

# Making Life Work



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# Contents

## 3 How Can We Make Life Work?

You probably already own the best self-help book ever published—the Bible. It's filled with practical guidance on how to make your life work!

## 6 Marriage: Foundation of the Family

A strong marriage is the foundation for a strong family. What does the Bible reveal about dating, love and building a successful marriage?

## 17 Child Rearing: Building the Right Foundation

God's Word reveals a great deal about this crucial subject, and parents can discover a wealth of guidance for how to bring up happy, successful children.

## 23 Finding the Path to a Happy Family

A loving family is one of life's greatest blessings. But it doesn't just happen. Scripture reveals the keys that can help you enjoy a strong, happy family.

## 30 The Importance of Right Friendships

God designed us to need other people—to form, maintain and enjoy good relationships with others. What does God's Word tell us about friendships?

## 32 Finding Success in Your Job and Career

Although written centuries ago, the Bible contains time-tested and proven principles for success in your job and career. What are its key principles?

## 39 Financial Security and Peace of Mind

It seems that all of us could use help with our finances and financial management. Many principles have been there all along in the pages of Scripture!

## 46 Keys to a Long, Healthy Life

We all want to enjoy good health and avoid sickness and injury. So why not follow the health guidance our Creator gave in His instruction manual?

## 62 Does Life Have Greater Meaning and Purpose?

Why are you here? Why were you born? Perhaps the most important key to making life work lies in understanding God's great purpose for you!

# How Can We Make Life Work?

**F**rankly, life just isn't working for some people. Maybe you have noticed the incredible proliferation of self-help books on store and library bookshelves.

Why are so many self-help books published? Could it be simply because people recognize they need help with the many problems, challenges and stresses of everyday life? Writers and publishers recognize this, and their books fly off the shelves by the thousands.

You may not realize that most families already own the best self-help book ever published.

Millions of copies have been published, and it's been translated into hundreds of languages. Its words have been around for thousands of years. This book is *your Bible*.

Although it's a perpetual best seller, few people take the time to read and study the Bible. Most think it's nice to have around and that



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everybody should have one, but few seem to accept that it means much to us. After all, how could something written thousands of years ago apply to our fast-paced, technologically advanced world? Still others think the Bible is a book for theologians and cannot be understood by the average person.

Those who take the time to study the Bible, however, find it is a

*timeless* book. It addresses the ageless issues and questions: Why are we here? Where are we going? What are the solutions to perpetual human problems? How can we learn to live together in peace? How can we live rewarding, fulfilling lives?

The Bible is filled with practical, down-to-earth advice from our Creator. It can help us see and avoid the pitfalls that come with doing things our way (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). It records for us vital and profound lessons from real people.

The Bible clearly shows the principle of *cause and effect*—that our choices and actions, good and bad, produce good and bad results. It's filled with sound counsel on how to have happy families, marriages and friendships, how to properly rear children, how to manage family finances and succeed on the job, how to maintain your health and so much more. In short, it tells us how to *make life work*.

In this booklet we have gathered and summarized some of the Bible's advice on these topics. But in many ways we've only scratched the surface; the Bible easily contains a lifetime's education, just waiting for us to search out its priceless gems and treasures. It's a source of spiritual and practical help that you cannot afford to be without.

### The challenge of living the truth you learn

Keep in mind, however, that just because the advice is there doesn't mean it's easy to follow. It takes *effort*. Trying to live by the Bible's instruction is a challenge.

Our natural inclination is to go a different direction from what the Bible teaches (Romans 8:7). We're surrounded by a secular world largely oblivious to biblical values, and those who wish to obey God often find themselves swimming upstream against popular thinking and ways of doing things. Nor does it help when we see that many who profess to be Christian display little or no commitment to living by God's instructions.

Also, we need to be aware that things don't always work out the way we expect, even when we do try to follow God's instruction. Scripture tells us that "time and chance happen to [us] all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11). In other words, in spite of our best efforts, other circumstances and situations beyond our control will affect us—sometimes for the better, at times for the worse. Although we can control our own actions, we sometimes have little or no control over the actions of others that spill over and affect us.

God doesn't tell us this life will be perfect when we put His instruction into practice. In fact, He tells us to expect adversities (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:20). He assures us, though, that in spite of difficulties and

disappointments, "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

### Is living this way worth it?

In the face of such difficulties, some may question whether it is worth the effort to live a godly life. But the Bible assures us that "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life *that now is* and of *that which is to come*" (1 Timothy 4:8, emphasis added throughout).

Some people recognize that living God's way holds great promise "of the life . . . which is to come." Far fewer understand that living a godly life also has benefits in "the life that now is"—that is, our present physical lives. They misperceive God's way as restrictive and detrimental to a happy, fulfilled life.

God's way of life, however, is not a burden; it is most assuredly a blessing.

After all, God's purpose for sending Jesus Christ to earth was to give us the opportunity for eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

God is concerned about our eternal well-being. But Jesus revealed another reason for His coming when He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus came so we can have eternal life, but He came also to help us understand how we can enjoy fulfilled, productive lives *right now*.

The apostle John expressed God's desire for us when he wrote, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (3 John 2).

Even though living by God's instruction can bring trials and suffering (John 16:33; Acts 14:22), Jesus promised tangible blessings in the here and now for following God's way of life and then, in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30). We can experience definite blessings in this life for following the instructions found in God's Word.

Since following God's way is worth the effort, what must we do to please Him? This booklet addresses some of the common issues we face—marriage, child rearing, health, employment, finances—and explains how we can structure our lives according to many principles brought out in the Bible. Continue reading to begin learning how you can live by the rules that *make life work*.

# Marriage: Foundation of the Family

**G**od's Word declares that "he who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22, New International Version). The same is true for women who find loving and responsible husbands. Marriages are the building blocks of communities, societies and, ultimately, civilizations. A society is only as strong as its marriages and families.

From the beginning God taught that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This special arrangement, this bond between a man and woman, was intended to last, as traditional marriage ceremonies put it, "until death do us part." It was designed to be a lifelong relationship (Romans 7:2-3) that would produce godly children (Malachi 2:15) and help both spouses better understand the deep, loving relationship between Jesus Christ and the members of "the household of God," His Church (Ephesians 5:25-32; 2:19-22).

A happy marriage is one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. God intended for couples to live happily ever after once they exchanged their marriage vows. To this end Ecclesiastes 9:9 instructs husbands to "enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (New American Standard Bible). Likewise, wives should enjoy life with their husbands.

Yet, judging by the divorce rates in many countries, mankind has not learned how to do this. Everyone wants a good marriage, but few are willing to follow God's instructions that, if followed, would produce loving, committed relationships.

God designed marriage and wants us to be happily married (Genesis 2:24). For success in this area of life, we need to learn from the Creator of marriage the principles that lead to happy, successful unions. In short, we need to understand and apply concepts that work rather than following modern paths that so often lead to failure.

## Dating: preparation for marriage

According to God's Word, the foundation for a good marriage is laid

long before the wedding ceremony. It is established when two people begin dating.

As children grow older, "When can I begin dating?" is a question they commonly ask their parents. Though the Bible gives no specific age when dating is appropriate, wise parents will teach their maturing children sound biblical principles that will help them follow God's standards of behavior. Parents should determine when their children are ready to date based on their maturity and readiness to accept responsibility for their actions. Before parents allow dating, they should teach and encourage their children to follow biblical standards rather than turning them loose to do whatever comes naturally.

Teaching children God's standards before allowing them to date may sound terribly old-fashioned and restrictive to some with supposedly



enlightened ways of thinking. But most governments do not allow people to drive automobiles until they demonstrate the knowledge and ability to do so in a safe manner. No responsible parent would put his or her adolescent child in an automobile in the

*When two people exchange wedding vows, they make a life-long commitment. Biblically speaking, this is a covenant—a solemn promise to God and one's mate to be faithful.*

middle of a busy highway without having given that child instruction on how to drive.

Dating in our modern world is not without its dangers. Without proper instruction, too many youths become promiscuous, contract sexually transmissible diseases, experience unwanted pregnancies and choose wrong paths that seem enjoyable and right at the time but lead to untold anguish (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). They need instruction early and interactive discussions on why and how biblical values can protect them from such suffering.

Without this proper instruction, many people will never experience a

happy marriage. Loving parents would never wish misery on their children! But leaving them ignorant is a sure path to heartache. A thorough understanding of God's standards for dating and marriage is one of the greatest blessings children can receive from their parents.

Yet many, of course, are far past that point, having already reached adulthood—some having perhaps gotten married and even divorced. Teaching young people proper behavior for dating is obviously ideal. But what about adults? Do the principles change? Because adults are older, does that give them license for more liberties than adolescents may take? Are all things appropriate for consenting adults?

As we shall see, God's standards for dating apply to people of all ages. He does not have two sets of guidelines, one for adults and one for youths. *Following* the biblical laws is equally *beneficial* no matter one's age. *Breaking* God's laws is equally *disastrous* for people of all ages.

### Modern standards of dating

To understand the difference between God's way and the world's, consider the dating practices common in the Western world.

Many assume that when people are dating, sexual intercourse is appropriate to determine if they are compatible. They believe sex is simply a natural expression of love between two people and thereby the natural thing to do for individuals living together or "going together" in an exclusive dating relationship. If such a couple then breaks up and the two start dating others, the common assumption is that they are then free to have sexual relations with their new partners.

This practice of serial monogamy—being sexually active with only one unmarried person at a time—is widely considered a suitable way to date and find a future mate.

In the United States about two thirds of married women in their 20s cohabited with their future husbands before marriage (Robert Moeller, "America's Morality Report Card," *Christian Reader*, November-December 1995, pp. 97-100). This dubious practice is followed by all too many young adults in the Western world.

Another honorable principle, according to current standards, is that partners should disclose any sexually transmissible diseases before intercourse so appropriate protection can be employed. In addition, practicing "safe sex" (using contraceptives to avoid disease and unwanted pregnancies) is touted as the right thing to do. These practices are so widely accepted that increasing numbers of school systems provide free contraceptives to students, no questions asked.

Although these approaches may appear to be logical, they do not measure up to God's standards. What many do not understand is that such

faulty logic is precisely the *cause* of so many unhappy relationships and failed marriages. Let's consider what God says.

### God's standards for dating

Historical records, like those of the ancient city of Corinth, reveal that in the heart of the Roman Empire, the most technologically advanced civilization of its day, the sexual values of the first century were similar to the modern concepts of dating today. Standards were so skewed that sexual relations with temple prostitutes were not looked upon as scandalous but considered an appropriate form of worship.

Through the apostle Paul, God taught the Corinthians a better way. "*Flee sexual immorality,*" he wrote. "Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . 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" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

How could Paul dare to address others' private behavior? He could be so bold because he understood that God sanctions sexual relations *only within the marriage relationship* (Genesis 2:24; Hebrews 13:4). Sexual relations in any other situation were and are immoral.

Later Paul addressed relationships between members of the opposite sex even more directly. Urging the brethren to live their lives in a way pleasing to God (1 Thessalonians 4:1), he wrote:

"This is the will of God, that you should be holy: you must abstain from fornication; each one of you must learn to gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honour it, not giving way to lust like the pagans who know nothing of God; no one must do his fellow-Christian wrong in this matter, or infringe his rights.

"As we impressed on you before, the Lord punishes all such offences. For God called us to holiness, not to impurity. Anyone therefore who flouts these rules is flouting not man but the God who bestows on you his Holy Spirit" (verses 3-8, Revised English Bible).

The custom and practice of dating—which leads to marriage—should be conducted with honor. It should not be devalued into an excuse for sexual gratification. God expects us to enter marriage as virgins. This approach shows respect for God, our bodies, our futures and the divine institution of marriage.

God's way is the best for making marriage work. Sociologists have found that God's standard for dating is the one that produces marriages that last. "After analyzing cohabitation and marriage patterns among some 13,000 adults, two University of Wisconsin–Madison sociologists

have concluded that couples who live together before marriage experience higher levels of marital conflict and do not communicate as well. Such couples were less committed to marriage and saw divorce as more likely than those who had not cohabited prior to marriage” (*Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 54, 1992).

### Dating: Teach the right way

How can concerned parents counteract pressure on their children to engage in immoral dating practices?

The first step, as noted earlier, is to teach them godly principles of dating and friendship. When their teens are ready, many families have found group dating to be a good way for youths to enter their next stage of life.

Since teenagers are generally not ready for marriage—because of immaturity and the need for educational and occupational training—some of the pressures and temptations of one-on-one dating can be avoided through group dates. Social development and learning to have fun in the company of the opposite sex are healthy experiences for teens in a safe environment.

### Dating for marriage

When two mature people begin dating each other with an eye toward marriage, they must consider many things. What values does the other person hold? Does he believe in God? Does she obey God? What is this person’s background and personal standards and values? What are his preferences, dislikes, character and personality? Will this person be a complementary match? Can I love and respect her?

Often in modern dating little thought is given to a potential partner for life—other than whether the two enjoy their sexual activity. Yet when two people refrain from the emotionally charged arena of sexual relations as God instructs, they can much more rationally consider the values and traits of a potential spouse.

Finding a mate with similar religious values is an especially important consideration. The ancient nation of Israel repeatedly lost its spiritual moorings when its citizens intermarried with people with different religious convictions and practices (Numbers 25:1-3; Nehemiah 13:23-26). Marrying within one’s faith is still just as important.

Ideally children should have two parents who believe, practice and teach the same religious principles. When children have parents with different values, they are confused. Even if children are not involved, clashes between two competing value systems can be painful. Through bitter experience, many afterward wish that when they were dating they had followed the apostle Paul’s advice against being “unequally yoked

together” with someone of different religious beliefs (2 Corinthians 6:14).

As two people consider getting engaged to be married, if they are wise they will seek premarital counseling. Such counsel can help couples consider their strengths and weaknesses before marriage. In addition to an objective review, they can discuss their relationship skills.

Although the decision to marry is a personal one, this kind of information can help couples make wiser choices about whom they marry. For those who choose to proceed with marriage, insights gained through premarital counseling can lay a foundation for a relationship that will last.

### A foundation for marriage

Within marriage God gives husbands and wives specific instructions that will produce peace and happiness. Whether or not one has followed God’s instructions regarding dating, these principles can help any marriage.

Although the best course of action is always to follow all of God’s instructions, God also allows and encourages everyone to turn from past sins and begin obeying Him (Ezekiel 18:21; Acts 2:38; 26:18). (If you would like to know more about the purpose of human life and how to commit your life to God, request our free booklets *What Is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

Although solid relationships are built more quickly when both husband and wife accept and practice God’s laws, God expects each of us to respond to Him regardless of the circumstances of our marriage (James 4:17). Even when only one mate commits his or her life to God and His standards, this opens the door to God blessing both partners (1 Corinthians 7:13-14). A positive, loving example of obedience to God by a husband or wife may influence the other to want to please God (1 Peter 3:1-4). One person *can* make a difference.

Let us consider some biblical principles that when followed make marriages work.

### A lifelong commitment

Early in the book of Genesis God tells us that it is appropriate for a man to “leave his father and his mother” and “cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, King James Version). The Hebrew word translated “cleave” is *dabaq*, meaning “to cling, cleave, keep close.”

“Used in modern Hebrew in the sense of ‘to stick to, adhere to,’ *dabaq* yields the noun form for ‘glue’ and also the more abstract ideas of ‘loyalty, devotion’” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1985, “To Cleave, Cling”).

When a husband and wife obey the biblical command to cleave to each other, they will literally join together. Having sexual relations, being “one flesh,” is part of commitment to each other in marriage. Commitment includes fidelity, trust and the character to act properly when under pressure or temptation. Yet too often people engage in sex without commitment—a contradiction of this foundational principle for successful marriages.

When two people exchange wedding vows, they make a lifelong commitment. Biblically speaking, this is a covenant (Malachi 2:14)—a solemn promise to God and one’s mate to be faithful.

This commitment should not be taken lightly or maintained only when we feel like it. We need to understand that our feelings can mislead us. God does not advocate only occasional bursts of loyalty and obedience to Him whenever it is convenient for us. Similarly, people who desire good marriages do not look for people who will stay committed to them only *most* of the time.

Good relationships stand on long-term, trustworthy commitments—even under trying circumstances. When two people commit to follow God and His instructions within their marriage, they take the first steps to a happy, lasting relationship.

### What is love?

To love and be loved is one of the most exhilarating experiences people can enjoy. Writers and poets ancient and modern speak of the power and emotion of romantic love. Yet the Bible reveals that love, in its broadest sense, is a *choice*. Love is something we *choose* to do.

God tells husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Colossians 3:19)—and not just if they feel like it. Lacking a foundational understanding, many couples have tragically assumed they have no control over their feelings. Concluding that love just magically appears or disappears, too many have suffered and even dissolved relationships over difficulties that could have been resolved.

In a beautiful explanation of the love God expects of us, the apostle Paul describes the nature and qualities of love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV).

Love is much more than a vague emotion or physical attraction. Practicing real love requires conscious choice and determination. Genuine love resolves to show kindness and patience in the face of suffering. It

does not return evil for evil (Romans 12:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). People who exemplify this kind of love follow the example of God Himself, who “is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).

Full, complete love is the love God expects husbands to show their wives. It is the foundation of godly leadership. Without it husbands cannot properly fulfill the leadership God expects from them within marriage (Ephesians 5:23). When a husband demonstrates godly love, his whole family benefits. His wife and children feel secure. When they know they are honored and loved, it is much easier for them to respect him as the leader of the family.

Husbands must understand that even though God has given them responsibility within the family, their position of leadership is to be used only for the good of the family. It should never be used for selfish reasons. This kind of leadership flows from the understanding that first and foremost the husband, too, is under authority—God’s authority (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Because husbands historically have not lived up to God’s expectations for them, some have concluded that a father’s leadership position within the family is evil and outdated. The real problem, however, is with husbands who neglect or reject the character traits of godliness—not with God’s model for families. If we accept God’s instructions, we must accept His teaching on the marriage model.

God places on a husband’s shoulders immense responsibility for leading his wife and children in gentleness and love. God gives him no mandate to use his position harshly or selfishly, nor the right to neglect his family’s well-being. Humility, the opposite of pride and arrogance, is essential in godly leadership.

In a poignant letter to Titus, Paul explained that God’s structure for families is a foundational biblical teaching: “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior . . . —that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed” (Titus 2:1-5).

### Respect: key to a successful marriage

God set husbands in a leadership role in the family, but He expects men and women alike to practice biblical love and respect (Ephesians 5:21).

Besides detailing for husbands how they should love their wives (Ephesians 5:25-33), Paul gives specific instructions to wives: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of

the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (verse 22-24).

This verse teaches us that a wife’s willing acknowledgment of her husband’s leadership role is a vital ingredient in the godly model for marriage. This doesn’t mean the husband must make every decision. Many couples successfully divide household responsibilities, working together according to their respective strengths and interests. In a loving marriage, both partners should discuss major decisions and priorities. Then, according to the biblical model, if the husband chooses to make the final judgment all family members should honor it.

But there are times when a husband should wisely defer to the preferences of his wife and children. Just because he has the right to make family choices does not mean it is always best that he does. Many decisions are a matter of preference, and preference is an individual matter. A loving husband and father should be sensitive to the desires and preferences of every family member as long as they don’t violate family and godly standards.

No husband can successfully head his household unless his wife cooperatively respects the leadership position God has given him. Without her conscious decision to obey God’s instruction, she will usurp his leadership role in the family, or the husband and wife will constantly argue. Paul urges wives to respect their husbands (verse 33). Attitude—of both husbands and wives—is the key to making the biblical model of marriage a joyful experience.

Like love, respect also implies making a choice. We can choose to respect people for their positive qualities or despise them for the traits we dislike. The best time for critical evaluation is before marriage. Afterwards spouses need to focus on mutual respect. Deal kindly with imperfections and abundantly praise good qualities. Benjamin Franklin, early American statesman, wisely and humorously put it this way: “Keep your eyes wide open before marriage and half shut afterwards.”

### Conflict and communication

Researchers have found that the way two people communicate mirrors the state of their relationship. Positive, encouraging communication indicates a good relationship, and excessive criticism indicates a poor relationship. Depending on the circumstances, the two little words “I’m sorry” can be as effective as “I love you.”

Some marriage counselors claim couples should learn to fight fairly and not worry about the number of arguments. “Get it off your chest, and get it all out in the open,” they advise.

Although candor can be healthy, fighting and arguing over every disagreement has proven to not be so wise. A study of 691 couples indicated that the more partners argue, regardless of their style of quarreling, the more likely they will eventually divorce (Richard Morin, “What’s Fair in Love and Fights?” *Washington Post Weekly*, June 7, 1993, p. 37). Conflicts lower respect and can build resentment. An argument can turn into the catalyst for a divorce.

How much conflict can a relationship stand? One method of measurement, which claims 90 percent accuracy in predicting which marriages will last and which will fail, is based on the percentage of positive comments vs. negative comments between mates. Among newlyweds researchers found that partners who would end up staying together made five or fewer critical comments out of each 100 comments about each other. Newlyweds who later divorced had made 10 or more critical comments out of each 100 (Joanni Schrof, “A Lens on Matrimony,” *U.S. News and World Report*, Feb. 21, 1994, pp. 66-69).

Since no two people, even happily married couples, agree on everything, learning how to peacefully resolve differences is an important part of maintaining respect. Here are a few principles couples should follow:

- *Talk matters out.* Take turns expressing your beliefs and concerns in a kind way, without raising your voices (Proverbs 15:1). Refusing to talk about difficulties does not resolve problems. Learn to express your opinions in a nonjudgmental way.

Respect differences in your mate. Since God created humankind with a broad range of personalities, we need to appreciate those different perspectives. Even the steps we take to fulfill God’s instructions can vary from person to person (2 Peter 3:9).

- *Seek a win-win solution.* Whenever possible look for solutions to problems that are acceptable to both parties (Philippians 2:4). If possible, have two winners rather than a winner and loser. We must at times be willing to yield as long as a choice or action isn’t in conflict with God’s instruction (Matthew 5:9; 1 Corinthians 6:7).

Paul beautifully explained this principle: “Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:4-5).

- *Forgive.* Everyone makes mistakes. Forgive so God and your spouse will be inclined to forgive you (Matthew 6:15; Luke 6:37). Put your best foot forward. Action often follows thought. Approach your marriage partner in a spirit of love and forgiveness and ask God to restore you to a right attitude (Psalm 51:10). Instead of letting your negative emotions rule you, determine to treat your spouse with respect (2 Corinthians 10:5). Often your emotions will match your actions.

- *Seek help.* If you have applied everything you know to do and are still struggling, look for competent professional help. Both you and your spouse may be making mistakes neither of you has recognized but which a counselor can discern. Healthy, mature people are not afraid to seek help when they need it (Proverbs 4:7; 11:14).

### The value of teamwork

God intends couples to work, live and grow in harmony. Instead of waging a war of the sexes, which modern philosophies often fuel, God teaches husbands and wives to work together as a team. “Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs *together* of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

Working together, husbands and wives can accomplish much more than they can working independently. In the first century, Aquila and Priscilla set a fine example as a husband-and-wife team dedicated to God and serving His people. Together they worked as tentmakers with the apostle Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:2-3), traveled with him to Syria (verse 18), helped Apollos understand “the way of God more accurately” when he was new in the faith (verses 24-26) and provided a meeting place for a church congregation in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19).

They were loved and respected. Notice Paul’s commendation of them: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles” (Romans 16:3-4). This couple saw a bigger purpose for their lives than arguing over inconsequential matters. They were living examples of “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

When husbands and wives lovingly submit to the roles God established in marriage, they learn how to submit to God. Intimate, loving relationships between husbands and wives teach us much about the relationship of Christ to the Church (Ephesians 5:32). Applying God’s principles for marriage not only produces happy relationships in this life, it yields greater understanding of godly principles that will last for eternity.

(To learn more, request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets).)

# Child Rearing: Building the Right Foundation

Countless books have been written about child rearing. Some approaches to rearing children are at opposite ends of the spectrum and give conflicting and contradictory advice. Where can we find sure, sound information to guide us in this crucial responsibility?

The Bible has much to say about this all-important subject, and parents should look to its pages for guidance. What should be our fundamental approach?

Our *attitude* toward our children is perhaps the single most important consideration in proper child rearing. Do we really love our children? Do our words and actions show our children we love them? Will we, and do we, sacrifice for them? Do we make time to show we care for them?

There is no



*The kind of teaching God commands requires much more than a once-a-week session at church services. It must be a regular practice, all week long. Such teaching should become a way of life.*

substitute for time spent with our children. Our time is our life. To our children, our time with them is life. A parent who provides his children with plenty of material possessions but little personal time is missing a vital point. Children do not equate the parent’s time on the job working

to provide for the family with love for them. They think it means Dad doesn't like to spend time with them. Our time is the most valuable gift we can give to our children, especially quality time interacting and conversing with them.

Without a foundational approach of love, little that we can do in rearing our children will produce the favorable results we want to see—mature, responsible and caring young men and women.

### Words and actions leave lasting impressions

All parents at times become frustrated with their children's behavior. It is easy for a father or mother to convey the impression that he or she doesn't love the child. Some parents, by means of angry, frustrated reactions and comments, make their children feel they are worthless or despised by the parents.

Parents must carefully consider the impression their words and actions make on their children. They may be upset about only one negative trait or action but make the child feel as if he is an altogether bad person. It is essential that parents control their anger when correcting a child and that they make the specific behavior, action or attitude for which the child is being punished perfectly clear.

The apostle Paul offers this instruction to parents: "Fathers, do not irritate and provoke your children to anger—do not exasperate them to resentment—but rear them (tenderly) in the training and discipline and the counsel and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4, Amplified Bible).

In other words, parents should be sure their children know, even when they are being disciplined and corrected, that they are loved. This is not to say parents should never display anger, but that it must be obviously directed toward the child's misbehavior. It should always be controlled and brief. God Himself becomes angry at times, but He doesn't lose His temper, and He always has a righteous purpose for His indignation and resulting actions.

When children know they are deeply cared for and that correction from their father or mother grows out of concern and is in their best interest, such discipline will not provoke them to anger and rebellion.

On the other hand, statements that a child perceives as painting him and his character and attitude as worthless make him feel rejected and can eventually lead to rebellious behavior, damaging activities and even running away from home.

If a parent tells his child he's no good, the child soon will start believing it and living up to that reputation. To show *active* rather than passive love for our kids, we must extend sincere compliments and praise when

they're due. This reassures our children they are loved and appreciated.

### Parents' responsibility to teach

Another essential ingredient in proper child rearing is actively teaching right values and behavior. God emphasizes this parental responsibility: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

This does not mean just formal, classroom-style teaching, although such teaching is appropriate. The instruction God commands inspires practical, down-to-earth learning and application of God's way of life while we go about our daily activities.

This kind of teaching requires much more than a once-a-week session at church services. It must be a regular practice, all week long. Such teaching should become a way of life.

Children, of course, quickly perceive whether their parents practice what they teach. Therefore, the parents' example may be the most important teacher of all. Parents must *do* the things they teach. Nothing is more ineffective than for a parent who uses foul language to correct his child for using similar language. How can a parent teach responsibility if his own actions are irresponsible, if they bring needless hardship on the family?

Our example greatly influences our children. They are quick to pick up on inconsistencies. They consider how fair we are, how much information we seek before making a decision, how we treat their friends, how courteously and respectfully we deal with others. They especially watch whether we live up to what we say—particularly if we are judgmental of other people on those same issues.

### The need for discipline

An important part of teaching is discipline, which can involve punishment. This is a controversial subject in many societies, with strong opinions on many sides of the issue. Some parents believe in corporal punishment; others are dead set against it. Governments, too, enter the picture, with some countries going so far as to outlaw spanking or paddling. The educational system is a major additional factor in this ongoing debate. Corporal punishment has virtually disappeared from many public schools.

Keep in mind, however, the various ways to punish or administer discipline. Verbal correction, removal of privileges, restricting freedoms and adding extra chores are a few. Sometimes such methods work well, and some may be more effective with one child than another. Some

children are more sensitive and respond to scolding. Others require bolder steps to teach the lesson. The result is the important thing. A godly principle is to use only as much punishment as is required to achieve the desired result.

But sometimes none of these methods work. So what about corporal punishment?

The Bible teaches that corporal punishment, wisely applied, is appropriate when disciplining children: “Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death” (Proverbs 23:13-14, New International Version; see also Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 29:15).

The word *rod* should not be interpreted to mean anything that could injure a child in any manner whatsoever. It implies only something small and light that would inflict a limited amount of pain without injury. The size might vary according to the age and size of the child.

Appropriate punishment involves temporarily inflicting



*Some children are more sensitive and respond to scolding. Others require bolder steps to teach the lesson.*

minor pain with the specific objective of preventing future inappropriate behavior with its far greater and long-lasting consequences. This minor, short-lived pain is nothing compared with the suffering that would come later if the child should permanently adopt destructive behavior. But parents must wisely administer such discipline. It should be undertaken only for the child’s benefit, never to vent a parent’s uncontrolled anger.

Family and child-rearing authority James Dobson describes the proper approach in administering punishment: “It is possible . . . to create a violent and aggressive child who has observed this behavior at home. If he is routinely beaten by hostile, volatile parents, or if he witnesses physical violence between angry adults, or if he feels unloved

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and unappreciated within his family, the child will not fail to notice how the game is played . . . Being a parent carries no right to slap and intimidate a child because you had a bad day or are in a lousy mood. It is this kind of unjust discipline that causes some well-meaning authorities to reject corporal punishment altogether.

“Just because a technique is used wrongly, however, is no reason to reject it altogether. Many children desperately need this resolution to their disobedience. In those situations when the child fully understands what he is being asked to do or not to do but refuses to yield to adult leadership, an appropriate spanking is the shortest and most effective route to an attitude adjustment. When he lowers his head, clenches his fists, and makes it clear he is going for broke, justice must speak swiftly and eloquently. Not only does this response not create aggression in a boy or girl, it helps them control their impulses and live in harmony with various forms of benevolent authority throughout life” (*The New Dare to Discipline*, 1992, p. 60).

Spanking should be a contingency plan, not the standard or sole way of punishing. It should be used when other approaches don’t work or when a child is out of control and will not submit or when he shows a rebellious spirit. Spankings are not for accidentally spilling milk or for making a C on a report card. Nor should they become the dominant tool of child rearing.

Says Dr. Dobson: “In my opinion, spankings . . . should be reserved for the moment a child (between the age of eighteen months to ten years old) expresses to parents a defiant ‘I will not!’ or ‘You shut up!’ When youngsters convey this kind of stiff-necked rebellion, you must be willing to respond to the challenge immediately” (Dobson, p. 20).

### Taking a cue from God’s discipline

Consider that God chastises Christians out of love for them. Notice Hebrews 12:5-11: “And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.’

“Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

“For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness.

Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

The preceding passage from Hebrews quotes Proverbs 3:11-12, comparing God’s correction of us as His children to human parents disciplining their children out of love and concern for them.

These verses teach us several vital principles regarding discipline. From them we learn (1) God disciplines in love, (2) discipline is not rejection but part of our maturing and growth, (3) discipline produces respect, and (4) discipline produces good fruit and righteousness.

The Greek word for “discipline” in the passage in Hebrews includes the concepts of education and training, corrective guidance and corrective punishment. Proper child rearing involves all these elements of training.

Another biblical principle that parents should consider when evaluating discipline appropriate for their children is expressed by the apostle Paul: “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 13:1-2).

Parents should understand that some disciplinary practices recommended in Scriptures may be restricted by local, state or national laws.

### A blessing and responsibility

God’s Word tells us children are a gift, a blessing from Him. Being a parent is perhaps the greatest responsibility we can have in this life, and it can bring the greatest rewards.

We can teach our sons and daughters many things, but we can also learn much from them about life and relationships. If we are effective in parenting, they can even surpass us and achieve more than we. That is truly an honor to any parent and a worthy goal.

(To learn more, download or request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets). You can also download our free article reprint collection *Successful Parenting* at [www.gnmagazine.org/reprints](http://www.gnmagazine.org/reprints).)

# Finding the Path to a Happy Family

One of the greatest blessings of a happy, fulfilled life is a loving family. Nothing seems better than coming home to a household filled with love, children and a happy marriage. Although we may have a great job, without a successful home life we will realize a great void in our lives.

In the broadest sense our family includes not only our spouse and children, but parents, uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces and others—all members of our extended family. Enjoying a good relationship with all one’s family is a wonderful blessing.

To discover how we can make our family relationships work, let’s see



how the institution of the family began.

Shortly after God created the first man, Adam, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). Adam was incomplete. So God created a woman, Eve, to be his partner in life.

*It is easy to forget that children are a blessing from God. Life is much more fulfilling when we take time to notice and appreciate the simple things around us.*

God created men and women to *complement* each other, not compete with each other. He created them to work together, within marriage, to form families and populate the earth.

### Keys to happiness

God didn’t create the family relationship and then leave us to stumble

blindly in trying to find the best way to make it work. The keys for family happiness and success are revealed in the Scriptures. When we follow these instructions, much of the strife so often found in families is eliminated.

One of the keys God gives is that marriage is a lifelong commitment. When asked about divorce, Jesus Christ responded: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’?” (Matthew 19:4-5).

Jesus showed that marriage was designed by God as a sacred contract, a covenant between a man and woman (Malachi 2:14)—an agreement not to be violated.

Happiness does not come by accident. We are most satisfied when we are doing something we believe is important. Such is the case with the family. God created this institution so we could learn many lessons and attain our potential in His family (2 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 2:10-11; 1 John 3:2).

God gives instructions on how a family is to function. In the Fifth Commandment He tells us, “Honor your father and mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

We are always to honor our parents. In our youth we should honor them by respectful obedience. When they are old we should honor them with visits, regular communication and respect and by seeing that their material and emotional needs are met.

God promises a special blessing for people who obey this commandment. Notice the reward for honoring our parents: “that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” In Ephesians 6:2 the apostle Paul describes this instruction as “the first commandment with promise.”

Another blessing that comes from having a family is children. Psalm 127:3-5 tells us: “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them . . .”

Whether first-time parents marveling at the miracle of life, a grandmother proudly holding her first grandchild or a grandfather playing catch with his grandchild in the backyard—all discover children to be a God-given source of joy.

It is easy to forget that children are a blessing from God. Too often we think of having fun as visiting an exotic vacation spot, meeting exciting

people or witnessing a spectacular event. Yet we eventually learn that life is much more fulfilling when we take time to notice and appreciate the simple things around us.

### **Happiness begins at home**

Sadly, our modern way of life tends to separate families. Grandchildren often live far from their grandparents. Youngsters are separated from their aunts, uncles and cousins. Frequent visits and phone calls can help shorten the distance and keep us in touch with other members of our family, but those measures are not always adequate.

Building happy, stable, extended families takes effort. Galatians 6:7 explains that we reap what we sow. A properly functioning family requires a lot of work, just as it takes effort to start a career, build a house or plow a field.

We usually reap rewards in proportion to the effort we put into something. If we start to build a house but don’t make use of good-quality materials and good workmanship, our house will not have much value. Our families are the same. If we put effort and care into them, then we can reap the benefits of healthy relationships. On the other hand, if we don’t invest much time and effort in our families, we cannot expect much in return.

Let’s consider some investments we can make to create the most positive environment in our families.

### **Time: a precious commodity**

Spending time together is important for people in any profitable and proper relationship. The many pressures and demands on our time tend to pull our families farther apart rather than drawing them together. Some parents find it difficult to spend more than a few minutes each day with their spouses and children.

It is common to hear people complain about their lack of time. Yet we seem to find time for the things that we really want to do.

How important is your family? How high a priority is it to you? When we ask ourselves this question, we may see a need to rearrange our priorities. You may have to *make time* for your family.

When family members live in the same area and share the commitment to obey God’s commandments, they have a special opportunity for spending time together while worshiping God. The Fourth Commandment instructs us to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Though one of the most ignored laws of God, the Sabbath command, when observed, affords families many opportunities to come together. (To learn how to find time in your week to consider godly

spiritual values, you need to learn more about God's weekly Sabbath. Be sure to request our free booklet *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest.*)

The Sabbath commandment is more important today than ever because of our busy schedules. It is a day on which family members should have dinner together, perhaps take time for a walk and, above all, worship God together. Investing time with your close relatives on the Sabbath can enhance your relationships with them, teach them the values of God and bind your family together through eternal spiritual principles.

In addition to the Sabbath, other times and activities, such as trips, vacations and holidays, provide ways for family members to spend time together. Such occasions provide opportunities for parents to talk with

their children, to find out what they are thinking about life and learn of their hopes, dreams and frustrations. It is also a time for children to start asking questions of their parents about life. When a



*The Sabbath is a day on which family members should have dinner together, perhaps take time for a walk and, above all, worship God together.*

family is together in a car for many hours traveling, parents can take this time to communicate with their children, thus bringing their families closer together.

#### **A source of support**

There are always times when things go wrong. When rough times come, the family can provide powerful support. Ecclesiastes 4:11-12 points out the advantage of support: "If two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart" (NASB). What better physical, emotional and even spiritual

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support can one have than a loving family that comes to the aid of a stricken member?

Paul exhorted the congregation in Thessalonica to "comfort the faint-hearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all" (1 Thessalonians 5:15). Assistance from the family is the first source of help when problems arise. If a family member falls ill or loses a job, a supporting family can help. Family members can encourage him not to give up or become overly discouraged.

A problem during Jesus' earthly ministry was nonsupporting families. Christ chastised the Pharisees, telling them they needed to take care of older, needy family members. "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition," He told them. "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban'—(that is, a gift to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother" (Mark 7:9-12). He made it clear that family members have a responsibility to take care of elderly parents.

One way to support elderly parents is to stay in regular contact with them. Letters and phone calls to see how they are doing are good first steps. Then one should follow through with help as needed. The principle of assisting also applies to other members of a family when they are in need.

#### **Traditionally speaking**

Traditions help families function and grow closer. We have already mentioned that obedience to the Fourth Commandment (to keep the Sabbath holy) can help make stronger families. Besides the Sabbath and biblical feast days, other traditional times to get together—such as anniversaries—offer important opportunities for developing relationships. (To understand the meaning of the biblical Holy Days, be sure to request *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*)

Jesus Christ encourages us as well to extend hospitality to others outside our immediate families: "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14).

#### **The need for rules**

We live in an era that has cast off many of the rules—the standards

and traditions—that once governed society. The result? Young people do not have the guidelines to help them grow and mature into responsible adults. Far too many roam the streets without rules to define proper behavior.

Children need boundaries and rules. They need to know what is expected of them. Proverbs 29:15 tells us that “the rod and rebuke give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” Children and teenagers may not appreciate correction and rules when they are young; but when they are older, they will see and be thankful for the wisdom of parents who gave them proper guidance.

Ross Campbell, M.D., understands the importance of rules in the development of children. In his book *How to Really Love Your Teenager* he writes: “Teenagers at some level of consciousness realize they need guidance and control from their parents. They want it. I have heard so many teenagers say that their parents do not love them because they are not strict or firm enough. And so many teenagers express their thankfulness and love to parents who showed their care and concern by their guidance and control” (1988, p. 77).

Rules and guidelines are good for children. They let them know what is expected of them. They identify proper standards of behavior.

Responsible parents who love their children will give careful consideration to the rules they establish. Dr. Campbell asks: “Should you make them fair, broad, and reasonable? Or should you be very strict? It is important to remember that the normal teenager will test—and sometimes even break—your limits or rules. Common sense, then, indicates that since it is in the makeup of most teenagers to challenge and/or break rules, no matter how strict or broad they are, the sensible thing is to make rules initially quite strict and restrictive” (ibid., p. 76).

Later, as children mature and demonstrate responsible behavior, the rules can be relaxed where and when appropriate.

The Bible tells us that children, too, have a responsibility. Paul wrote, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Ephesians 6:1). Ideally, youths will learn from parents who teach them God’s instructions.

Of course, children tend to test rules. At times they will decide they know better than their parents. When this happens, parents should take time to explain why certain rules exist. For example, if a youngster or teenager has a tendency to not wear a seat belt when riding in a car, explain to him the reason for wearing one: Seat belts usually save lives and prevent serious injuries in case of accidents. If children are placed in seat belts when they are young, they will develop the habit of buckling up and likely not challenge it as they grow older.

### Love: the lasting ingredient

Love is the most important ingredient in any successful family. If members of the family love each other, they will be more tolerant and forgiving, and they will be willing to support weaker members of the family.



The apostle Paul describes the characteristics of true love, the unselfish concern for other people: “Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity,

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but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Love is especially important within the family structure. It gives us direction when we wonder how to treat a family member. Love means applying discipline when needed. This kind of love requires parental courage and self-discipline—the same attributes we would like to see in our children.

Societal changes have seriously threatened the family. Some wonder if the family structure can survive. Many forces are at work that constantly threaten and undermine this basic building block of society.

There is much you can do to help make your family life work, to help prevent your family from becoming one of the casualties. You can help make your family a safe haven for its members, a harbor from the storms of life in a troubled world. To see your family life flourish, be sure to apply these principles and many more to be found throughout the Bible.

(To learn more, request our free booklet *Marriage and Family: The Missing Dimension* from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets).)

# The Importance of Right Friendships

**S**ome people prefer to be alone. But most want to be around other people. Relationships and associations are important to them. They desire to have and maintain friendships.

Friendship is part of God's way of life. His Word has much to say about friendship. In fact, God Himself strongly emphasizes His desire for relationships and friendships. Jesus Christ, who is one in mind and Spirit with the Father, will marry the Church. This implies an extremely close relationship as well as a friendship. A major underpinning in God's plan is healthy, strong, close relationships.

The Scriptures refer to Abraham and Moses as friends of God (Exodus 33:11; James 2:23). Jesus had close friends. Though the disciples were His closest friends, He had friendly relationships with others, including tax collectors. For this He was soundly condemned by others (Matthew 11:19). One of the tax collectors, Matthew, even became a disciple (Matthew 9:9-13).

These examples illustrate that it is not wrong to have friends who are not Christian. John, another disciple and a close friend of Jesus, described the danger we must keep in mind: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

We must maintain a proper balance. We are to help people in the world—in society—without becoming part of the way of life of the world.

Among the disciples, the Savior apparently felt especially close to John. He even commissioned this disciple to care for His mother, Mary, after His death. Although Jesus was a friend to many, He appears to have felt a special affinity for John.

John's epistles dwell on love as a major theme. Since God is love and the Son of God is like His Father (Hebrews 1:3), this may be why Jesus felt a special affinity for John. Following Christ's example, we can see that it's not wrong for us to have close friends as long as they do not prevent us from helping others and having a positive relationship with them.

People can be so much more effective, so much more balanced and

so much wiser as a result of developing and maintaining healthy friendships. The Word of God supports this approach. The book of Proverbs is rife with wise sayings on aspects of friendship. Proverbs focuses on the importance of developing friendships based on the right reasons. For example, Proverbs 19:4-6 tells us: "Wealth makes many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend . . . Many entreat the favor of the nobility, and every man is a friend to one who gives gifts."

Solomon noted that many people make friends for ulterior motives, such as what a friend can do for us. But a true friend is one who will sacrifice for his brother, not one who will sacrifice his brother for gain. A true friend will not be friendly only when things are going well but will love at all times, including periods of adversity (Proverbs 17:17).

A true friend is deeply committed to a relationship. Notice Jesus Christ



describing this commitment: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus not only said this, He lived it. It's quite a challenge for us to follow this wonderful example.

Some believe that to be a friend to someone, one should never stand up to or disagree with him. But there are times when a true friend

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needs to tell his brother where he is wrong. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend. But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Proverbs 27:6).

Friends should assist and strengthen each other by helping each other grow and improve (Proverbs 27:17). People simply do much better by working together. Two really are better than one (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

God's way is not one of total independence from others. It is a way of interdependence—of close relationships and of working together as a well-trained team to accomplish the goals He sets before us. All of us need to actively seek, develop and maintain friendships from a godly perspective and motive. We will be better people as a result.

# Finding Success in Your Job and Career

In a world that has changed tremendously in recent years, it seems few things have changed as fast as employment and economic situations.

Not that long ago it was common for a person to work for himself or learn a trade and work for one employer for most, if not all, of his working life. Most people started working for one company, and it was virtually a partnership for life. But no longer. That kind of security and loyalty—from employer to employee and vice-versa—is a thing of the past. It's now much more common for people to work for several employers over a lifetime and to learn many skills and hold several kinds of jobs over the course of their career.

In an increasingly competitive world of business mergers, acquisitions and bankruptcies, seniority and experience no longer necessarily equate to job security. People can lose their jobs through downsizing and layoffs with little or no warning. In many advanced nations, entire categories of jobs have been eliminated, replaced through computers and automation or outsourced to poorer nations where workers will perform the task for a fraction of the cost.

In a world that is so far removed from the life and times of the Bible, do the Scriptures offer any guidance in how to be successful in our job and career?

## Versatility in a changing world

Obviously, one key to economic survival is versatility. Only in recent generations have we seen such a remarkable move toward specialization, and that driven largely by technological advancements. These advancements constantly alter our world, creating new business and job opportunities virtually overnight while just as quickly rendering others obsolete.

In terms of versatility, we might liken our world to the Bible world of 2,000 years ago. Back then most people were self-employed and had to learn many skills out of necessity. There was not a throwaway society in which if something broke you simply went to the store and bought a new one. People made most of the things they used, then repaired them when necessary. Of necessity they learned many skills to provide for themselves and their families.

Similarly, people today often have to learn many job skills out of necessity in a fast-paced, fast-changing world. Those who don't learn, grow and change with the times can fall behind and have to fend for themselves.

## Timeless principles for success

Even though we live in a world of constant change, some things have not changed for thousands of years. Our world is far removed from that of the Bible, yet its pages reveal timeless principles that apply just as well today as they did when they were first written thousands of years ago.

The book of Proverbs is especially helpful, not just in offering us guidance for how to be successful on the job but in advising how to succeed in all areas of life. Notice how, in the first few verses, King Solomon expresses the purpose of the book of Proverbs:

“The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair;

for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young—let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance” (Proverbs 1:1-5, NIV).

Simply put, the book of Proverbs is a book to teach us wisdom. It records hundreds of observations on all aspects of life and our relationships with one another. It offers hundreds



*In a world that is so far removed from the life and times of the Bible, do the Scriptures offer any guidance in how to be successful in our job and career?*

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of gems of advice that have been proven over time. Let's examine some of the advice it offers to help us succeed in our jobs and careers, whether we work for ourselves or others.

### A tiny teacher from nature

Solomon was a multitalented man. He was not only a gifted writer, teacher and composer but a student of nature who recorded his observations about the natural world around him (1 Kings 4:30-34). One of his first recorded principles for success on the job, and in all areas of life for that matter, came from observing one of the tiniest of God's creatures: the ant.

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” advises Solomon. “It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11, NIV).

Solomon tells us we can learn much about how to be successful in life from the lowly ant. First, the ant doesn't have to have someone tell it what to do. It recognizes what needs to be done and takes care of it.

Any supervisor recognizes the value of an employee with such an approach—someone who learns his job, does it and doesn't have to be reminded what to do. Those who must constantly be told what to do are rarely successful because they not only drain the time and energy of their managers, but they show little or no initiative or potential for advancement.

The ant in Solomon's observations instinctively recognizes the need to prepare for the future. When the opportunity is there to gather food, it willingly and diligently works hard to store up provisions for lean times ahead.

Likewise, we should recognize the need to prepare for the future. When circumstances are good, make the most of them, recognizing that it won't always be this way. When opportunities present themselves, we should learn to recognize and act on them while circumstances allow. Otherwise they might not present themselves again.

### The value of hard work

One lesson from Solomon's meditations on the ant's behavior is unmistakable: To be successful requires hard work. The ant seems instinctively to know it must work hard to survive. Too many people have yet to figure that out.

No one wants to hire (or keep) a person who is lazy, passive, not dependable and always looking for excuses or ways to get out of work. Such people usually are more trouble than they are worth. Solomon points out where such people usually end up—suffering from poverty and scarcity.

Curiously, Solomon's comments imply that these consequences strike the lazy person unexpectedly, like a bandit or robber who strikes suddenly and without warning. Apparently at least some such people lack the foresight even to see the inevitable consequences of their laziness. Perhaps you've seen problem employees go their merry way, unaware of their behavioral deficiencies until they were fired. Solomon even notes that some people are so oblivious to their own shortcomings that they seem impervious to reality (Proverbs 26:16).

Solomon adds that we should learn from the examples of behavior we see around us. We should recognize cause and effect, he tells us, to learn what leads to success and what leads to poverty: “I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler, and your need like an armed man” (Proverbs 24:30-34).

The Proverbs repeatedly tell us that, when it comes to success, there is no substitute for diligent work. “In all hard work there is profit, but talk only makes a man poor” (Proverbs 14:23, Bible in Basic English).

Talk by itself, as Solomon pointed out, produces nothing. Good intentions are just that—intentions. “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Proverbs 13:4). Good intentions without follow-up actions bring nothing. Rightly acting on such intentions, however, pays off.

Solomon noted that those who don't want to work can always come up with creative excuses. “The lazy man says, ‘There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!’” (Proverbs 22:13). Excuses, too, are no substitute for getting the job done.

### Diligence delivers dividends

Hand in hand with hard work is a trait the Bible often refers to as diligence. We might call it many things: initiative, motivation, enthusiasm, drive, foresight. Curiously, the Hebrew word translated as “diligent” is rendered as “sharp” in several verses. Today we refer to someone as *sharp* if we think he is intelligent, productive and effective—in other words, if he's diligent.

Diligence and hard work are the opposite of laziness. The *fruits* of diligence and hard work are also the opposite of the consequences of laziness. What does Solomon tell us about the reward of diligence—of initiative, drive and foresight?

“The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to

forced labor,” he writes (Proverbs 12:24). Those who are enthusiastic and motivated in their work are those who naturally will get the promotions and greater responsibility. If you want to be considered for opportunities for advancement, cultivate and develop these traits. Do your absolute best in your current position to show that you can handle additional responsibility, and it will likely come.

No one who takes a passive, disinterested approach to work should expect additional responsibilities or the additional pay that comes

with them. “He who is slow in his work becomes poor, but the hand of the ready worker gets in wealth,” says Solomon (Proverbs 10:4, BBE). The results of work habits Solomon noted almost 3,000 years ago haven’t changed.

“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might,” advised Solomon in another biblical book (Ecclesiastes 9:10).



*Those who are enthusiastic and motivated in their work are those who naturally will get the promotions and greater responsibility.*

This is wise advice indeed. If we do our best with opportunities given us, more opportunities will come our way. As king over Israel, Solomon noted just how high diligent, motivated employees can go when they apply themselves: “Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men” (Proverbs 22:29, NIV).

### Preparation before pleasure

For young people in particular, Solomon offers advice that becomes understandable when we apply its underlying principle to our day and age. “Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that, build your house,” he wrote (Proverbs 24:27, NIV). What does that quaint-sounding advice have to do with us?

Solomon was summing up a principle crucial for success. In the agriculturally based society of his time, people lived—and sometimes died—by the condition, readiness and productivity of their fields. If their fields yielded little or no crops, the individual or family was in deep trouble. Thus their highest priority was to keep fields in good condition so everyone could eat.

Solomon advises someone starting out as a young adult to “get your fields ready” first. In other words, take the steps that will put—and keep—food on your table. “After that, build your house,” he says. Solomon here sums up our basic priorities in life as *work before pleasure*.

The modern equivalent would be to be sure you are well prepared to make a living before you start trying to enjoy a good living. Put in the hard work necessary to begin a career and get and keep well-paying jobs. Once your fields (or their economic equivalent) are ready—after you’ve gained the skills to provide for you and your family—you can take time to build your house—to think about home and family.

In our time the thrust of that preparation to earn a living will be to get an appropriate education. On average, Americans with a college degree will earn double the lifetime earnings of a high-school graduate. Those with advanced degrees will earn far more.

Education is the single best investment you can make for your financial stability and earning power. As technology transforms our world, education will likely grow even more important with each coming year. At the same time the constant advancement of technology means that ongoing education—adding and developing skills—is also crucial.

### Stability and strength through self-discipline

Solomon tells us that this sort of self-discipline is crucial to our success. “Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls” (Proverbs 25:28).

Self-discipline is crucial to getting and maintaining control over our lives. Solomon compared a person without self-discipline to a city without walls. In his day an unwalled city was defenseless before invaders, unable to control its own destiny. It stood helpless before its enemies; when surrounded, it could either surrender, pay protection money or fight and suffer the likely bloody consequences. None of these choices came easily.

In the same way, a person without self-discipline is unable to control his own destiny. Without self-discipline he cannot set and maintain a course that will lead to security and stability. He will often be his own greatest hindrance to success as he follows his own impulses on one false start after another.

### Another biblical writer's perspective

Solomon wasn't the only Bible writer to offer sound advice for a successful career. The apostle Paul offers a perspective that can help us on the job regardless of our circumstances. He describes for us the perspective a Christian—and by extension any of us—should take toward our job and our employer:

“Servants, in all things do the orders of your natural masters; not only when their eyes are on you, as pleasers of men, but with all your heart, fearing the Lord: Whatever you do, do it readily, as to the Lord and not to men” (Colossians 3:22-23, BBE; compare Ephesians 6:5-8).

Paul's instruction is simple: We should approach our job as if we were working for Jesus Christ Himself. God is watching us whether the person paying us is or not, so we should always put forth our best effort and strive to please and honor Him. To do otherwise is to dishonor and disobey God, in essence stealing from or defrauding our employer by accepting pay while not giving the quantity and quality of work we've agreed to.

### Are you a profitable servant?

Perhaps no other biblical approach to success on the job and in our career is better expressed than that summarized by Jesus Christ Himself. He noted the difference between a servant—an employee—who is profitable to his employer and one who is not.

“Does [the master] thank [his] servant because he did the things that were commanded him?” Jesus asked. “I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do’” (Luke 17:9-10).

An unprofitable servant, said Jesus, does as he is told. He exactly—and barely—meets his responsibility. Such a servant, Jesus said, is *unprofitable*.

Jesus didn't spell out what makes a servant profitable. He didn't have to. His meaning was clear: A profitable servant must go above and beyond his duty. He must go beyond what his master—his employer—expects.

In times of economic uncertainty and financial instability, there is probably no better way to assure your employment security and growth than to follow Paul's admonition to work for one's employer as if you are working for Jesus Christ Himself. In doing so you will fulfill Jesus' description of what we must do to be truly profitable servants.

# Financial Security and Peace of Mind

A popular magazine pointed out that some Hollywood celebrities, each earning more than \$35 million per year, were deeply in debt. A newspaper article similarly reported that a popular musician had to drastically reorder his finances because his personal spending had grown to an average of some \$400,000 *per week*.

At the same time, many nations are mired in serious financial trouble, carrying enormous deficits, in spite of their industrial, business and agricultural productivity and know-how.

Following these same patterns, personal bankruptcies are soaring upward, and many families owe so much money they have very little hope of getting out of debt.

It is ironic that our materialistic world, which prizes the acquisition of wealth over almost everything else, is so heavily burdened by it. It's not hard to see that something is fundamentally wrong and out of balance. Instead of being a blessing and source of stability and security, money has come to be a curse that often produces great stress and anxiety because people have not learned to properly use it.

### Man's focus on materialism

We live in a world that does not seek the knowledge of its Creator—including His financial advice. Few people are aware that the Bible contains an amazing amount of information about how to accumulate and manage wealth. God wants us to be prosperous and happy (3 John 2), and He offers guidance to make that possible.

Most people feel they are able on their own to handle their personal affairs, including monetary decisions and allocations. They don't realize they're making a grave mistake in this, unwittingly cutting themselves off from God's favor and guidance that would lead to the financial success they seek.

For example, contrary to human inclination, God tells us not to set a high priority on the accumulation of wealth and material goods. Instead, even though we have physical needs, He tells us that spiritual values and objectives are more important and lasting and that we need first to seek His Kingdom rather than the things of this world. If we do this, He

promises to supply the physical necessities we require (Matthew 6:19-34).

However, because people are naturally inclined toward acquiring as much as possible for themselves, many find God's approach difficult to accept and pursue. But if we want to attain real financial stability and security—with peace of mind—we must recognize the importance of putting God first. After all, He is the primary source of our blessings. Covetousness, along with lack of discipline and self-control, is a root cause of much personal and national economic trouble (1 Timothy 6:10).

God's Word sternly warns against covetousness. God's Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17) forbids coveting—intensely or obsessively desiring something that we could not legitimately obtain or afford.

The prophet Jeremiah indicted the kingdom of Judah for its citizens' covetousness (Jeremiah 22:17). Jesus Christ warned of its dangers (Luke 12:15-34). Hebrews 13:5 tells us, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have." Too many people fail to recognize the perils of yielding to their desires and cravings, especially when they are out of reach.

### The source of all wealth

Many have forgotten—or never considered—that it is God who gives us power to obtain wealth. Although diligent effort is a necessary part of anyone's success, God reminds us that when we say in our hearts, "My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth," we need to "remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

As 1 Chronicles 29:11-12 tells us: "Yours, O LORD, is the greatness, the power and the glory, the victory and the majesty; for all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; . . . Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; in Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all."

Psalms 24:1 adds, "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein."

These verses give a critically important godly perspective that we need to consider. It is God who gives us our life and capacities and who has created the earth's raw materials from which commodities and wealth originate.

### Acknowledging God for His blessings

Because God is the creator, life giver and sustainer of every living being, it follows that He has the prerogative to ask something in return from those who live as tenants on His property. Thousands of years ago He instituted the financial principle of tithing—giving 10 percent of

one's increase to His representatives—as a way of acknowledging Him as the source of our blessings. Tithing also provides a means for allowing His truth to be shared with others.

Scripture shows us that the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham and Jacob tithed (Genesis 14:18-20; 28:22). God commanded the entire nation of Israel to tithe (Leviticus 27:30). Jesus Christ endorsed tithing (Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42).

People who think tithing is a humanly contrived scheme to obtain wealth fail to see that this financial practice was ordained by God, not man, for a great spiritual purpose. They also fail to see that being will-

ing to acknowledge and obey God in this matter is an important step toward attaining personal happiness and financial success.

God promises material blessings to those who obey Him and acknowledge Him with their wealth (Proverbs 3:1, 9-10). Through the prophet Malachi, God



*Instead of being a blessing and source of stability and security, money has become a curse that often produces great stress and anxiety because people have not learned to properly use it.*

warns that withholding His tithe amounts to robbing Him but says He will bless those who tithe (Malachi 3:7-12).

God gives us "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17). Giving a 10th back to Him, along with offerings that express our gratitude, is a basic financial obligation. Putting God first in your financial planning shows you are getting your priorities straight and willing to follow God's instruction. The first 10th of our increase is holy to God (Leviticus 27:30) and should be set aside for *His* purposes and desires rather than our own.

### What is our highest priority?

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11 shows the futility of seeking worldly pleasure, wealth and materialism. In the end such pursuits are empty: "He who

loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase” (Ecclesiastes 5:10).

This illustrates again the importance of putting the things of God and His Kingdom first because they alone give lasting satisfaction and fulfillment.

Jesus Christ tells us we cannot successfully focus on and place the correct emphasis on both God and “mammon”—material wealth (Matthew 6:24). Therefore, the choice between the two is an important one.

To help us consider and evaluate these alternatives, Jesus contrasted the value of each. Earthly treasure is easily destroyed or stolen, He said, while heavenly riches are not vulnerable to loss or theft and are therefore more enduring and substantial (verses 19-20).

Later He continued this theme by showing that being overly concerned with the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches can strangle the influence of God’s Word, preventing spiritual growth and maturity (Matthew 13:22).

In Matthew 19:16-26 and Luke 12:13-34 He gives additional examples of the greater importance and value of setting our heart on spiritual

priorities rather than material and earthly concerns.

### Responsibilities toward others

God’s Word offers many other financial principles and truths we should study and follow to gain wisdom and guidance from God’s mind.

One sound bit of advice is to pay your taxes. Romans 13:1-7 teaches we should comply with governmental tax requirements. Some wrongly think they are above and exempt from government authority, but this is not what the Bible teaches (except in cases where God’s laws conflict with man’s—see Acts 5:29).

Failure to pay taxes can result in severe penalties because it is against the law of the land. Jesus Himself told us to pay taxes but not neglect what we owe to God (Matthew 22:17-21). We should pay first that which belongs to God as well as that which is required by the government.

The apostle Paul teaches that we should be willing and generous in contributing to the needs of others (2 Corinthians 9:6-15). He amplifies this by explaining that we should work so we “may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).

## A Source of *Timeless* Financial Advice

One of the best sources of timeless financial advice and guidance is the book of Proverbs.

Although we should carefully read the entire book to discover its many gems of wisdom, the following are some of its nuggets regarding finances and wealth.

Proverbs 6:1-5: Don’t put yourself in a position to be liable for the financial obligations of others (see also 11:15).

Proverbs 6:6-11: Don’t be lazy. Work while you can and save for the future. Don’t waste or make excuses (see also 10:4-5; 13:4; 18:9; 20:4; 22:13; 24:30-34; 26:13-16).

Proverbs 8:18: God doesn’t intend that we should be poor.

Proverbs 11:1: God hates cheating and delights in honesty (see also 13:11; 20:10, 23).

Proverbs 11:4: Riches won’t profit in times of disaster, but righteousness will (see also verse 28).

Proverbs 11:14: There is safety in seeking advice from many sources (see also 13:18; 15:22).

Proverbs 11:24-26: God blesses the generous (see also 25:21-22).

Proverbs 12:11: Make work a higher priority than play (see also 28:19).

Proverbs 15:16-17: It is better to be content with little, while having the fear of God and family love, than to have prosperity with hatred, disharmony and godlessness (see also 16:8; 17:1; 19:1; 28:6).

Proverbs 15:27: Don’t be greedy or open to bribery.

Proverbs 16:16: Gaining godly wisdom and understanding is more important than obtaining wealth.

Proverbs 18:10-11: It is better to rely on God’s power than money and material wealth.

Proverbs 19:17: God will repay and bless those who show regard for the poor (see also

28:27; 29:7).

Proverbs 20:17: Deceit doesn’t pay.

Proverbs 21:5: Diligence leads to prosperity, hastiness to poverty.

Proverbs 21:6: Obtaining wealth by lying leads to destruction.

Proverbs 21:17: Loving pleasure and overindulgence squanders assets and prevents one from building proper financial resources (see also verse 20).

Proverbs 22:1: Having a good reputation and favor are more important than having money.

Proverbs 22:4: Riches and honor come through humility and fearing God.

Proverbs 22:7: Those who incur debt give others power over them—a warning we should seriously consider, especially when it comes to financing expensive items and running up credit-card and other debt.

Proverbs 23:4-5: For the sake of your family and physical and spiritual well-being, don’t focus so much on work that you neglect other important priorities in life.

Proverbs 27:23-27: Although wealth is not enduring, keep diligent account of your assets and finances so you can wisely apportion what you have to supply the needs of your family. The principles of budgeting and financial planning are contained in these verses (see also verse 12).

Proverbs 28:8: If wealth is acquired by exorbitant interest rates and extortion, it will eventually be given to those who pity the poor.

Proverbs 28:20, 22: Don’t hasten after riches. (Although not specifically spelled out, this verse warns against lotteries and other forms of gambling as well as shady, questionable and unlawful endeavors. Punishment and poverty will likely come to those who get caught up in such activities.)

Proverbs 28:24: Pay your debts, especially any you owe to your parents.

Proverbs 30:8-9: Desire and seek proper, balanced economic objectives. Avoid extremes so you will neither forget God because of acquiring great wealth nor be tempted to steal because of dire need.

### A key to contentment

Paul's words bring into focus an unusual concept of the purpose of wealth. Most people view work and money as the necessary means of satisfying their personal needs and wants, which can often be selfishly oriented. But a righteous viewpoint embraces the spirit of God's law of love, which is concerned about the welfare of others in addition to oneself. We should keep this in mind when contemplating how to use money and other material wealth.

By examining the example and words of Paul, we see that he learned to be content with what he had during various periods of his life (Philippians 4:11). Sometimes this was almost nothing.

Paul tells us that "godliness with contentment is great gain. For we



*We need to learn to focus on our genuine needs rather than the frivolous things advertisers have convinced us we need.*

brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (1 Timothy 6:6-8).

Considerable spiritual danger lies in wanting more and more. Paul recognized this: "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life" (verses 9-11).

Because of constant pressure to buy and satisfy our every urge, such contentment and focus is difficult for us to achieve. But the closer we come to contentment, the better off we will be. We need to learn to focus

on our genuine needs rather than the frivolous things advertisers have convinced us we need.

### Taking personal responsibility

Paul encouraged Christians to work hard, mind their own business and be self-sufficient (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). He set an example of carrying our own load and not taking advantage of others (2 Thessalonians 3:7-13).

In line with this, he instructed that families should take care of their own households and elderly relatives (1 Timothy 5:8) and share their material blessings with those less fortunate (1 Timothy 6:17-19).

Because God will judge each of us for what we do in this life (2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:17), we need to set our hearts on God's instruction and do good whenever we can. None of us knows what tomorrow will bring, so we must learn to apply now the principles and teaching here (James 4:13-17; 5:1-5).

### Some final thoughts

As we have seen, money can be used for either right or wrong purposes. The challenge we face is learning to put first things first and practice the financial principles that are pleasing to God.

Although it is wise to set up a personal savings account as a buffer against the uncertainties of the future (experts suggest putting aside as much as the equivalent of six months' income before investing in other ventures), we should not become so self-focused and greedy that we lose sight of our important financial responsibilities toward God and the needy.

Also, we must never forget that it is much easier to get into debt than to get out of it. Being in debt, especially for depreciating goods purchased at a high interest rate, makes us vulnerable when troubles come. Paying as we go, as much as we are able, is a much safer and sounder way to live.

What about buying a house? In contrast to most forms of indebtedness, buying a house is generally a good investment because of its tax benefits and tendency to hold or even increase its value. But it is a huge commitment and something each household should carefully evaluate on the basis of its individual circumstances.

This view of the Bible's financial instruction will help provide the knowledge and balance to manage your income in a way that honors God and benefits yourself and mankind. (For a more in-depth view of the Bible's instruction on wealth and finances, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet *Managing Your Finances*. It's free for the asking from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets).)

# Keys to a Long, Healthy Life

**H**ealth advancements in Western civilization in the modern era are beyond amazing. Human life expectancy was about 40 years in 1870 and today approaches 80. In Western nations, the average person can expect to live roughly twice as long as he or she would have 130 years ago.

We can credit sophisticated medical treatments for doing much to extend life and improve health. Surgery often provides a new lease on life, correcting a life-threatening condition or dramatically enhancing the quality of life. Body parts can sometimes be replaced, and new drugs often knock out infections.

Most of the world's health-care dollars are spent in trying to heal existing diseases. If we are to live even healthier and longer lives, we must focus more on *prevention*. Otherwise old age will mean more time for illness because of the general decline in the body's immunity as we age. We can offset this decline by practicing fundamental health principles in such matters as diet, exercise and how we handle our anxieties.

There is solid evidence of the effectiveness of basic health practices in extending and enhancing the quality of life. Note how behavioral changes have impacted fatalities from heart disease: "A major study showing that the mortality rate from heart disease has been dropping since 1963 also found that life-style changes in diet and smoking habits—rather than new medical treatments—accounted for over half of the decline" (*The Wellness Encyclopedia*, 1991, p. 1).

Let's consider seven important health principles. Practicing these will help you live a longer and healthier life. These principles are backed by extensive research in the health-care field and by the Bible. As we go through these principles, remember that God wants us to live productive, healthy and useful lives (John 10:10; 1 Timothy 4:8).

## You are what you eat

Eating is one of our most pleasurable activities, and God intended it to be so. His creation is filled with a wonderful variety of tasty, nourishing, healthful foods. However, the same appetites that add to life's pleasure can, if misused, make us ill. Benjamin Franklin observed that "we

should eat to live and not live to eat." Of all health practices and habits, diet is the area where we can help ourselves the most.

Historically, humanity's dietary problems have often consisted of a general condition of malnutrition and hunger because of poverty. In the modern Western world, this is no longer a major problem. A growing problem, however, is the increasing consumption of junk food as a regular part of our diet. This is the result of eating out more often and serving ready-made packaged foods at home. In the United States "roughly half a family's food budget now goes on food eaten out; and 45 percent of dinners eaten at home include not a single home-made item" (*The Economist*, Dec. 20, 1997).

Many other nations are following America's lead in gorging on such foods. Use of prepared foods gives us less control over what we eat, and



many such foods are laden with fat and salt. Eating habits based on these foods "can bring with them heart disease, strokes and cancer, the so-called diseases of affluence that accompany the adoption of high-fat, low-exercise 'Western lifestyles'" (*Newsweek*, June 1, 1998).

Such dietary practices also cause weight problems. "The most recent official

*There is solid evidence of the effectiveness of basic health practices in extending and enhancing the quality of life.*

figures, from the National Centre for Health Statistics, show that more than half of all Americans are now overweight . . . [and] most countries are following suit. The rate of obesity in Britain has more than doubled since 1980" (*The Economist*, Dec. 20, 1997). A survey taken in Britain "shows that one-third of those aged 16-24 were overweight or obese" (*The Independent*, December 15, 1998).

Overweight is a major contributor to serious health conditions. "A 16-year study conducted on 115,000 nurses, published in the September 14, 1995, issue of *The New England Journal of Medicine*, concluded that even a moderate weight gain—as little as 18 pounds—put otherwise-healthy women at increased risk for heart disease, cardiovascular death,

and cancer” (Steven Jonas, M.D., and Linda Konner, *Just the Weigh You Are*, 1997, p. 18).

Overweight men are at risk as well. “Men who are 30 percent overweight have a 70 percent higher risk of developing coronary heart disease than those at their recommended weight level” (*The Wellness Encyclopedia*, p. 23). Overweight people are also more likely to suffer hypertension (high blood pressure).

### Diet and cancer

According to the American Cancer Society, about one third of the 500,000 cancer-related deaths in the United States each year are because of dietary factors. High-fat diets have been linked with an elevation of cancer of the colon, rectum, prostate, endometrium and even the lungs. High levels of meat consumption may bring susceptibility to colon cancer. “The disease is some ten times more common in meat-eating, industrialized societies than in the less well-stuffed peoples who depend for sustenance on plant foods high in fiber” (Sherwin Nuland, *How We Live*, 1997, p. 132).

Consuming a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, grains and beans can reduce the risk of cancer. These foods are all rich in fiber and low in fat. They also contain many beneficial vitamins and minerals.

A few years ago the National Cancer Institute (NCI) instituted a “five-a-day program.” The idea was to exhort everyone to eat a combination of at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. The NCI believes that if people make this simple change in their dietary habits, the number of new cancer cases will be dramatically reduced.

The evidence for the benefits of eating a lot of fruits and vegetables is overwhelming. “Scientists argue about many issues, but everybody agrees that increasing your intake of fruits and vegetables can help prevent heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases” (*University of California at Berkeley Wellness Letter*, February 1995).

A healthy diet doesn’t have to be bland. Notice the following description of a balanced, healthful diet: “Vegetables, fruits, grains, and legumes are preferred foods, since they are typically low in fat and rich in complex carbohydrates, dietary fiber, vitamins, and minerals. But meats, poultry, fish, and dairy products also contain a wealth of nutrients. Some of these foods are high in fat, and so should be consumed in moderation. But there is no reason to give them up entirely” (Sheldon Margen, *The Wellness Encyclopedia of Food and Nutrition*, 1992, p. 9).

The dietary practices reflected in the Bible have much in common with this recommendation. “The ordinary food of the average Hebrew of Bible times was bread, olives, oil, buttermilk and cheese from their

flocks; fruits and vegetables from their orchards and gardens; and meat on rare occasions” (Fred Wight, *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, 1987, p. 43).

*The Bible Almanac* makes a similar observation. “Vegetable products



formed a major portion of the diet . . . When meat was used, it was often for the purpose of serving strangers or honored guests. Grains were an important part of the diet . . . Fruits and fish were a favorite part of the diet” (Packer, Tenney and White, editors, 1980, p. 465).

The diet of Bible times was probably a factor in longevity. In David’s time,

**Consuming a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, grains and beans can reduce the risk of cancer. These foods are all rich in fiber and low in fat.**

it seems to have been common for adults to reach 70 years of age (Psalm 90:10). Many lived far longer. Modern life expectancy didn’t reach 70 until about 1955.

The Bible also gives detailed lists of what animals, birds and fish are appropriate or inappropriate for human consumption (Leviticus 11:1-30; Deuteronomy 14:3-20). Studies have linked various health problems to consumption of some of the prohibited items. The avoidance of eating some of the creatures on the list is clearly a matter of common sense. (To learn more, be sure to request your free copy of our booklet *What Does the Bible Teach About Clean and Unclean Meats?*)

### Exercise for your health

“Physical training is of some value” (1 Timothy 4:8, NIV). The apostle Paul wrote these words nearly 2,000 years ago. His observation is consistently backed up by medical research and modern experience. The results of a study of 10,000 men and 3,000 women were published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. It stated: “There is solid evidence that physically active people live longer . . . Fitness helped

overcome all causes of mortality, including diabetes, cancer, and heart disease” (Kenneth Cooper, M.D., *It's Better to Believe*, 1995, p. 211).

The surgeon general of the United States released a report that stated that “regular physical activity reduces the risk for developing or dying from coronary heart disease, noninsulin-dependent diabetes, hypertension, and colon cancer; reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression; contributes to the development and maintenance of healthier bones, muscles, and joints and helps control weight” (*Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, July 12, 1996, p. 591).



Exercise need not be overly taxing to be beneficial. Even moderate physical activity, such as working in the yard or gardening, promotes health and fitness.

Until the modern era most people exercised as part of their normal routine. Most occupations involved

**Exercise need not be overly taxing to be beneficial. Even moderate physical activity, such as working in the yard or gardening, promotes health and fitness.**

considerable physical activity. Families often grew much of their own food. In comparison, most jobs today are sedentary, and we buy most of our food at the supermarket.

Between 1985 and 1990 America saw a 15 percent decline in exercise among people in their 20s. The decline among other age groups was about half this (*Wellness Letter*, July 1995). “One American in four admits to being completely sedentary, and another 40 percent rarely exercise” (*The Economist*, Dec. 20, 1997).

Given the frantic pace and structure of modern life, it is difficult to obtain sufficient exercise without a regular program. The younger you are when you begin a regular exercise program the better, but it is never too late. A recent study confirms that “much of the functional losses that set in between the ages of 30 and 70 are . . . attributable to lack of exercise” (*Wellness Letter*, May 1995). One way we deteriorate as we age is in decreased effectiveness of heart and lungs. Beginning even a moderate

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exercise program will help slow or even reverse this deterioration.

Healthy exercise comes in many forms. Running, cycling, swimming and working out at health clubs or on home exercise machines are all popular. Although certain costs are connected with all of these, exercise need not be expensive.

### Inexpensive and convenient

Probably the least expensive and most convenient way for many people to exercise is to walk. The primary expense is a decent pair of shoes. Brisk walking produces cardiovascular function, increases flexibility and leads to a longer life. “A long-term study of thousands of Harvard alumni has suggested that a regimen of walking (an average of nine miles a week) can significantly prolong life” (*The Wellness Encyclopedia*, p. 252).

For older people and those suffering from partially debilitating infirmities, even slow walking brings benefits. There is also some indication that, because walking is a weight-bearing exercise, it may help prevent osteoporosis in postmenopausal women.

An additional benefit of exercise—especially if combined with eating better—is weight loss. But even if you do not lose significant weight, don’t quit exercising. It could be that you are replacing fat with muscle, which is heavier than fat. And in some cases the tendency to be heavier than what is considered normal is partially a function of genetics. Such people still benefit from a fitness program.

“Current research supports the notion that, even if you remain overweight, working out and becoming fit can help you live longer. In one study done at the Cooper Institute for Aerobics Research, in Dallas, more than 25,000 obese men were given an initial health exam that included a treadmill test and a body-fat assessment. Eight years later, they were retested, and the men who were moderately fit or very fit had a 70 percent lower mortality rate than unfit men . . . Mortality rates, it was concluded, were more influenced by the men’s fitness levels than by their weight” (Jonas and Konner, p. 41).

### Time to recharge

Sufficient sleep is essential to good health. Prolonged sleep loss can bring many problems. Laboratory experiments with rats and dogs have demonstrated that animals will die if denied sleep for too long. Although we can endure short-term sleep loss with no serious side effects, extensive or prolonged sleep deprivation brings physical, mental and psychological difficulties.

Widespread lack of sufficient sleep is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Late in the 19th century Thomas Edison invented the electric light bulb, enabling us to virtually turn night into day and increasing our potential for productive hours. But his wonderful invention brought both positive and negative consequences. Many people view sleep as unproductive down time. “By some estimates, we’re sleeping as much as an hour and a half less per night than we did at the turn of the century” (*Newsweek*, Jan. 12, 1998).

An indicator that many struggle with sleep is that in 1977 there were three certified sleep clinics in America and by 1997 the number had grown to 337. Sleep loss can be disastrous. The *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, the Chernobyl explosion, the Three Mile Island incident and the *Challenger* space-shuttle disaster have all been blamed in part on sleepy personnel. The U.S. Department of Transportation estimates that sleepy drivers cause more than 100,000 accidents every year, resulting in at least 1,500 deaths. A drowsy driver will make mistakes in judgment, and a driver who falls asleep at the wheel is a threat to himself and everyone else nearby.

Chronic sleep loss reduces the body’s resistance to infection. Studies have shown that, in general, when healthy people miss sleep their bodies produce fewer cells to fight off infection. “Experiments on volunteers have ascertained that two or three days of sleep deprivation will produce significant reductions in various aspects of immune function” (Paul Martin, M.D., *The Healing Mind*, 1997, p. 70).

Difficulty falling asleep or remaining asleep is called insomnia. In America, “according to several national surveys, between 15 and 25 percent of the adult population complain about insomnia” (*The Wellness Encyclopedia*, p. 421).

Several simple practices are available through which we can enhance our ability to get sound, restful sleep. Regular physical exercise is one. Many sedentary occupations produce intense mental strain. Physical exercise helps expend this pent-up tension, bringing about natural fatigue that prepares the body for sleep.

It is best, however, to refrain from strenuous exercise close to bedtime. Curbing your intake of stimulants also helps bring better sleep. This includes reduction of caffeine and total abstention from it in the latter part of the day. Tobacco is a problem because nicotine is a stimulant, speeding up the metabolic process. Heavy smokers sleep more lightly and less restfully (*ibid.*, p. 422).

If you work late at night and then go to bed expecting to sleep, you may experience frustration. Try ceasing your work or intense mental activity about an hour before bedtime and do something relaxing. Other helpful habits include keeping regular hours for going to bed and getting

up. A warm bath before bedtime can help induce sleep too.

Scientists still puzzle over exactly why sleep is necessary, but they know it is. When we sleep, our bodies release a growth hormone that some researchers believe is used to renew worn-out tissue.

Sleep helps restore our bodies and minds. To feel good and function effectively, we must have sufficient sleep. Without it we lose our



ability to concentrate and make complex decisions. Don’t rob yourself of the sleep and rest your body and mind need.

#### Take care to avoid injury

Most of the health hazards we encounter have a gradual effect upon us. Accidents are an exception. You can

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be diligent and conscientious in caring for your body, but if you slip up in a careless moment your health can be irreparably damaged in a split second in a single tragic accident.

Driving or riding in a car may be the most dangerous thing most people do. Millions are injured and tens of thousands die every year. In 2005, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 43,443 people were killed and 2.7 million injured in the United States alone.

Most accidents could be prevented with caution and safe driving habits. “If you are a typical low-risk driver, you are more than 1,000 times less likely to die in a car crash than a high-risk driver” (*Wellness Letter*, April 1990).

Seat belts and airbags save many from severe injury and loss of life. They would save more if everyone used them. In the United States “sixty-nine percent of adults in front seats buckle up nationwide, one of the lowest rates of any developed country. Australia, Canada and

most European countries have belt use rates of more than 90 percent” (*Portland Oregonian*, Nov. 19, 1998).

In America “drivers who are least likely to wear seat belts are actually the ones who need them most; they tend to be males under 35 . . . and have more crashes and driving violations” (*Wellness Letter*, August 1995).

When adults don’t use seat belts, they endanger children too. Many careless adults do not make sure the children in their care are adequately restrained. Children, following their parents’ example, fail to use seat belts too. As a result, of the 2,087 children killed in U.S. automobile crashes in 1997, “six out of 10 of them were not secured in seat belts or child seats. The same held for the more than 100,000 children who suffered injuries requiring medical attention” (*Portland Oregonian*, Nov. 19, 1998).

Though the injuries are not generally as serious, more people are injured at home than in traffic accidents. In America “household accidents injure more people each year than car and workplace accidents combined” (*Parade*, Feb. 15, 1998). It is estimated that 90 percent of these accidents could be prevented. Major sources of home accidents are power lawn equipment and falls, particularly from ladders.

Children in particular are prone to accidents. Common causes of childhood injury around the house are poisonings, drownings, falls, accidental shootings, fires and burns. Parents should realize that the leading cause of drowning of children less than one year old is in buckets, bathtubs and toilets.

Accidents with toys are common. Many children visit emergency rooms every year after being injured with baseball bats. Younger children, who have not developed fine muscle control, are susceptible to bicycle injuries, particularly if not wearing a helmet. Most bicyclists’ injuries involve the head, and three of four cyclists who die in crashes die of head injuries (*Wellness Encyclopedia*, p. 124).

Young children must have close supervision to avoid injury, but it is impossible to supervise them every minute. The best long-term protection you can give children is to instill safety habits in them as they mature.

A complete personal health-care program will include guarding against accidental injury. Wise people are wary of dangers, while the careless stumble into trouble. “A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge, but the simple keep going and suffer for it” (Proverbs 22:3, NIV).

### Dangerous substances

It is outside the scope of this publication to address illegal-drug usage at length. Generally, illegal substances are declared to be so because of their obvious destructive effects upon society. Anyone

who is using an illegal substance should immediately cease, entering a treatment program if necessary.

Although legal, and one of the most profitable of cash crops, tobacco probably causes more damage to the health of its users than any other substance. “The global proliferation of cigarettes leads to an estimated 3 million deaths a year . . . By 2020, the number is estimated by the World Health Organization, to reach 10 million a year” (Carl Sagan, *Billions & Billions*, 1997, p. 205).

The number of premature deaths from tobacco use is staggering in comparison to other causes of premature death. “Take a random sample of a thousand young men who smoke; on the basis of actuarial data it can confidently be predicted that one of these young men will eventually



be murdered, six will be killed on the roads and two hundred and fifty will die prematurely from the effects of smoking” (Martin, p. 59).

Tobacco is a deadly substance. Its smoke “contains more than 4,000 chemicals including trace amounts of such known poisons as cya-

*The number of premature deaths from tobacco use is staggering in comparison to other causes of premature death.*

nide, arsenic, and formaldehyde. There are 43 known cancer-causing chemicals (carcinogens) in tobacco smoke” (*Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*, 1996, p. 317).

Tobacco users raise their susceptibility to numerous diseases, including a variety of cancers, cardiovascular ailments, sexual dysfunction and lung diseases, including emphysema. “Each year smoking kills more than 400,000 Americans, more than died in battle in World War II and the Vietnam war combined” (ibid., p. 316).

Smoking not only shortens life, but its detrimental effects often deprive smokers of the opportunity to live an active life to the full. This is ironic because cigarette advertising typically associates smoking with vigorous

outdoor activities. Smokers are shown skiing, hiking, swimming, playing ball games and the like. The reality is that continued tobacco use damages the heart and lungs, eventually reducing the smoker's activities and bringing on premature aging.

The smoker's body looks older too, especially in facial appearance. "Compared to nonsmokers, smokers are more likely to appear at least five years older than their stated age" (*Wellness Letter*, April 1994). The term "smoker's face" was coined a few years ago to refer to certain physical features that accompany smoking. These include increased wrinkling, facial discoloration, stained teeth and a tendency toward gauntness. All of these make smokers appear older than they are.

Lung cancer at one time was largely a man's disease because of the larger proportion of male smokers compared with females. The percentage of adult American males who smoke has declined from half in 1965 to less than a third today (*Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*, p. 316). Although this is good news, it is offset by the fact that now almost as many women smoke as men. As a result more American women die from lung cancer than from breast cancer. Cigarette smokers are 10 times more likely to die of lung cancer than nonsmokers (*ibid.*, p. 318).

A similar trend has developed in Britain. "Lung cancer will fall sharply among men over the next two decades but double among women. This may be because women took up smoking on a large scale some 20 to 30 years after men, who are giving up at a faster rate" (*Daily Mail*, June 25, 1997).

Smoking enormously increases the risk factor for numerous cancers, including kidney and bladder. Professor Richard Peto of Oxford, England, who has spent his life investigating the causes of cancer, says: "Smokers inhale carcinogens, which spread through their body. The whole body is bathed in carcinogenic solvents—they have carcinogenic urine. This affects the kidney and bladder" (*Sunday Times Magazine*, June 1, 1997). Smoking among the young is a matter of grave concern in Britain. "A staggering 43 per cent of young men and 42 per cent of young women are smoking by the age of 20" (*The Mirror*, Dec. 15, 1998).

Reducing or eliminating tobacco use is the only proven way to reduce the health hazards of smoking. If you are a smoker, you should quit. Those who don't smoke should never start. Smoking is a losing gamble, and you are not the only one who will suffer from the habit. Secondhand smoke puts others at risk and increases the chance of respiratory disease in children who are exposed.

Some think they are better off switching to cigars, pipes or smokeless tobacco. Although these products may lower the amount of toxins and carcinogens taken into the body through tobacco use, they do not elimi-

nate the health risks. Any form and amount of tobacco use is ultimately harmful to our bodies.

One item of good news related to tobacco use is that when you quit your body will begin to recover. For example, even long-term smokers can reduce their risk of stroke to the same level as nonsmokers within five years (*Wellness Letter*, September 1988). By the end of five years your risk of heart attack will be almost the same as that of lifetime nonsmokers. Over several years the risk of various types of cancer decreases significantly as your body slowly repairs the damage caused by smoking (*Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*, p. 324).

From a biblical standpoint, smoking is wrong because God tells us we should not inflict harm on the bodies He gave us. We are told, "Honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20, NIV). To mistreat our bodies by subjecting them to the harmful effects of tobacco violates this command.

God also tells us, in the first of the Ten Commandments, that we are to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3). We are to let nothing come between us and Him to adversely affect that relationship. When we allow ourselves to become addicted to tobacco (or any other substance), we have become enslaved (Romans 6:16) to a harmful, wasteful, destructive habit that hinders us from wholeheartedly serving Him (Matthew 4:10).

### Alcohol use and abuse

Unlike smoking, alcohol is not a health hazard if consumed in moderation. Studies have even shown that consumption of alcohol in moderation can be beneficial, to the arteries of the heart in particular. However, excessive drinking damages the muscle of the heart wall. Some researchers, perhaps because of the tendency of many to drink too much, question whether the benefits of even moderate usage outweigh the risks.

Some people should not drink at all. Most alcoholic-treatment programs advise that those who have become addicted should practice complete abstinence. The United States surgeon general's office has also advised abstinence to all women who are pregnant or are considering pregnancy.

In a 1998 U.S. Gallup Poll 77 percent of respondents indicated they drink some alcohol. Sadly, many descend into alcohol abuse. "Alcohol is the third-largest killer in the United States, ranking behind heart disease and cancer. If traffic fatalities and death certificate diagnoses related to alcoholic use were included in the statistics, alcoholism would be recognized as our nation's number one killer" (p. 326).

Britain has a growing problem with alcohol abuse. "Compared with 1950 . . . average annual alcohol consumption has more than doubled and so has fully fledged alcoholism. Excessive drinking is now the norm, not

the exception” (*The Express*, July 13, 1998). “It has been estimated that as much as one in 20 is an alcoholic” (*ibid.*, March 21, 1997).

Alcohol abuse can damage the brain, nerves, liver, pancreas and cardiovascular system. Excessive drinking is also associated with cancer. “After cardiovascular disease, cancer is the next leading cause of death among alcoholics” (*Mayo Clinic Family Health Book*, p. 329).

The Bible does not forbid the use of alcoholic beverages. It presents wine as a source of pleasure (Psalm 104:15; Ecclesiastes 9:7) and notes its benefits when used appropriately (1 Timothy 5:23). Wine was commonly served at weddings in biblical culture, and when Jesus was present at a wedding He miraculously replenished the supply when it was exhausted (John 2:1-10).

However, the Bible does give strong warnings about the abuse of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1; 23:1; Ephesians 5:18). No drunkard will be allowed in the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:10). Abuse of alcohol is a threat to your spiritual and physical health.

### The power of a positive outlook

The idea that positive thoughts and emotions help promote physical health and that negative ones tear it down was long a tenet of folk wisdom. However, the concept fell out of favor after scientific experimentation in the 19th century established a clear connection between microbial agents and infectious diseases. The idea that one’s state of mind could affect bodily health was more or less discarded. In the last few decades, however, some in the medical community have taken a closer look and revived this ancient wisdom.

Medical researchers in the 1950s noticed that many cardiac patients shared personality traits. In particular they tended to be competitive, impatient and always in a hurry. From such observations researchers coined the term “type A personality.”

Those possessing this personality type were thought to be prone to coronary disease. Later research resulted in a refinement of the type-A theory. “Current studies . . . suggest that certain toxic components of the type A personality, such as hostility and cynicism, are the real risk factors for heart disease, rather than the more general type A behavior such as competitiveness and time-urgency” (*Newsweek*, Feb. 17, 1997).

Studies in the last few years have yielded evidence that negative emotions in general often affect not only the heart but many other aspects of bodily health. Stress and negative emotions, such as anxiety and depression, can influence our health, increasing our susceptibility to afflictions as minor as colds and as major as cancer.

Notes the *Harvard Men’s Health Watch*: “More than a dozen investi-

gations have asked if stress increases susceptibility to the common cold; all have concluded that it does” (January 1999).

Solid evidence points to emotional factors influencing vulnerability to cancer as well as the ability to recover from it. Researchers have identified what they believe is a cancer-prone, or type-C, personality. “There is . . . a reasonable consensus that certain characteristics are key components of Type C” (Martin, p. 223).

The components identified include bottling up emotions—especially anger, inability to forgive and a hopeless outlook toward life. God created our bodies with a marvelous immune system that constantly fights against invasion from bacterial and viral agents as well as against cancerous cells produced in our bodies. Stress and negative emotions seem to suppress the ability of the body’s immune system to respond to these threats, making us more vulnerable to disease.

### Positive emotions boost health

If negative emotions hinder the body’s immunity, can we expect positive emotions to provide a boost? Yes, we can! Some 3,000 years ago God inspired this observation to be recorded for us: “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

The truth of these words is borne out by many scientific studies. Positive emotions assist in the prevention of illness and, if one does become ill, they can help speed recovery. “Scientists have investigated the notion and found compelling evidence to suggest that social environment and mental attitude can modify our chances of surviving cancer” (Martin, p. 230).

Researchers in a University of London study assessed women’s psychological response to breast cancer. A follow-up study after five years showed that those who displayed an initial fighting response were more likely to survive. A survey of the same women conducted 15 years later revealed that “those who had originally displayed a fighting spirit or denial continued to fare better: 45 per cent of them were still alive, and free from cancer, as against 17 per cent of the women who had reacted initially with stoic acceptance, helplessness or anxious preoccupation” (*ibid.*).

The effect of mental stress on health appears to be illustrated in developments in the former Soviet Union in recent years. “Between 1990 and 1994 . . . life expectancy for Russian men and women declined dramatically from 63.8 and 74.4 years to 57.7 and 71.2 years, respectively.” Authorities cite many factors, “including economic and social instability, high rates of tobacco and alcohol consumption, poor nutrition [and] depression” (*The Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 11, 1998).

We often refer to a fighting response to illness as the will to live. This will can be strengthened by a number of factors. One of the keys is to

believe in and be committed to a cause in life. “A raft of recent scientific studies has established that having deep personal convictions and values can do wonders for almost every aspect of your physical and emotional well-being” (Cooper, pp. 3-4). Faith in the Creator God and knowledge of His purpose provide a strong reason to live and a spark to our mental and physical health.

The ability to manage stress and maintain a healthy mental outlook is one of the essential elements of good health. As Proverbs 18:14 tells

us, “The spirit of a man will sustain him in sickness, but who can bear a broken spirit?”

#### People who need people

Several thousand years ago God inspired a scripture to be written that says, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).



*Recent research shows that having good relationships with others is also important for our physical well-being.*

Experience proves this is true. We are social beings and need connection to others. Most would agree that we need people for psychological and emotional support, but recent research shows that having good relationships with others is also important for our physical well-being. “More than twenty years’ worth of scientific research has accumulated overwhelming evidence that having strong, supportive relationships is good for your mental and physical health” (Martin, p. 151).

Social isolation, on the other hand, can be a substantial risk factor for ill health. “Its impact on health and mortality is comparable to that of high blood pressure, obesity and lack of exercise. Research suggests that social factors can have as much impact on health as smoking . . . A six-year study of 17,433 Swedish men and women found that those who had the fewest social interactions and least social relationships had a mortality rate 50 per cent higher than those with rich social lives” (ibid., pp. 158-159).

It is sad that forces in society often drive people apart instead of pulling them together. Little attention is paid to the importance of

relationships—or what the Bible calls love—in the pursuit of good health. Many parents who have tenderly cared for an ill child believe in a connection between health and love.

There are many ways we can apply the health principle. One is to enrich our personal relationships, to learn how to love more fully in marriage, raising children and friendships. Another way is to be involved with your neighbors. Volunteering and serving others is a proven way of benefiting yourself as well as those whom you serve.

Service to God through church involvement can provide health benefits. A study at the University of Texas Medical School examined the relationship between mortality and involvement in religious or social activities among recipients of open-heart surgery. “Those who neither had regular group participation nor drew strength and comfort from their religion were more than seven times more likely to die six months after surgery” (Dean Ornish, M.D., *Love & Survival*, 1997, p. 51). The nourishment of relationships, both with God and with our fellow man, is a proven health principle.

#### Take personal responsibility for your health

Healthy people share one of life’s greatest blessings. Those who have enjoyed good health and lost it know, through painful personal experience, that they are missing out on one of life’s greatest treasures. However, those who have experienced a decline in health can often regain a significant measure of their well-being by applying the principles outlined in this chapter. Those who still have good health can do a lot to preserve it by living right.

To maximize our potential to live long and well requires that we make a habit of living by proven health principles. This is the will of God: “Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you” (3 John 2, NIV).

# Does Life Have Greater Meaning and Purpose?

It is a paradox of our modern age that, although we have more knowledge and material possessions than at any other time in history, we lack a sense of purpose in life. A gnawing hunger for the meaning of life pervades our world.

Harvard historian and author Oscar Handlin describes this lack of direction and meaning: “At some point, midway into the twentieth century, Europeans and Americans discovered that they had lost all sense of direction . . . Wandering in the dark, men and women in all Western societies, stumbling blindly along, strained unavailingly for glimpses of recognizable landmarks” (“The Unmarked Way,” *American Scholar*, Summer 1996, p. 335).

That we find ourselves stumbling down the path of uncertainty is ironic. Our meanderings in the spiritual wilderness occur at a time when mankind has made many impressive gains. The quality of life is generally improved. Life expectancy has increased almost everywhere. The portion of the world’s population ruled by the fist of despots is shrinking. Though far from eradicated, the curse of poverty casts a smaller shadow.

Yet humanity is troubled. We are plagued with a sense of drift and aimlessness. Counselors Muriel James and John James describe it this way: “A universal hunger pervades the world. It is the hunger to get more out of life . . . to be more involved, and to find more meaning” (*Passion for Life*, 1991, p. 7).

One reason people hunger is they lack a sense of transcendent purpose. They don’t have the understanding that God is involved with mankind and that He has a plan for us. To be at peace, human beings must realize what God has in mind for them.

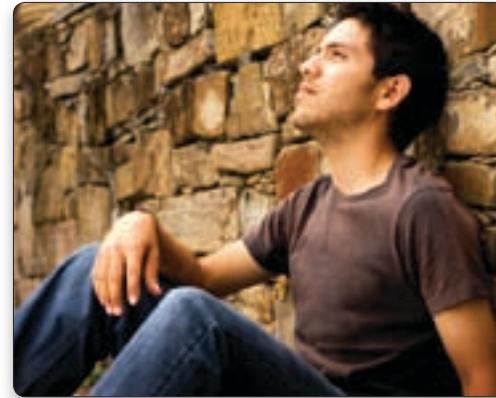
In the past, Western man possessed the “certainty that history moved in a linear fashion from a beginning to a terminus.” Most people held the conviction that “nothing walked with aimless feet and not one life was wasted” (Handlin, pp. 336-337).

Creation and life had explicit meaning. Society took comfort from Jesus Christ’s assurance that “the very hairs of your head are numbered” (Matthew 10:30). They noted that Jesus said God is aware of the tiniest details of His creation, even the tiny birds: “. . . Not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will” (verse 29).

## The foundation is shaken

What happened to shake this assurance man felt toward God? In the 19th century, in one of the major spiritual and intellectual shifts of history, scholarship began to view the words of Christ and the Bible with skepticism. “For thoughtful men and women, the Bible was no longer an unquestioned source of religious authority; it had become a form of evidence . . . that itself needed defending” (James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed*, 1985, p. 150).

Belief in the Bible had given humanity a road map for life. People believed that, in effect, they had in the Bible an owner’s manual, a user’s guide for the human experience. The same manual informed man that



God had specified a destination at the end of life for any who loved and served Him.

Before the watershed changes of the 19th century, the Bible provided ultimate answers that gave satisfaction to humanity in general. The esteem in which it was held is illustrated in a conversation reported by Bible translator James Moffatt. The exchange took place between Scottish

*“A universal hunger pervades the world. It is the hunger to get more out of life . . . to be more involved, and to find more meaning.”*

historical novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott and his son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart, about a week before Scott’s death. He said to his son-in-law: “‘Read to me from the Book.’ When Lockhart asked him which one, Sir Walter said, ‘Need you ask? There is but one’” (quoted by Bruce Barton, *The Book Nobody Knows*, 1926, p. 7).

To capture understanding of the purpose of life, we must return to the Bible because it explains how to make life work.

## The two great principles

Jesus Christ showed that the essence and purpose of human life are accomplished through fulfilling two supreme principles: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all

your mind” and “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37, 39). Jesus defined our reason for being in one word, *love*. He stated that our love should be directed first toward God, then toward our fellow man. Love is man’s reason for being, his purpose.

But what is the love of which Jesus Christ spoke? We need to be sure we have a correct understanding of what love means to be able to fulfill our purpose.



Most people would describe love as a romantic feeling, as deeply caring for someone or something. Or they would equate love with sexual attraction. The kind of love they have in mind is oriented *toward themselves*; it is a feeling, an emotion or attraction that makes them feel good.

**Many people choose to take another dead-end road: overemphasis on material goods. Those who fall into this trap mistakenly assume that the accumulation of things will provide contentment.**

But Jesus Christ referred to love on a considerably higher level.

The Bible describes love as *concern for others* rather than concern for ourselves and our wants and needs. In its simplest terms, love is the way of *giving* rather than the way of *getting* (Acts 20:35).

Jesus said our love should be *outgoing*, directed first toward our Creator. We are to strive to please and serve Him rather than ourselves (Matthew 6:24). We should love Him with all our being. We should then channel our love toward our neighbor, our fellow human being. God’s law shows us how to live this way of loving respect toward God (John 14:15; 15:10; 1 John 5:2-3) and concern for others. (To better understand the law of love, be sure to request your free copy of our booklet *The Ten Commandments*.)

People who focus on loving care and concern for others as the purpose for their existence can fulfill their highest human potential. Wise men and women have discovered this profound truth. After his days as prime minister of Britain in the 19th century, Benjamin Disraeli wrote: “We are all born for love . . . It is the principle of existence and its only end” (quoted

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by Lewis Henry, *Best Quotations for All Occasions*, 1966, p. 136).

### The voice of history

English historian Arnold Toynbee exhaustively studied civilizations, past and present. He became internationally famous for his multivolume series *Study of History*. When asked to address the meaning of life, he said: “I myself believe that love does have an absolute value, that it is what gives value to human life . . . Love is the only thing that makes life possible, or, indeed, tolerable” (*Surviving the Future*, 1971, pp. 1-2).

He also observed that “true love . . . discharges itself in an activity that overcomes self-centeredness by expending the self on people and on purposes beyond the self” and “this love . . . is the only true self-fulfillment” (*ibid.*, p. 3).

These words stand in vivid contrast to the modern philosophy of self-worship. Ours is a world in which many believe they have a right to renounce personal responsibility in their quest for self-fulfillment. Author and rabbi Harold Kushner reported that “a comprehensive survey of mental health in America states, ‘Psychoanalysis (and psychotherapy) is the only form of psychic healing that attempts to cure people by detaching them from society and relationships’” (*Who Needs God?* 1989, p. 93).

In our society increasing numbers of people have come to believe it is perfectly acceptable to cut themselves loose from those who have come to depend on them if it will enable them to get what they want out of life.

Such an attitude is a prescription for emptiness. It is contrary to genuine love. Eventually those who practice this way of life will encounter frustration. As Rabbi Kushner puts it: “To live life only for ourselves will bring us nothing but sadness and misery. A self-centered life is an unhappy life. Selfishness is a major stumbling block to happiness” (quoted by Dennis Wholey, *Are You Happy?* Boston, 1986, p. 17).

Jesus Christ, after giving His disciples a lesson in love, humility and service to others, said to them, “If you know these things, *happy are you if you do them*” (John 13:17).

### Does wealth give meaning?

Many people choose to take another dead-end road: overemphasis on material goods. Those who fall into this trap mistakenly assume that the accumulation of *things* will provide contentment. The result? A society in which a rising standard of living is more important than how we treat people. The health of our economy—public and personal—is accorded more importance than the welfare of our neighbor and sometimes even more than our own flesh and blood.

To obtain greater wealth and status, many people are willing to sacrifice

marriages and families for career advancement. Yet they often find themselves in a frantic rat race that provides them with no lasting meaning. The activities that are supposed to be fulfilling lead only to physical, mental and emotional exhaustion.

Compared with the poverty of previous generations, the Western world has hitched a ride on the fast track to material success. Yet many find life lacking. Life for the successful can be like a dizzying, intense amusement-park ride. It provides exhilaration but also disorientation.

“We hurry through our meals to go to work and hurry through our work in order to ‘recreate’ ourselves in the evenings and on weekends and vacations. And then we hurry, with the greatest possible speed and noise and violence, through our recreation—for what? To eat the billionth hamburger at some fast-food joint hellbent on increasing the ‘quality’ of our life?” (Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?* 1990, p. 147).

Money can't buy happiness. Living as though it can exacts a heavy toll.

### Materialism no substitute for purpose

Where, then, can we find happiness? We find it in discovering the

## Our Need for Love

Life without love is ultimately life without meaning. Love is a primary element of a human life. A landmark 1945 study by René Spitz established that love is so vital to infants that those deprived of it may perish for want of it.

The study looked at “a hospital where a group of children—all under three years of age—were fed and clothed adequately but, because of too few nurses, given very little personal attention. No one talked to them, carried them around, or cuddled them. The human results were devastating: within two years fully a third of the children had died and the rest were mentally retarded . . . The conclusion seemed to be clear: loving attention is as essential as food for the human infant” (James McKee, *Sociology: The Study Of Society*, 1981, p. 79).

That people need love is considered a basic truth by many scientists. In “Can't Do Without Love,” *U.S. News and World Report* reported that biologists “know

that love is central to human existence . . . The capacity for loving emotions is . . . written into our biochemistry, essential if children are to grow and thrive” (Feb. 17, 1997, p. 58).

Recent research has shown that even intelligence in children—and hence the ability to excel at many tasks—depends to some degree on loving attention and communication.

“According to recent findings, the neuron links that are the keys to creativity and intelligence in later life are mainly laid down by the age of 3 . . . the main factor in establishing these connections . . . [is] interactions with an attentive adult. The sight, sound, touch, smell, and, especially, the intense involvement, through language and eye contact, of parent and child affect the number and sophistication of links within the brain . . . This word play is so important that those left behind at age 2 may never catch up” (*U.S. News and World Report*, Aug. 18, 1997, p. 92).

What does this mean? Love and loving

greater purpose of life. We find it in concern for and involvement with others. “The essence of happiness is the unconditional love we have for the people in our lives and their unconditional love for us” (Wholey, p. 11).

Jesus said, “Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15). The things that matter in life are the values we adopt, the character we build, the relationships we develop and the contributions we make to our relationships.

Most people naturally follow the way of acquiring rather than the way of giving. It might be summed up, as the popular bumper sticker proclaims: “He who dies with the most toys wins.” This philosophy fails in the long run. In contrast, Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). The one who truly wins when he dies is the one who seeks God's purpose and devotes his life to fulfilling it. “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11).

We are our brother's keeper, to answer a question raised early in the Bible (Genesis 4:9). We are indebted to love one another and devote our

communication are essential not only for the emotional, but also for the intellectual development of a child. “When babies are cared for by caring adults, they become much better learners and are much more confident to take over the world” (ibid.).

If children do not receive loving attention, they will not be well equipped to function in society. They need the love of their parents to succeed. “Dependency assures that parents are the source of everything important to infants: food, comfort, love, models of success and maturity” (Betty Hart and Todd Risely, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children*, 1995, pp. 181-182).

It isn't only children who depend on love for their well-being. Although generally less vulnerable than children, adults also suffer when deprived of love. “Love's absence can be devastating: The loss of a spouse often hastens death in older people” (*U.S. News and World Report*, Feb. 17, 1997, p. 58).

“A pattern of susceptibility to disease is apparent in those with disrupted or weakened social ties. People who are single, separated,

divorced or widowed are two or three times more likely to die than their married peers. They also wind up in the hospital for mental disorders five to ten times as frequently” (Robert Ornstein and David Sobel, *The Healing Brain*, 1987, p. 119).

Life's challenges are more easily managed when we have the support that loving relationships provide. The Bible confirmed this truth more than 3,000 years ago: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). It also tells us, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

The wisdom of the Bible and many assenting human voices tell us that people who lack affectionate ties with others find it difficult to make life work. The mutual giving and receiving that flow from personal relationships increase life's worth. God created us with the need to be connected to other people. These ties give significance and satisfaction to life.

lives to this standard: “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). Loving others is the way to great contentment.

### Love God with all your heart

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” said Jesus (Matthew 22:37; compare Deuteronomy 6:5; 10:12). Fundamental to genuine happiness and fulfillment is, first and foremost, loving God. The Creator, who gave us life, deserves our greatest love. “For in Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28).

God is the greatest giver. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17). Every man’s first duty in life is always to God (Acts 5:29). We owe Him complete devotion.

God seeks people who will worship Him (John 4:23). He created us to share His life and purpose with us, giving true meaning to our existence.

History shows that nations maintaining a devotion to God retain their strength and vitality. In reflecting on the decline of the atheistic Soviet Union and comparing it with America, author David Halberstam wrote that “the just and harmonious society was, in the long run, also the strong society” (*The Next Century*, 1991, p. 14).

French historian Alexis de Tocqueville observed America’s success in the 1800s and wrote: “America is great because America is good. If America ceases to be good, she will cease to be great.” This statement has application for every nation. Each of us needs God in our personal life, regardless of what nations do.

### The divine connection

Faith in God provides us with a sense of place in the larger scheme of the universe. We need faith in God when we face the sufferings of life. Our way of life may provide material acquisitions, but these are often useless in times of great loss or affliction. As British historian Paul Johnson observed, “In chronic pain and in distress without apparent end, even the confirmed atheist longs for a God” (*The Quest for God*, 1996, p. 3).

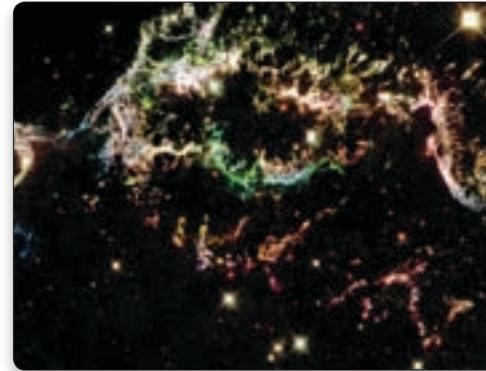
We need the peace and confidence that the promise of eternal reward delivers. God promises everlasting life through Jesus Christ for those who believe in Him (1 John 5:12). If the future holds nothing for us but eternal nothingness, we have no hedge against the frightening specter of death.

If it is true that there is no life beyond the grave, we are forced to admit that life is like a breath of air, here and gone with no trace of its passing. If this life is all there is, we would be miserable (1 Corinthians

15:19). But God assures us He has something far greater in mind for us.

The apostle Paul wrote that God planned a marvelous future for us even before He created our first parents, Adam and Eve. He planned our destiny “according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus *before time began*” (2 Timothy 1:9). Our future—our reason for being—was a part of God’s awesome purpose before He formed the universe, with its heavenly bodies by which we measure the passing of time.

God’s purpose is far greater than just the creation of mortal, perishable human beings. He is in the process of fashioning a “new creation”



(2 Corinthians 5:17)—His own spiritual sons and daughters, immortal and incorruptible children who will share His very nature and character.

How is this a new creation? Paul contrasts the “old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires,” with the “new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians

*Our future—our reason for being—was a part of God’s awesome purpose before He formed the universe, with its heavenly bodies by which we measure the passing of time.*

4:22-24, NIV). Paul is describing a much-needed transformation. It involves first a change in our nature and character from a mind and outlook that tends toward hostility toward God (Romans 8:7). It ultimately involves a far greater change in the resurrection, a transformation from our physical, mortal bodies to glorious immortal spirit bodies.

Notice how Paul describes this miracle: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’” (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

God is accomplishing this entire transformation through the power of

His Spirit. The Bible describes the spiritual transformation as *salvation*. Paul describes those who will receive salvation as the children of God. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that *we are the children of God*: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together*” (Romans 8:16-17, KJV).

Do you grasp the significance of Paul’s inspired statement? He explains why we are here, the very reason for our existence. God, the Scriptures



tell us, is creating a family—His own family. He offers us the opportunity to be a part of that family, the *family of God*.

### The core of God’s plan

That family relationship—our becoming children of God—is the heart and core of His incredible plan for humanity. Notice how important that family is to God: “*In bringing many sons to glory* [through the resurrection to immortality], it was

*God, the Scriptures tell us, is creating a family—His own family. He offers us the opportunity to be a part of that family, the family of God. That family relationship—our becoming children of God—is the heart and core of His incredible plan for humanity.*

fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation [Jesus Christ] perfect through suffering. Both the one who makes men holy [Christ] and those who are made holy [human beings in whom God is working] are *of the same family*” (Hebrews 2:10-11, NIV).

Those who are truly converted—who are led by God’s Spirit after repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38; Romans 8:9)—have the same spiritual Father and are members of the same family—*God’s family*. The Scriptures continue: “So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.’ And again, ‘I will put my trust in him.’ And again he says, ‘Here am I, and the *children* God has given me’” (Hebrews 2:11-13, NIV).

photo illustration by Shaun Venish/Corbis/PhotoDisc

Jesus is not ashamed to call members of His Church His own brothers (and sisters). That is how wonderfully close and personal this family relationship is.

From the beginning God has clearly stated this purpose: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in our image, according to Our likeness . . . So God created man *in His own image*; . . . male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27).

Men and women are created in God’s image and likeness, *to be like God*. He tells us, “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

Human beings who are inducted into the family God is creating will ultimately be glorified spirit beings like the resurrected Jesus Christ (Philippians 3:20-21). The apostle John plainly tells us that “*we shall be like Him*” (1 John 3:2). Our destiny is ultimately to “shine . . . like the stars forever and ever” in God’s family (Daniel 12:2-3).

The awesome potential of any person, as it is presented to us by Jesus Christ and His apostles, seems so incredible that most people cannot grasp this truth when they first read it. Although it is plainly stated in the Bible, people usually read right over it. Yet this awesome future is the whole purpose and reason God made mankind. It is why we were born, why we exist. God is in the process of creating His immortal family, and *you can have a part in it*.

(If you would like to know more about God’s plan for humanity, be sure to download or request our booklets *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, *What Is Your Destiny?* and *Who Is God?* All are free for the asking from any of our offices or from our Web site at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets).)

### Is God’s Word true?

We should not believe in God or the Bible just to make ourselves feel good; we should latch onto Scripture *because it is true*. The Bible’s credibility can be established. (To prove for yourself the truth of the Bible, be sure to download your free copy of our booklet *Is the Bible True?* at [www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets) or request it from our office nearest you.) In the Bible, God promises to those who serve Him a reward that is far greater than anything this life has to offer.

In his present condition, lacking understanding of God’s purpose, man is like a rudderless ship, adrift and at the mercy of winds and storms. His dogmas fail as a shield against the anxieties and uncertainties inherent in the human condition.

But you can understand the reason for your existence. You can turn away “from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Peter 1:18) by turning to a life of meaning and purpose, *a life that works*.

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