- Why were Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem? Where did they actually live?
- What were the details of Jesus' birth? Where was He laid? Consider this in light of Philippians 2.
- Who is recorded as receiving news of the birth of Christ from God first? Would these have been elite Jews, or members of the working class?
- What were the "good tidings of great joy?" (Luke 2:10) Why does this matter to me, today?
- How did the shepherds respond to the news?
- How did Mary respond (Luke 2:19)?
- What did Simeon foreshadow in Luke 2:31-32?
- Who came to Herod in Matthew 2:1? How many were in the group? (There are several traditions about these men that are not found in Scripture.)
- What did Herod want from these men? Did they provide this for him?

- When and where did the wise men visit the Child? How is this usually portrayed in nativity scenes? Does this matter? Why or why not?
- Does Scripture authorize or encourage a celebration of this event? If so, when? If not, why not?

Challenge: Find and read prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in the birth of Christ. Why do you think the Jews missed that Jesus was the Christ?

Questions for children

- Where was Jesus born?
- What is a census?
- Who were Jesus' earthly mother and father?
- Where did Mary lay the Baby Jesus?
- Where were the shepherds when the angel came?
- How many wise men visited Jesus?
- Jesus was really the Son of _____ (Luke 1:35).

Suggestions for interaction with children

Find a printable craft, story sequencing, or coloring page about the birth of Jesus. Talk about how God gives us families and that He also gave Baby Jesus a family on earth. Let young children draw a picture of what they learned, and have older children teach a simple lesson to younger siblings (or to you!) about the birth of Christ. ■

If you have questions, please feel free to contact Kerri at kerripling@gmail.com with email subject of "Christian Family Study."

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In Ecclesiastes 7:2, Solomon wrote: “Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.” Personally, I enjoy the house of feasting best. However, when we read the second part of this verse (“for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart”), we see that the point of the wise king is not, “Where will someone enjoy more?” but, “Where will someone **learn** more?” The truth is that there are many valuable lessons that are best learned in the middle of difficult circumstances.

If Solomon were to be writing in 2020, he may put it like this: “Better to live in a time of pandemic than in a time of health.” Again, the point would be the same. In fact, one of the greatest tragedies of our time would be for the pandemic to come and go and for us not to learn the important lessons in life. What family lessons can be learned best in a time of pandemic?



Love should reign in our homes.

We know our home should be filled with love. Solomon wrote that the house of mourning is the “end of all men,” and who doesn’t know all men die (Ecclesiastes 9:5)? But the truth is that in the house of mourning, death becomes a greater reality in the minds of people.

As the U.S. started its two weeks of quarantine and social media began to be flooded with comments from people, especially young, who **disliked** being at home, something became clearer in my mind: we need more love in our homes, even among Christian homes.

No Christian home should lack love, and no Christian home could not benefit from more love. Jesus said: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). This applies beautifully and perfectly to the home: a **Christian** home is not known by a copy of the Bible on a coffee table, but by the **love** in the hearts of its members.

Parents should be the example of love in the family (Colossians 3:18–19; Titus 2:4); they should strive to promote an atmosphere of love, unity, and peace among all the members of the family, and they should teach their children to appreciate, seek, and work for love in their future homes.

How sad would it be to spend weeks confined in a home devoid of love! On the other hand, what a great blessing it is to have love, unity, and harmony in the home during this time (cf. Psalm 133:1)! Yet, love is a need for all times. Is there love in your home? Does your home need more love? Do your children know they are loved in the home?

FAMILY LESSONS



“Basic hygiene” is very important in the home.

Someone said that “we thought we’d have flying cars by 2020. But no, here we are, teaching people how to wash their hands!” It is no secret that basic hygiene has been stressed over and over during this time of pandemic. In fact, although there has been so much conflicting information concerning what to do or not to do to avoid infection, one piece of advice has remained consistent: “Preventing the spread of coronavirus starts with basic hygiene.”¹

THAT ARE BEST LEARNED IN A TIME OF A PANDEMIC

by **Moisés Pinedo**



3

A home must be a spiritual place.

the children. They are to **supervise** what enters their home by means of the TV, the internet, or the radio. They are to protect their children from the bad influence of others. They cannot let sin run rampant in the home. Sin is more destructive and lethal than any virus that can ever threaten the home; therefore, we should follow a strict daily “hygiene” routine.

As many congregations in the country began to close their doors to large gatherings and events to avoid infection, a need has become more apparent: the home must be a spiritual place. As vital as the church is, we cannot let the church be the **only** source of spirituality for our families; this was never God’s intention (cf. Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14–15). Worship services are the times where we come together to give God the honor from the abundance of who we are on a daily basis. We can learn much in Bible classes, but it is not enough if we want to build strong families in the Lord.²

A Christian family must be a Christian family **always**. This is why a Christian family never takes a vacation from God and His kingdom when going on a family vacation; as faithful Abraham did, they “build an altar to the Lord” wherever they go

Yet, more than physical hygiene, the home needs **spiritual** hygiene. A Christian family must strive to prevent the contaminations of the world from polluting the home (cf. James 1:27). This begins with some basic routines: not touching what is unclean (2 Corinthians 6:17), not letting corrupt words proceed out of our mouths (Ephesians 4:29), and not setting anything wicked before our eyes (Psalm 101:3), but, instead, keeping clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3–4).

Spouses are to help each other to keep the sanctity in marriage (cf. Ephesians 5:25–26; Hebrews 13:4), and both parents are to be the guardians of the innocence and holiness of

(Genesis 12:7,8; 13:4,18). A Christian family never forgets modesty and holiness when summer finally arrives (cf. 1 Timothy 2:9). Also, a Christian family, in the middle of a pandemic, never becomes desperate, selfish, unfruitful, or spiritually cold (cf. John 15:8; Revelation 2:4).

This time of pandemic has clearly shown the need of spiritual homes. Families should study and meditate on the Bible—at morning, afternoon, or night, when walking, sitting, or eating, and/or anytime in between (Deuteronomy 6:6–9). Families should pray—for the church, for the government, for our doctors and nurses, for the sick and the weak, for the lonely and suffering, for the friends and the foes, and for all men (1 Timothy 2:1). Families should be thankful—for life and health, for the food and clothes, and for every opportunity to serve others and grow closer to God (Philippians 4:6).

Do you have a spiritual home? Is your home a place of faith in God instead of fear? Can your children see that your home is focused on the spiritual instead of the material?



4

A home needs “good connection.”

The pandemic has also stressed the need of having good internet connection. Some say that the coronavirus proves that the internet should be

a public utility,³ others say that the coronavirus strengthens the case for free internet,⁴ and others even suggest that access to the internet can be a matter of life or death during the coronavirus.⁵ Independent of your point of view on the issue, no one can deny that people are using the internet more during this time: we are buying online more than ever,⁶ most students are being schooled online, a great part of the population is working over the internet, more

with friends and begin doing more things with your family. Listen to your spouse and to your children; ask them questions concerning their day and their likes. Try to understand their thoughts, feelings, and needs, and help them to understand you. Listen more, talk more, play more, hug more; just slow down and enjoy life with your family more! Paul understood the need for connection to win the world for God (1 Corinthians 9:19–23); we must understand the same to win our families for the Lord!

(Matthew 19:22). It is harming them because there will be times, like the pandemic, when they will not get to have and do everything they want. Only a right relationship with God can satisfy the soul and bring about the abundant life (John 4:13–14; 10:10; cf. Philippians 4:11).

Are the members of your family happy? Are **you** happy?



How are you connecting with your family—your spouse, your children? Is your spouse your confidant? Do your children feel free to talk to you anytime and about anything?

5 At home, everybody should learn to be content.

People have always had problems being content. From the beginning, the Israelites were unhappy people who liked to complain about everything (cf. Numbers 11). By the time of Jesus, they were a generation that could not be pleased with a “happy or a sad song” (Matthew 11:16–17). This is also a misfortune in today’s society. Some cannot even be happy with themselves! A quarantined person quipped: “Now I have spent about two weeks with myself. So, I want to apologize to all the people who have been around me for all the past years.”

meetings are being held online, and even more Christians are engaged in livestream services.

Now, this point is not about internet connection, but about the connection among the members of our family. There is great disconnection in the family—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. It is said that “technology has brought us closer to those who are far away, but far away from those who are close.” Sadly, many families have been practicing “social distancing” among their members for a long time.

What can we do to have better connection in the home? We may start with connecting less with the outside world to allow us more time to connect. Turn off your phone and limit social media to talk to your spouse and children. Avoid making life busier with extra work and extra activities and hobbies outside of the home. Limit your time doing things

There is some truth in that joke: we are raising an unsatisfied generation. We are giving our children everything they want, whenever they want it; we see this as our main responsibility. We are replacing presence with presents, and our children can’t ever have “enough.” They have to be entertained all the time, and given what they want, to be “happy.”

This is a materialistic parenting approach that is harming our children. It is harming them because having things and doing things can never satisfy (Haggai 1:6); he who puts his confidence on the material will always go “away sorrowful”



6 A home should focus on the positive.

It is very easy to focus on the negative in a time of crisis. The TV is full of bad news, and social media is usually full of negative comments. In a time of quarantine, people begin to focus on the things they **cannot** do—they **cannot** go to their favorite restaurant, they **cannot** hang out with their friends on a regular basis, they **cannot** workout at the gym, they **cannot** travel outside of the country; they just **cannot** do what they want to do! Some are just “over this virus.” But the truth is that “this virus is not over with us,” and focusing on the things we cannot do, or we cannot change, will only contribute to a life of unhappiness and depression.

Although sometimes it is necessary to point to a problem, a home cannot dwell on the negative, but it must focus, instead, on the positive. Thinking on positive things and doing positive things can change the way we feel (Philippians 4:4,8). (Read brother Williams’ article in this



issue about focusing on the solution instead of the problem.)

It is refreshing to learn that many people are doing positive things in this perceived “negative” time. Some Christian families are making homemade goodies and dropping them off at the houses of older Christians and neighbors; some parents are reading good books online to entertain little ones across the nation; some families are streaming their devo time online to encourage other families to do the same; young people are doing some shopping for the elderly and sick; many little ones are drawing pictures and sending them by mail to encourage the shut-ins; and many people are spending more quality time with their families.

What is your family’s general attitude in the face of difficult times? Do you have a positive and productive family?

This world is not our home.

Christians know that this is one of the greatest truths found in the Bible. In Matthew 5:12, our Lord told His followers who would suffer for His sake: “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward **in heaven.**” In 1 Peter 1:4, the apostle wrote that Christians have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved **in heaven.**” And in Philippians 3:20, Paul wrote that “our citizenship is **in heaven.**”

However, many times Christians live and act as if the world were our permanent home; and it is in times like this—of sickness, death, and uncertainty, that we come to vividly remember this truth. It is in times like this that we begin to long for the place where “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

The idea of being “pilgrims in this world” should be a regular lesson taught to our children. Parents should not strive to make this world so comfortable and appealing to their children that they lose sight of heaven. We are to long for heaven, and we should instill this “longingness” in our children.

Do the members of your family have a “longing” to get to heaven? What a day of rejoicing that will be!

Conclusion

I am certainly not thankful that millions of people are being infected by the coronavirus, I am certainly not thankful that this virus has claimed the lives of thousands, and I am certainly not thankful for all the pain that it is causing around the world. But I am thankful that, in the middle of all this crisis, we have a unique opportunity to pause and think about the important things in life. We have a unique opportunity to learn and grow as a family. Instead of wishing that this time quickly passes, let us welcome the many lessons that it can teach us, and let us pass these lessons on to the younger generations. ■

1. Mineo, Liz (2020), “How to Reduce the Spread of Coronavirus,” *The Harvard Gazette*, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/03/preventing-the-spread-of-coronavirus-starts-with-basic-hygiene/>.

2. If a family attends all three church services a week, receives four hours of “spiritual education.” In comparison, a child receives about 60 hours of secular education a week.

3. Livni, Ephrat (2020), “The Coronavirus Crisis Proves the Internet Should Be a Public Utility,” *Quartz*, <https://qz.com/1826043/the-coronavirus-crisis-proves-internet-should-be-a-public-utility/>.

4. Macaulay, Thomas (2020), “The Coronavirus Is Strengthening the Case for Free Internet Access,” TNW, <https://thenextweb.com/politics/2020/03/18/the-coronavirus-is-strengthening-the-case-for-free-internet-access/>.

5. “Coronavirus: Access to the Internet Can Be a Matter of Life and Death During a Pandemic,” Article 19, <https://www.article19.org/resources/access-to-the-internet-can-be-a-matter-of-life-and-death-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>.

6. See Mattioli, Dana and Sebastian Herrera (2020), “Amazon’s Sales Jump as Coronavirus Prompts Surge in Online Shopping,” *The Wall Street Journal*, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/amazons-sales-jump-as-coronavirus-prompts-surge-in-online-shopping-11588278740>.

youth.

A MESS TO A MESSAGE

by Robert Lee

MY name is Robert. I grew up attending church with my family. We went to everything, including Gospel meetings, youth rallies, summer camp, and VBS. “Any time the doors are open; we will be there,” Dad said. We moved a lot. Every state we moved to, we were established in the church family, and every three to four years we would start all over again.

I was always excited to move, but the excitement quickly wore off after a month or two. I had no acceptance of these new beginnings and found it very easy to feel sorry for myself. I was overweight, and people at school began to make fun of me; even my brothers joined in with them on the school bus. I thought this would end when we moved, but it continued everywhere we moved. I was a victim of bullying and I didn’t know how to stop it. These circumstances helped shape the story that I believed about myself: I was a punching bag, I had no friends, and no one cared about my feelings.

Regardless of who I pretended to be on the outside, I was a scared child on the inside. I started looking for ways I could avoid myself and my problems. When I was 15, I was kicked out of summer camp and sent to the emergency room the first night after taking too many pills. That same year I was arrested for the first time and charged with grand theft for stealing a laptop and camera. I broke into cars, stole money from strangers and people I knew, stores and anywhere else. I enjoyed the rush until I was caught. I spent a year on probation, and when we moved to Michigan, it was like none of that had ever happened.

I was in a delusional state of mind and denied that I needed any kind of help at all. Within six months of moving, I was standing in front of the youth group apologizing for getting drunk at the lock-in. I constantly fought with my “friends,” and, in an emotional outburst, threw a knife at someone. I had no peace in my life. After high school, I went off to college and spent most of the year under the influence of whatever was available.

Then I moved back with my parents and attended church again regularly. I had a reprieve from the life I was living. I surrounded myself with positive Christian friends, exercised regularly, and began to set goals for myself and started thinking about my future.

But after about five months, I joined the military and stopped thinking about church and God all together. I had some periods of being drug free, but there was no relief from the past I was carrying around. I was “too busy” to go to church and hardly tried. I once attempted suicide but was found hanging in a room and was saved. Out of the military, I married and tried to attend church, but I wasn’t trying hard enough and eventually stopped. I started using drugs again, and I soon realized I had some serious mental problems that needed addressing. I was taking medication and using drugs at the same time. Later I was arrested for selling drugs, went to jail, lost my job, went to rehab, was hospitalized in a psychiatric hold, totaled my car, and went to go live with my parents for a month. I was mentally and physically drained. I was spiritually bankrupt.

Eventually, I attended 12-step recovery meetings, and the obsession to use drugs was lifted. I was slowly being restored to sanity. I was learning a new way of thinking and living a new way of life. I found many of the spiritual principles of recovery in my Bible as well.

In Matthew 11:28, Jesus says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Accepting that I needed to change was the honesty I lacked. I needed the help of the church, a group of friends with whom I could learn from and have fellowship. I had to come to terms with the fact that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). I had to be completely deflated of the idea that I could handle myself. My life was unmanageable, and I needed the guidance of God in my life. I couldn’t just say the words and expect “Water” to satisfy my thirst. I grew up in the church, but I needed to grow up in Christ.

I was treating God like a vending machine instead of a Father, One Who loves and protects His children. God provides guidance through His Word and through His followers. James 4:8 tells us, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." My whole life and thinking were centered around my understanding of what I thought I needed in the world instead of listening to God. I had no awareness of how I saw myself and how others saw me. Most important is that I couldn't understand what God wanted from me.

The patterns of thinking that led to me using drugs are the same patterns that lead people to commit any other sin. Gambling, sexual immorality, lying, cheating, stealing all started with the thought that what I had in life wasn't enough. But God provides all we need. He loves each and every one of us and gave us His Son, Jesus, to teach us how to live. I have been blessed with the opportunity to give an insight on God's grace, love and mercy. I can share my experience, strength, and hope with others. This is how God can use the mess I made of my life and transform it into a message that reflects God's grace and His love for us. I believe God created man to help, to strengthen, and to encourage one another. The longer I stay mindful of God's will for me, the more He reveals His love for me and allows me another day on this earth to share this love with others.

I thought I was a lost cause. I had a heart full of guilt and shame because I could not help myself. Recovery gave me the ability to walk in newness of life, the way I always wanted but never knew how. Until I admitted complete defeat and asked for help, I would never have found the very program of recovery that brought me back to God. I encourage anyone who has a problem with drugs to seek help. There are thousands of others who love you, care for you, and want to help you, only if you let them—in the same way that Jesus will carry us through if we let Him. ■

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children.

*My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty,
There's nothing my God cannot do.*

*My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty,
There's nothing my God cannot do.*

*The mountains are His, the rivers are His,
The stars are His handiwork too.*

*My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty,
There's nothing my God cannot do.*

Jesus said in Mark 12:30, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment." The greatest command is to build a relationship with God, so let's use the fun song "My God is So Big" to learn more about Him!

MY GOD IS SO BIG, SO STRONG, AND SO MIGHTY...

I want to raise my arms and flex my muscles when I sing this song! When I hear the words **big**, **strong**, and **mighty**, it makes me think of an elephant or a lion. But we cannot see God with our eyes, so how do we know He is big, strong, or mighty? The Bible can help us!



MY GOD IS SO BIG SO STRONG AND SO MIGHTY!

by Christina Vincent

Job 11:7-9 reads, "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—What can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea." Wow! God is so **big** that we cannot even measure Him! He is bigger than the earth and broader than the sea. There is no end to God—He goes on, and on, and on! Psalms 90:2 says, "...from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."

God Himself says in Jeremiah 23:23-24, "Am I a God near at hand," says the Lord, "And not a God afar off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so I shall not see him?" says the Lord; "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord." God is both near and far. God knows where you are at all times, even those places you might hide in. God even fills the earth and sky! It is hard to grasp how **mighty** God is, but these verses help us to better understand that God is forever.

*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great God, mighty and awesome... (Deuteronomy
10:17).*

THERE'S NOTHING MY GOD CANNOT DO...

As soon as I hear the words, "there's nothing my God cannot do", my mind starts to ask, "Well, can God do this? Can He do that? What about this?" This is what Jesus answered in Matthew 19:26, "...with God all things are possible." The Bible has many examples of God doing things that we could never do.

- God flooded the whole earth until the mountains were covered (Genesis 7-8).
- God parted a huge sea for Moses and God's people to cross (Exodus 14).
- God made a donkey talk (Numbers 22:22-35).
- God made the walls of Jericho go flat with just priests blowing trumpets and men shouting (Joshua 6:20).
- God allowed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to walk out of a fiery furnace (Daniel 3:12-28).
- God sent His angel to shut the mouths of lions so Daniel would not get eaten (Daniel 6:16-22).

- God sent a big fish to swallow Jonah and vomit him out (Jonah 1:17-2:10).
- God sent His son, Jesus, to save us from our sins by dying on a cross and rising from the dead (John 3:16).

God is amazing! These are only a few things God has done that we could never do. Even though nothing is impossible with God, He still expects us to do great things too. If we choose Jesus, God's Son, we can do wonderful things for God (Philippians 4:13). It is a great thing to know that there is **nothing our God cannot do!**

THE MOUNTAINS ARE HIS, THE RIVERS ARE HIS, THE STARS ARE HIS HANDIWORK TOO...

Another impossible thing God accomplished was creating the earth. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). God made the **mountains**, the **rivers**, and the **stars**: "Ah, Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You" (Jeremiah 32:17).

God created the earth and all that is on it, but God's greatness is beyond Him just making these things. God also **knows** His creation so well that He knows when a sparrow falls to the ground and every hair on our head (Matthew 10:29-30).

Psalms 147:8-9 reads, "Who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food, and to the young ravens that cry." God loves all the things He has made and takes care of them through making weather, growing plants, and feeding the animals. The earth and creatures on this earth are God's **handiwork**. He not only created everything, but He also knows them and takes care of them. What a great God we have!

CONCLUSION

The more we read the Bible, the more we learn about God! We have learned that God is so big, strong, and mighty that He is beyond measure. He is so powerful that there is nothing God cannot do. God loves His creation, knows His creation, and takes care of His creation; all is His handiwork. We have learned so much about God through the song "My God is So Big." Now we need to use what we have learned to tell others about God. Isaiah 12:4 commands, "Praise the Lord, call upon His name; declare His deeds among the peoples, make mention that His name is exalted." ■

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MY GOD IS SO...

The Bible uses several words to describe how big our God is. Here is a list of seven of those words found in Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 76:4, and Psalm 97:9 (NKJV). Find the words in the puzzle.

1. GREAT
2. MIGHTY
3. AWESOME
4. GLORIOUS
5. EXCELLENT
6. MOST HIGH
7. EXALTED

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



questions.

Q&A

Q: Is it a sin to use contraceptive methods in marriage? —HONDURAS

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. The fruit of the womb is a reward” (Psalm 127:3). Ultimately, God wants heaven populated with His creation. However, God does not command us to have children nor does He tell us how many we ought to have. How large or small a family we have is our choice. If a contraceptive method does not destroy a life, a fertilized egg, then there are no ethical problems with it. In fact, refraining from sex while the female is fertile is a type of contraception! Pray with your spouse and have an understanding of how large you want your family. —PH

Q: How should I deal with my children, who, despite being Christians and having active roles in their youth group, do not behave well at home, lack respect for us parents, and do things they know they shouldn't do? How do I talk to them? What do I do?

—SANTO DOMINGO, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

I would recommend making a list of their disrespectful behaviors along with appropriate Bible verses. Pray about your response and their responses. Then, sit down and have a heart to heart talk. Say something like, “You have put Christ on in baptism and have made a commitment to follow Him

as your Lord. I have seen a series of behaviors in you that show disrespect for Christ. Here is what I have found. Now, let's ask for God's forgiveness and start to work on overcoming these behaviors. Let me know what I can do to help.” Pray together and encourage them to reflect Christ in their lives, even at home. —PH

Q: How can I instill hope in my children in difficult times like the pandemic? —CALIFORNIA, U.S.

There is a good article by brother Steve Minor on “How to Talk to Your Kids About the Pandemic.”¹ Some of the main points could be divided into things we should **not** do, and things we **could** do, to instill hope in our children.

Concerning the negative aspect, we should not give them unnecessary information or details that may lead them to fear, neither should we talk about our fears or doubts in front of them or panic about what we hear or read in the news. Children are more susceptible than adults and feed off our emotions. Once they become fearful and worried, it becomes harder to instill hope and peace in them.

On the positive side, brother Minor advises to talk to your children about the attributes of God: “God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, and at work in our lives.” He recommends reading some passages such as Ephesians

3:20, Psalm 23:1, and Psalm 31:14-15 with them. Also, he advises to talk to them about the acts of God—what God did in the Bible to protect His people and what He has done in the past to protect us. Finally, he suggests singing and praying with your children (James 5:13-16; cf. Acts 16:25). While we may not be able to do much to change things during this time, God can; and praying to Him Who is able to make a difference can instill hope in them.

Remember that you cannot instill something in your children that you do not have. Work on trusting the Lord and finding hope and peace in Him by following this advice first. Then, work on instilling hope and peace in your children. —MP

1. Minor, Steve (2020), “How to Talk to Your Kids About the Pandemic,” <https://plainsimplefaith.com/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-the-pandemic/>.

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