

## FAMILIES FILLED WITH JOY

by  
Karen & Ron Flowers

**Theme:** An understanding of the dynamics of families, coupled with a clear presentation of the good news of the gospel, can make it possible for more households to be disciplined together for Christ.

**Theme Text:** Acts 16:31-34

**Presentation Notes:** Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate illustrations, quotations and other material found in the section called *Sermon Illumination* that may be helpful in your sermon development and delivery.

The account of the events in the jail at Philippi is one of the New Testament's most stirring stories. Not only are Paul and Silas miraculously freed from prison, but in the process a family, a whole household, hears the preaching of the gospel at midnight and is baptized by daybreak! The whole story is abridged in a few verses. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" inquired the jailer. "They replied, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved-you and your household.' Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them, and the *whole family was filled with joy*, because they had come to believe in God" [Acts 16:31-34, *The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible*, NIV. Zondervan. (1983). Emphasis supplied].

Several household conversions are found in the Bible (cf. John 4:46-53; Acts 10:2, 24, 44-48). How is that whole households find faith in Christ together? What might enable more families-our families-to be filled with joy in the gospel?

### **The Disappointment of Spiritually Fragmented Families**

Many people know the disappointment of living life with family members who do not share their love for Christ. Some of these family members are merely indifferent about the religious faith of others; some are deliberately hostile. This experience is hardest when those with whom we share the most intimate of ties are the ones who are most out of sympathy with our love for Christ. (1)

Many know from personal experience the mixed emotions which arise from making a decision to follow Jesus whom they love, while at the same time sensing that, by this decision, they are creating distance between themselves and others whom they love who do not share their commitment to Him.

**When family members reject their faith.** Many also feel burdened for family members-a teenager, an adult child, a spouse-who once evidenced commitment to Christ, but no longer seemingly have interest in Christ or the church. The pain of the loss of Christian fellowship with such a dear one is severe. Even more difficult is the concern for that loved one's eternal welfare.

**When families do not know joy.** Sometimes even Christian families have found little or no joy in the gospel. Some have not understood the good news of all that has been accomplished for them in Christ. They struggle to live perfect lives in order to win the favor of the Savior, rather than finding rest in the good news of His grace. Others have been so damaged by life's

experience that they have extreme difficulty comprehending God's love and experiencing it in their family relationships. Others have not had the opportunity to develop the relational skills needed for healthy family functioning. Religious beliefs notwithstanding, these families struggle with anxiety, depression, and unfulfilling relational patterns which breed discouragement at every turn.

In some homes, the kind of religion practiced breeds conflict, discord and unhappiness, instead of contributing to peace, harmony and contentment. Individuals often feel unloved, abandoned, controlled, isolated, manipulated, minimized, or abused. Many actually are. Such families, because they make an outward show of religiosity which belies their true condition, place their members at great risk for abandoning the family faith profession and rejecting religion altogether.

Nonetheless, the good news of the gospel, which came to the home of the Philippian jailer, can awaken joy in troubled hearts today.

### **Good News for Families**

**The good news of Immanuel, God with us.** The good news is that God knows our pain. He knows because He is all knowing, but He also knows because He became one with us in Jesus Christ (Is. 7:14; 53:3-6; John 1:14; Phil. 2:7-8). Ellen White paints this picture of the God who is with us:

The blessed Saviour stands by many whose eyes are so blinded by tears that they do not discern Him. . . . His heart is open to our griefs, our sorrows, and our trials. He has loved us with an everlasting love and with loving-kindness compassed us about. . . . He will lift the soul above the daily sorrow and perplexity into a realm of peace. Think of this children of suffering and sorrow, and rejoice in hope ( *Mount of Blessing* , p. 12).

By our patient discipleship, we may be able to exert an influence for good on those who have not yet chosen to follow Christ (1 Cor. 7:16; 1 Peter 3:1, 2). But God is concerned for our well-being, even as He is anxious to draw these family members to Himself. We can take courage that, when families forsake us, the Lord does not (Ps. 27:10). Jesus Himself knew the pain of having family members who did not understand His mission or His commitment to it (John 7:5). If the natural love of family conflicts with the call to follow Him, commitment to Christ must be valued above all else (Matt. 8:22; 10:36, 37). But should family reject us, there remains the fellowship of a new family-the household of faith (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19).

**The good news of God's love for sinners.** God's love is unfathomable, almost beyond human comprehension. Listen to what the Bible says; let God's expressions of love for you cascade over you and penetrate deep into your soul like a refreshing mountain waterfall on a warm summer day. (2) Our God is portrayed from Genesis to Revelation as the God who goes looking for the lost He loves (Gen. 3:8, 9; Ps. 103:13-18; Hos. 11:1-4, 8, 9; Luke 15; 2 Pet. 3:9). We may take comfort in the certainty that the Good Shepherd never rests until He has found the lost and winsomely drawn them to Himself so that they may avail themselves of the salvation He has made certain in Christ.

**The Good News of the simple gospel.** Paul uses a family metaphor which is simple, yet profound, to give meaning to the Good News he preached. It was undoubtedly the basis for his message to the Philippian jailor and his household. God inspired Paul to use an ancient extended family concept, well understood in Old Testament times, to explain salvation to his hearers. Paul begins by reminding us that, in our human lineage, we are all family through Adam. The ties that bind us as a human family are so close, the Bible teaches, that when Adam sinned, the whole human race was doomed to die as a result (Rom. 5:12-17). "In Adam all die" (1 Cor. 15:22). That is our desperate human situation.

The prospects for humanity were grim, but for God's intervention. But the Good News is that by His own sovereign act, God sent His Son Jesus Christ as the second Adam, "the last Adam" (1

Cor. 15:45). In the mystery of the incarnation, Christ linked His life with our lives, with ties God intends never to be broken. (3) From that point onward, the life, death, and resurrection events in the life of the second Adam became our events, our history. In Christ's sinless life, we lived sinless lives. We all died with Him the death which sin required (Rom. 6:5; 2 Cor. 5:14). God "made us alive with Christ" and "raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:5, 6). God has made us family in the closest sense. So Paul can proclaim with assurance, "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17). This is truly Good News!

**Households in the Lord.** The choice now rests with us. To which family will we choose to finally belong-the family of the original Adam or the family of the second Adam, Jesus Christ?

Christ has become the "Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). In Christ the necessary reconciliation of God and humanity has been accomplished (2 Cor. 5:18). God did this "when we were powerless," "were still sinners," and "were God's enemies" (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10). God waits for us to use our free human will to accept the reality of the reconciliation and "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20) and to continue to choose to remain in Christ (John 15:4, 5). Like Narcissus' household, our families are households "in the Lord" (Rom. 16:11) by God's own act (1 Cor. 1:30). All that remains is for us to unclasp our hands and receive the benefits of God's saving work in Christ.

**Brothers and sisters in Christ.** To know that our family is in Christ-grandparents, mother, father, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins-causes us to see them in a new way. In addition to the relationships we share on earth, each one is a brother or sister in the family of God! These are the ties which will bind for all eternity. What good news for those who believe! What powerful incentive for sharing this good news with a family member who has not personally received it yet!

**Trusting the good news and releasing our loved ones to God.** The awareness that our spouses, our children, our relatives are in Christ by God's own divine act can bring great peace to our hearts. Even before they profess Christ as their personal Savior, they are in Him. Even as they make mistakes, disappoint us as parents, spouses, or siblings-they are nevertheless in Him. Nothing can ever take them outside the circle of God's love, nor change the divine reality that they are in Christ.

The good news is that the same God who has put them in Christ is perpetually working through the winsome work of His Holy Spirit to draw them to Himself, that they may make personal in their lives what He has already done for them. Knowing this, we can release our loved ones to God. We can let go of what may be a crushing burden of responsibility for their salvation. We can find courage to make amends where possible for our own failures in relationships. We can release others to be free to make choices different from our own, even as Jesus respects the freedom of the human will. He will turn from our dear ones only in a reluctant, last strange act, in response to their willful, persistent, ultimate choice to decline His abundant salvation.

### **Restoring the Significance of Families**

Throughout history, various factors have influenced our thinking about families and family ties:

- Families have at times been such sources of such pain that their members have given up on them.
- The rise of individualism in recent centuries in some societies has had an adverse effect on attitudes toward the family. (4)
- The sayings of Jesus (such as Matt. 10:35-37; Luke 9:59, 60) have been used in ways which have minimized the importance of family ties and diminished the profound effects which result when individuals forsake their families as they make a decision for Christ. (5)

Certainly the strong bonds which bind families together must not be allowed to hinder anyone from making a full and complete commitment to God personally. The good news of salvation must be proclaimed to everyone (Mark 16:15, 16), and it must be individually received (Rom. 10:13, 17; Rev. 22:12). Our ultimate allegiance is to the family of heaven. However, while the reality of a sinful world means that following the spiritual call of Jesus may require stepping apart from family, it is certain that God wants to bring our families together to the Savior. (6)

**Families central to discipling.** In the greatest treatise on spiritual nurture in Scripture, Moses calls parents to first love God in their own hearts, and then to share the good news with their children (Deut. 6:4-9). Jesus recognized the centrality of family to discipling when He identified the process of discipling with the transmission of values (John 8:31) and with the development of the capacity for giving and receiving love (John 13:35). There is no influence greater than that of family in the development of a person's values. Likewise, families can either set the stage for family members to understand and experience God's love, or they can make such understanding and experience a virtual impossibility but for a miracle of grace. Families also have the primary opportunity for developing the capacity for self-giving love in their members, the kind of love which makes for winsome witness within the family and in the neighborhood. This elevates family to center stage in the church's response to the gospel commission. (7)

Working for families can be challenging and difficult. Yet many can testify that when the good news came to their household, life was radically transformed. One such transformation not only brings joy to hearts on earth, but an abundance of joy to the hearts of heaven.

## Conclusion

Whole households are waiting-perhaps our own is waiting-for good news which will fill them with joy. Paul and Silas, maltreated, beaten and imprisoned, were miraculously released at midnight. They had good cause to flee from that area, to leave that town. Yet they responded to the cry of a family voiced through the jailer, "What must I do to be saved." Now was their opportunity to set more prisoners free, a household imprisoned in sin, by sharing the good news that has been entrusted to every believer. "And the whole family was filled with joy, because they had come to believe in God"(Acts 16:34). May our own households and many others experience that same joy.

## Sermon Illumination

**One (1):** It has often been the case that, when a man embarked on the way of Jesus Christ, his nearest and dearest could not understand him, and were even hostile to him. "A Christian's only relatives," said one of the early martyrs, "are the saints." Many of the early Quakers had this bitter experience. When Edward Burrough was moved to the new way, "his parents resenting his 'fanatical spirit' drove him forth from his home." He pleaded humbly with his father: "Let me stay and be your servant. I will do the work of the hired lad for thee. Let me stay!" But, as his biographer says, "His father was adamant, and much as the boy loved his home and its familiar surroundings, he was to know it no more." (Barclay, 1975b, pp. 52, 53)

**Two (2):** There are scores of wonderful passages about God's love for humankind. You may wish to read several selections together without comment, letting the Scripture speak for itself. Read as many as time will permit so as to create the image of an overflowing cascade of love. For starters: Is. 43:1-7; Jeremiah 31:3; Lam. 3:31, 32; John 3:16; Rom. 8:35-39; Eph. 2:4-6; 1 John 4:9, 10.

**Three (3):** "When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie

of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie-to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to choose another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and he will preserve us. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand." ( *Steps to Christ* , p. 72)

**Four (4):** Christians face a challenge to hold in balance beliefs about individualism on the one hand and beliefs about family on the other. While notions of individualism may be important to help swing the pendulum away from extremes of enmeshment, co-dependency, and loss of individual personhood in some families which are too tightly entangled, wherever the philosophy of individualism has been over-emphasized, some appreciation for the family as a group has been lost. The greater the emphasis on individualism, the less attention tends to be paid to the strength and benefits found in the family system (Bellah, 1985). M. Scott Peck (1993) goes so far as to speak of a "lack of group consciousness" altogether. This he calls "the hole in the mind" which has contributed to the loss of civility in society. In his view, the route to recovery of group consciousness and to the cure of ills which plague society must involve a re-emphasis on the family as the basic group or system within which individuals live.

**Five (5):** David Garland (Garland and Pancoast, 1990) discusses the difficult sayings of Jesus regarding the family and concludes that He did not hold a view of family that was subversive, nor did He see the family as a petty concern or an impediment to commitment to God. Far from undercutting the valuable nurture, support and strength to be gained from membership in families, Jesus addressed the exclusive attitudes of those who trusted implicitly in biological kinship. He redefined family loyalties, putting them in perspective against the higher loyalty to God. He opened the way for service to God to be done, not only within the structure of the biological family, but also in the wider circle of the church which includes others who come from outside that biological group.

Regarding Matt. 10:35-37, Barclay (1975a) offers an insightful comment:

The Jews believed that one of the features of the Day of the Lord, the day when God would break into history, would be the division of families. The Rabbis said: "In the period when the Son of David shall come, a daughter will rise up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." "The son despises his father, the daughter rebels against the mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and the man's enemies are they of his own household." It is as if Jesus said, "*The end you have always been waiting for has come; and the intervention of God in history is splitting homes and groups and families into two.*" (Barclay, 1975a, p. 393, emphasis supplied)

**Six (6):** One man tells this story: "My father had been reared in an Adventist home but, because of difficulties in the family, he cut himself off from them and the church. When I attended church evangelistic meetings as a lad growing up, no effort was made to reach the members of my family with the gospel message. I was encouraged to step out from my family and join alone. Now, after a number of years, my parents have become believers also. But what a wonderful thing it would have been if we could have attended church together while I was growing up! What encouragement that would have been! What fellowship! What opportunities to talk over with people you live with every day what it means to live as a Christian. We could have supported each other.

"I don't think evangelism is only about conveying twenty-seven paragraphs of truth from a list of fundamental beliefs. Evangelism is about sharing the gospel and inviting people to respond to it. It is about helping them close the gap in their relationship with God. Often people cannot fully complete that task, or sometimes even undertake it, until they have closed the gaps in their relationships with the people who are closest to them. Evangelism needed to be done in my

family at the level of intergenerational reconciliation. Who knows what would have happened if efforts had been put forth to bring about a healing and restoration between my father and his family? An effect as profound as bringing in additional members might have occurred by the working of the gospel among the already existing members. Yet so often we do not take the time or put forth the energy to fully evangelize, to bring the gospel to bear upon the hurts and wounds in people's lives."

**Seven (7):** If disciples are those who relate with their teacher in the context of a primary relationship, then the capacity to form primary relationships is necessary to the process of disciple making. Secondly, if primary relationships consist of relationship skills that are generalized from one primary group to another, then the family is key in its significance because it is the place where those skills are learned well or learned poorly. And last of all, if the family is the social organization in which these skills are learned first, and thus most essentially, then the family becomes central to the process of disciple making. It is a place where disciplelike relational skills are learned, and it is a primary group in which disciple making takes place. (Guernsey, 1982, p. 11)

## FAMILIES WHO FOSTER FAITH

by  
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**Theme:** Scripture reveals the paramount importance of the family in transmitting spiritual values from generation to generation.

**Theme Text:** Deuteronomy 6:4-25; Matthew 22:37-38

**Presentation Notes:** Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate items from the section called *Sermon Illumination* which may be used for illustration. The addition of your personal illustrations will enhance the presentation.

As Moses neared the close of his life, he longed to transfer to those who followed him the legacy of faith and trust in God which had become his. Inspired by God, the aging leader sought, like the runners of the Olympiad, to "pass on the torch" to a new generation in the messages set down in the book of Deuteronomy.

Writes Dr. John Youngberg, professor of Religious Education at Andrews University, "The Book of Deuteronomy . . . is the most comprehensive statement on religious education to be found in sacred scripture. This book defines the problem of religious educators, its context, and enumerates factors which contribute or even determine the successful transmission of a religious heritage from one generation to another. . . . The problem of Deuteronomy is how can a dying 'pioneer' bequeath his faith legacy to a new generation that did not witness the miracle of the Exodus or the majesty of Sinai."

What Moses faced is similar to what parents face as they ponder the need to convey to their children spiritual convictions and a religious heritage. Says Dr. Youngberg, "Great ideals don't live on just because they are great or because they are true. They live on only when they are enshrined in the hearts of the young. Our most treasured religious ideals are always only one generation from extinction!"

Deuteronomy 6:4-25 contains counsel from God that will help us today as we think about fostering faith in our families.

### **Worship God Supremely**

Deut. 6:4, 5. "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!" "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength."

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 has come to be known in the Jewish faith as the Shema, from the Hebrew word for "hear" in vs. 4. The Shema is the basic and essential creed of Judaism and is used to open every Jewish service. It's opening line is the first Scripture that every Jewish child commits to memory. "The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Amidst religions with many gods, this verse declares our God to be one. It also declares that our commitment to God must be single-minded. It's as if Moses were saying, "Put your priorities in order. One thing is primary-your total love relationship with God. Everything else is secondary."

Jesus also said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all the rest will be added unto you" Matthew 6:33. Elsewhere He underscored the instruction of Deuteronomy 6:5, proclaiming it the first and great commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment" Matt. 22:37, 38.

### **Receive God's Word Inwardly**

Deut. 6:6. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart."

God desires each one to experience His love in a personal way and to take the word of God into his heart. *Heart* means thoughts, emotions, the very center of ones being as far as the Hebrew scriptures were concerned. Though the religion of Jehovah affects the behavior and outward actions of a person, it is concerned first of all with the condition of the heart, the inner spirit of the believer.

The highest level of motivation in life, in relationships and service occurs when God's Word has been accepted, appreciated and taken within the heart. (1) The heart is preeminent in the words of both Moses and Jesus (cf. Matt. 22:37, 38). External actions, such as talking, teaching and other behaviors, are not substitutes for the inner experience. Love of God's precepts in the heart is necessary before they can be effectively taught to others. (2)

### **Teach God's Word Diligently**

Deut. 6:7. "You shall teach them diligently to your children."

**A perpetual covenant.** God's covenant with His people is intended to be a perpetual one (Gen. 9:12; Ex. 31:16). It was not intended for one generation only. Understanding of God's covenant with His people does not automatically transfer from one generation to another. The individuals within each succeeding generation must be taught the meaning of the covenant and invited to enter that covenant relationship with God personally.

**Significance of home instruction.** Deuteronomy attaches importance to teaching within the family (Deut. 4:9; 6:20-25; 11:19). The home is to be the center for conserving and propagating truth. Moses understood that the greatness of the nation depended upon the teaching of God's Word in the home. (3)

**How to teach diligently.** In the verses that follow the counsel to "teach diligently" is explained.

. Teach continually. Deut. 6:7. "You . . . 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." Instruction from the parents is to be a continual way of life with spontaneous instruction mingled with more regular times for teaching. "Sitting," "walking," "lying down," and "rising up" describe typical, habitual activities of life. "Modern man may furnish the daily round of his life with devotional customs-grace at meals, regular Bible reading, family prayer, private prayer."- *The Interpreter's Bible* , p. 375.

- Teach practically. Deut. 6:8, 9. "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." Instruction was to be made real and practical in work, study, recreation, in family living and all aspects of life. (4), (5)

This verse eventually lost its meaning when the rabbis interpreted it literally, actually fixing small bits of written material from the books of Moses on their arms and foreheads and on the doorframes of their houses. (6)

The counsel, however, is couched in figurative language to express important principles. The truths of God's Word are to govern our *actions* , symbolized by the hands, and our *thinking* , symbolized by the forehead. Placing the Word of God on the doorframes of our homes indicates that God's truth is to be our identifying mark, just as blood on the doorframe of Israelite homes in Egypt provided an identifying mark so that the family within would be saved (cf. Ex. 12:7, 13). (7)



- Teach wisely. Deut. 6:20 ff. "When your son asks you in time to come . . . then you shall say . . ." Here God presents two powerful factors in effective values teaching. A wise parent recognizes the value both of children's *questions* and of the *personal story* .

It is the nature of children to be inquisitive. Let us encourage this questioning spirit and thus help them to establish their own faith. Their questions may be difficult, but do not be afraid to try to answer them. To be afraid of questions and discourage asking may stifle the growth of a child's faith. We must answer the questions as they come up, providing answers adequate and appropriate to the developmental level of the child. Each time we answer truthfully, honestly and openly, we help build trust and prepare the way so that young people will be encouraged to ask the meaningful questions. (8)

In response to children's questions, God instructs parents to respond with their personal story of how He has been active in their lives. Stories teach and inspire imitation as well as entertain. Self-disclosure to children of one's personal spiritual pilgrimage has a mighty influence on the minds and hearts of the young. (9)

### **Live God's Word Faithfully**

Deut. 6:12, 14, 18. "Beware, lest you forget . . . You shall not go after other gods . . . Do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord."

**Fidelity.** The word of God is aware that individuals who are in need and in want require little incentive to turn to God and serve Him. What is needed are individuals who in the midst of abundance and plenty will continue to be faithful to Him, who will not be distracted by other gods, nor go after the gods of the people around them.

**Consistent modeling.** Children pick up the values that are lived consistently before them. Inconsistency creates confusion and doubt. (10)

**The courage to be imperfect.** A faithful Christian life as a parent does not mean a flawless life. God does not require us to be perfect parents, but in our brokenness and imperfection to direct our children to the perfect Savior we have found and to guide their feet along the path to find Him for themselves.

### **Conclusion**

Our great purpose is to prepare the way for our children to make a covenant with their God as we have made a covenant with ours. We cannot coerce, we cannot force, but we can lovingly and patiently instruct them. We can live faithfully before them and we can invite them as did Moses who said, "Choose life, that both you and your children may live" Deut. 30:19. May we ourselves and our children after us respond as did Joshua, "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" Josh. 24:15.

### **Sermon Illumination**

**One (1): Processes affecting attitude change.** Herbert Kelman once described three processes that affect attitude change: compliance, identification, and internalization (Kelman, 1958). Compliance results when one is in some way controlled by another. A child complies with a parent's values because the parent enforces behavior by spanking, or denying privileges. In the process of identification, a desire for a relationship with another person or group leads to adoption of values. Liking to be with someone, or belonging to a group leads to an acceptance of their values for one's own. With internalization, the value with accompanying behavior is adopted as meaningful for its own sake. Internalization of Godly values is the intention expressed in Deuteronomy 6:6.

**Two (2): Love in the heart brings change in the life.** Seventy-eight-year-old Aleida Huissen of Rotterdam in the Netherlands had been smoking for fifty years. For most of that time she had been trying unsuccessfully to give up the habit. Then something happened and she succeeded. The secret? She met seventy-nine-year-old Leo Jansen. The two fell in love and Leo proposed marriage. "I'll want you around for a long time," he said. "You must quit smoking before it kills you." Aleida said, "Will power never was enough to get me off the habit. Love made me do it."- Adapted from John C. Maxwell, *The Communicator's Commentary* , p. 127.

**Three (3): Importance of the home as a center for teaching values.** The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation depend upon home influences.- Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it.-Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* , p. 349.

**Four (4) : Bread without salt.** Allen and Mark liked to join in when Mother made bread. Once the salt was accidentally left out and the bread was not very tasty. Mother took the opportunity to talk to the children about what Jesus had said about Christians being the salt of the earth, to make the world a better place by their love. "You are the world's seasoning to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world?" (Matt. 5:13, LB).

The bread was well-formed and nice in texture, but it tasted "flat," like something important was missing. "Many people seem to be getting along quite well without Jesus as you look at them," Mother pointed out, "but without Jesus something very important will always be missing from the lives of human beings." They tried spreading the bread with butter and then sprinkling on the salt, but that didn't work too well either. Mother added, "Christians who don't make friends with their neighbors and mix with those around them who don't know Jesus don't do much to flavor the world either. Jesus needs us to be mixed in and to share His love in all the circles where we live."

**Five (5): A lesson from weeds.** A few years ago my son and I were working in the garden. "Did God make weeds, Daddy?" Dickie asked, puzzled. I started to give a quick answer so that I could go on with my work, but then I realized that this was an opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson.

I laid down my weeding fork and said, "Dickie, you know about Adam and Eve. They were the first people who ever lived on earth. God put them in a beautiful garden without *any* weeds. Then one day the devil came along, and he looked like a snake. He told Adam and Eve to disobey God; he said they should eat some fruit God had told them not to eat. And you know what happened? They ate it. Then the world started having problems. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, weeds started growing and they had to go to work and leave their pretty garden."

With a serious look Dickie replied, "Isn't that a shame!"

I relate this incident to illustrate an important biblical principle:

Lessons arising out of real-life experiences are usually much more effective than formal learning.

This real-life instruction is what is spoken of in Deuteronomy 6. The Israelites were to weave child training into the fabric of their daily lives. In our culture we have a strong tendency to

separate the sacred and the secular. We see to it that our children receive education (at school), training (at home), and spiritual instruction (at church, at family devotions, and, in some cases, at school).

But this compartmentalizing creates problems. One of the reasons so many children and young adults from Christian homes find little meaning in their Christian experience is that their Christian faith was never integrated with daily living. Their parents failed to experience or failed to convey their joy at God's creative genius shown in nature. They failed to see and explain their business and family affairs from God's perspective-His children gaining dominion over the world for the glory of their Creator. As a result, their children failed to see that God is deeply interested and involved in every area of life.-Bruce Narramore, *Parenting With Love and Limits* , p. 61.

**Six (6): Jews placed the law on "hands," "foreheads," and "doorposts"**. Interpreting literally the words of verse 8, the custom of Orthodox Jewish men has been to copy four sections from the law (Exod. 12:1-10; 13:11-16; Deut. 6:4-9; 11:13-21) and put these passages in leather cases on straps and bind them to their left arms and on their foreheads during morning prayers. They also put Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and 11:13-20 in a metal or glass case and affixed it to the right-hand doorpost of every entrance to their homes.-John C. Maxwell, *The Communicator's Commentary* , p. 128.

**Seven (7): God's truth identifies our homes.** On Foxly Lane, near Newbold College, the homes, like many throughout England, are designated by names rather than by street numbers. Pastor and Mrs. Ernest Marter, a retired Seventh-day Adventist minister and his wife, built a home on this street. To this residence they gave the name "Gratitude" and placed an attractive sign with the name inscribed at their curbside. How like the symbolism in the book of Deuteronomy! Just as the Israelite was admonished to write the words of the Lord "on the doorposts of your house and on your gates," so the home Gratitude proclaims to all who enter and pass by the thankfulness and love for Jesus which pervades the hearts of those who dwell within.

**Eight (8): "I don't know" doesn't answer the question.** One day a small boy was walking with his father. When they passed an unusual looking truck, he asked, "What's that, Daddy?"

"I don't know," his father said.

Then they came to a large, old-fashioned warehouse. "What's in there, Daddy?" the little boy asked.

"I don't know," his father replied.

Then they saw a man with a pneumatic drill breaking up the pavement.

"What's that man doing, Daddy?" the boy asked.

"I don't know," was again the father's answer.

After they had walked on a short way in silence, the little boy turned to his father and said, "Daddy, do you mind my asking you so many questions?"

"Of course not," replied the father. "How else are you going to learn anything?"-John C. Maxwell,

*The Communicator's Commentary* , p. 134.

**Nine (9): The power of stories.** Another reason why everyone likes stories is that narrative is the easiest form of thinking. It does not take much mental effort to follow a story, and yet through the story one may learn a great deal of truth in concrete form. . . . Children cannot reason so well as adults are supposed to, nor grasp abstract ideas as adults are expected to; so the story is the natural means of teaching them truth. The right story, adapted to their understanding, is a little bundle of truth in such form that their minds can digest it.-Arthur Spalding and Eric B. Hare, *Christian Storytelling* , p. 14.

**Ten (10): Children Learn What They Live**

If a child lives with criticism,  
He learns to condemn.  
If a child lives with hostility,  
He learns to fight.  
If a child lives with ridicule,  
He learns to be shy.  
If a child lives with shame,  
He learns to feel guilty.  
If a child lives with tolerance,  
He learns to be patient.  
If a child lives with encouragement,  
He learns confidence.  
If a child lives with praise,  
He learns to appreciate.  
If a child lives with fairness,  
He learns justice.  
If a child lives with security,  
He learns to have faith.  
If a child lives with approval,  
He learns to like himself.  
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,  
He learns to find love in the world.  
-Dorothy Law Nolte