

Dorothy Eaton Watts



THE PALS PROGRAM

Prayer **A**nd **L**ove **S**aves

A seminar for the General Conference Women's Ministries to encourage parents of children who have wandered from God and the church.



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Organizing a *PALS* Program

I. Purpose of the *PALS* Program

The purpose of the *PALS* program is to encourage parents who have adult children who have wandered from God and the church. It is to provide an arena in which such parents can overcome their guilt, find support in one another in mutual concern, develop skills to build relationships with adult children and their families and intercede for their adult children in prayer.

II. Scope of the *PALS* Program

The *PALS* program has eleven lessons, which are divided into three basic focus areas: accepting, loving, and praying,

Part I focuses on the reality of the situation and encourages parents to accept the things they cannot change, to work with the things they can, and to know the difference when it comes to their relationships with their adult children. It's about releasing parents from blame, letting go to face their own feelings, and taking a look at the differences between themselves and their children.

Part II is a practical section of what parents can do to build better relationships with their adult children and their grandchildren. It is looking to the future and choosing the steps by which they can communicate love.

Part III is devoted to interceding for adult children who are prodigals. It offers prayer support for parents who are in pain over the choices their adult children have made. The final chapter makes suggestions for a better future.

III. Program Schedule

The following is a suggested outline for using the material in a 70-minute group session. This could be lengthened to 90 minutes and allow more time for sharing, Bible study, group discussion, and prayer. It could be shortened to 55 minutes by supplying the parent showcase and Bible Study as handouts for the parents to do at home. Feel free to adapt this material to the amount of time available.

1. Sharing Exercise	10 minutes
2. Presentation of Topic	15 minutes
3. Parent Showcase	5 minutes
4. Handout on Topic	
5. Small Group Bible Study	10 minutes
6. Group Discussion on Topic	20 minutes
7. Prayer Time	10 minutes

IV. Organizational Structure

The material has been prepared so that the group leader could easily pick up the material and use it to lead a support-prayer group with a minimum amount of preparation. One person could do all of the basic presentation, or the leader could organize others to give the presentations and parent showcase.

1. **Sharing Exercise**—This is an icebreaker type of small group activity or whole group interaction that is designed to relax the members or to get them thinking about the topic in an informal way. It is designed to help the members to get to know each other and their children better so that they can feel more empathy and understand where they are coming from. It aids in the bonding of group members. While all are encouraged to share, no one should feel pressured. *Parents should be told that they should not share personal information about their adult children or any information that might anger or embarrass the adult children if they should find out it was shared.*
2. **Presentation of the Topic**—This could be used as it is for a prepared talk or it could be duplicated and given out as an assigned reading before the next session. If it is used as an assigned reading, then the presenter would simply give a three to five minute summary at the next session, thus leaving more time for Bible study and topic discussion. This might work with some groups, but would be a problem if all of the members did not do their assignments. The content of the topic is vital for a meaningful discussion time and related Bible study activity.
3. **Parent Showcase**—This is a story of an actual parent or parents who put into practice the concept emphasized for the day. It uses stories of modern Christian parents or ones taken from history of how parents used that principle. This could be done by the leader or he/she may chose to assign this to a different person each week.
4. **Handout on the Topic**—There is at least a one handout page for each lesson. Except in the case of Lesson 11, these will not be used during the presentation, but will be handed out for the parents to take home and use on their own. Some give helpful ideas for personal devotional time.
5. **Bible Study**—These studies focus on a Biblical parent(s) who faced a similar situation or applied the principal under discussion. If the group is small, they could go through this together. Read through the Scriptures given and discuss the questions. If the group is more than eight divide into smaller groups of four to six to do this study. Everyone should have a copy of the Bible study page.
6. **Group Discussion**—This discussion could be led by the group leader, or divide into smaller groups and give each person a copy of the questions and discuss in their group. Bring all members back together and ask for a summary of answers from the groups.

7. **Prayer Time**—This is a time for the parents to pray for each other, their own children, and the children of others. It is a time of intercession focused on the parents' concerns for their children and grandchildren. Other issues should not be brought in. Varied ways of leading the group into prayer time are suggested. Sometimes the prayers will be focused on a specific area of need and other times they may be more general in nature. At times the focus will be on the parents and at other times on their adult children. These ideas given are only suggestions and the leader should feel free to lead in prayer in the most appropriate way for her group.

V. Options for Use of This Material.

1. **Weekly Prayer Group**—This group could meet at the church or in someone's home at a convenient time. There is enough material for three months. At the end of the three months the group will have the option of continuing. Several books on the references list would be good textbooks to use for a second quarterly series. The leader should review these books to see which ones are the most suitable for the group.
2. **Monthly Prayer Group**—A monthly group may want to include more time for socialization, perhaps a supper or breakfast together before the lessons begin. There are eleven lessons, about right for a year if time is allowed for the holidays.
3. **Sabbath School Alternative**—This material could be used as a support group Sabbath School lesson quarterly for one quarter. The presentation of the material would need to be adapted to the time allotted for lesson study in your church.
4. **Weekend Retreat**—Plan a weekend retreat at a lodge, hotel, or at a conference camp facility. By doing two lessons on Friday evening, three on Sabbath morning, two on Sabbath afternoon, two on Sabbath evening, and two on Sunday morning, all of the lessons could be covered in a weekend.
5. **Three Weekend Seminars**—The seminars could include one or two sessions on Friday evening and another two or three on Sabbath afternoon, according to the segment of the program used. Do Part I: **Accepting Parents** on one weekend, Part II: **Loving Parents** on a second weekend, and Part III: **Praying Parents** on a third weekend.
6. **Campmeeting Seminar**—Use the material for seminars that would be held either once or twice daily, thus covering five or ten of the topics. The leader would need to select the topics to be deleted or combine some topics that are similar in content.
7. **Convention Seminar**—Material could be adapted for one day or a part of each day at a retiree's convention. Use selected topics. Topics could be used individually as a seminar at a Ladies' Retreat.

Lesson 1

Facing Reality: The Blame Game

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

- A. Pass out family tree worksheets (page 12).
- B. Each couple or single parent fills one out for their family. The parent's name goes in the large center circle. The names of children and spouses go in the next sized circles. Smaller circles are for grandchildren.
- C. Each couple or single parent shares with the group the names of children, ages, and where they live. You may want to have the participants include this information in each circle.
- D. Collect these work sheets.

Divide into smaller groups of four to six.

- E. Go around the group again, each person sharing about a happy memory from the days when your children were small. Tell about a time when your heart was full of joy and hope, love and enjoyment of your children.

II. Today's Topic: Facing Reality (15 minutes)

After trying to have children for seven years, Marj and Tom finally chose to adopt. While they were going through the necessary paper work, close friends wrote them, "Why are you doing this to yourselves? You should leave well enough alone. Children will cause you more pain than they are worth. We advise you to give up the idea if you want to save yourselves a lot of trouble later on."

Marj and Tom shook their heads in disbelief. How could children bring anything but love and joy to the hearts of parents? Didn't God plan that we should have children, live in families? All you needed to do was to love your children, raise them right, and you'd live happily ever after. They looked at parents with wayward children and told themselves, "That will never happen to us. We will be perfect parents. We'll do it right. Nothing to worry about!"

A good number of years later, when their three children became teenagers, someone gave them a motto which they hung on their bedroom wall that said, "Insanity is inherited. You get it from your children." By that time they knew what it meant to see a child rebel and make choices that broke their hearts.

"What did we do wrong?" Marj asked over and over. "If only we had been more strict, or more loving, or more watchful, or more understanding, or more informed, or if only Tom hadn't been on the road so much, or if only I hadn't taken a job . . . or . . . or . . . or."

Feeling guilty for not being a perfect parent and raising perfect children, Marj felt near despair. She gave up all her church offices and withdrew from social functions. She felt like an outcast, a leper, a failure at parenting. She and Tom argued, each blaming the other for what had gone wrong, then needing each other so much, making up and weeping before God together, "Lord forgive us for not being the parents we ought to be."

They smiled when they saw a bumper sticker on someone's car, "Warning! Parenting may be hazardous to your health!"

How true! Marj thought. I can't sleep at night. I've got headaches, heartaches, backaches, and all kinds of aches. I've got high blood pressure. I didn't have any of these problems before we got children. Maybe our friends were right. We should have left well enough alone.

"I can't wait until our children all reach their twenty-first birthday!" Marj told Tom. "Then we won't have to worry about them any more."

But the pain didn't stop when their children were twenty-one. When will the pain go away? Marj wondered. When will I wake up and find our children are just as we always dreamed they would be?

Marj and Tom were caught up in the Blame Game because they believed a number of myths about Christian parenting. Their greatest need was to come to grips with the truth, to face reality.

Myth # 1: Children who are taught right, will never rebel.

This just isn't so. Proverbs 22:6 doesn't say that a child will never go through the "prodigal son" stage, rebelling against God and family. It does promise that the child will never be able to forget the lessons learned in childhood.

The facts are that there are wonderful Christian households in which children were trained correctly, but they chose to rebel. In the parable of "The Lost Son," does Jesus condemn the father whose son went to the far country?

If this myth were true it would make God a bad parent because one third of the angels chose to rebel against his love, goodness, and right training. God has made all of His creatures with the freedom of choice. In spite of three years with Jesus, Judas chose to follow a different path. God never takes our free will from us and we must be willing to grant to our children free will also. They may choose differently than we would wish.

Lee Ezell says, "A parent's job is to offer a loving atmosphere in which children can rebel if they so choose." (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 51).

Myth # 2: Parents are responsible for the sins of their children.

That same myth was circulating in the days of Ezekiel. There was a proverb going around that said, "The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." After questioning Ezekiel about this proverb, the Lord set the record straight. He said, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:1-4 NIV).

In verse 20 God continues, "The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son."

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." (Romans 14:12) No child in the judgement will ever be allowed to blame his parents for choices he made with his own free will. God has it straight about who is responsible for the choices each has made.

Of course as parents we will be held accountable. But what are we accountable for? What is our responsibility? Lee Ezell makes a clear distinction of what responsibility we have TO our children and the responsibility we do not have FOR our children. (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 89).

Parents **ARE** responsible:

- TO** train him up in the way he should go.
- TO** be an example.
- TO** be sincere, honest, open.
- TO** accept the child, unconditionally.
- TO** love, as best we can.
- TO** ask forgiveness when we have failed.
- TO** pray for our children.

Parents **ARE NOT** responsible:

- FOR** the child's attitudes,
- FOR** the child's choices.
- FOR** the child's friends.
- FOR** the child's lack of interest in church.
- FOR** the child's anger and resentment.

Sometimes a parent will discover too late that they did things or used training methods that helped cause anger and resentment, or that helped to cause a child to rebel. It is too late to change what has happened, but a parent can ask forgiveness and indicate a willingness to change the relationship for the future.

Myth # 3: Parents must rescue their wayward children.

Parents who believe this myth pay the fine when a son is arrested for driving while under the influence. They pay the bills when a child's rent comes due or he can't make payments on their new car. They cover up for a child's mistakes and hope that their benevolence will help the child do better.

Says Lee Ezell, "Somehow we've got to stop paying the price for our "of age" kids We must come to the place of allowing them to reap the consequences, and eat the bitter fruit of their own wrong choices." (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 117).

Remember the story of "The Lost Son?" Did the father go after his son, pay all his bills, refusing to allow him to suffer the consequences of his choices? No, he allowed the consequences to bring the boy to his senses.

God does the same with us, His children. "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would have none of my reproof: . . . For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: . . . Therefore, shall they eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices." (Proverbs 1:24-31).

Real but tough love, such as God shows to us, refuses to replace what children have destroyed, cover up and lie for them, make excuses for their behavior, bail them out when they get in trouble, and pay their debts for them.

Real love refuses to accept the blame for choices their children have made. Real love refuses to believe myth # 3.

"Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7) God allows the law of cause and effect to play itself out; so should we.

Myth # 4: Our children belong to us; they are ours.

False. Our children are gifts to us from God. They are given us in trust; they are on loan. They are not ours; they belong to God. We do not choose to have children; God chooses to allow us to give them life. "Children are a gift from the Lord," (Psalm 127:3 CWB).

Psalm 139:13-16 (TLB) says, "You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion! You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe."

Someone has said, "Couples may choose to make love, but God chooses to make life." There are no accidents with God. Each child is by his design; each child belongs to Him.

God has a plan for our children. "I already know the plans I have for you. I will help you, not hurt you. I will give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11 CWB) He loves them more than we could ever love them. We can trust them in His care.

The beautiful truth is that because God loves our children so much, He will never stop seeking them, speaking to them. There is nowhere that they can go that is beyond His reach.

"It does not matter that these wanderers refuse to listen or that they will not attend church or that they become silent when the conversation turns to spiritual things. It does not even matter if they refuse to read the Bible or pray. What matters is that they cannot escape from the God who is everywhere and who is always speaking." (Tom Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, p. 209).

Our children have wandered not only from us and our values, but from the fold of God. Our child is His child, His lost sheep. He is the Good Shepherd who is out there in the night and the storm, searching for His precious lost one. We can trust Him to search until He finds.

Gloria Gaither agrees. She writes, "It always calms the storm of parental worry to know that God loves our children infinitely more than we can, because He is the perfect parent with perfect love. I am able to be with and help my children only to the limit of my presence. But there is no boundary to His presence." (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 137).

Myth # 5: It is possible to be a perfect parent.

False. The truth is that no human parent is perfect. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

There are no righteous parents, no not one. (Romans 3:10)

We have all sinned against our children. None of us have done everything right. We like to look around us at other parents and compare ourselves to see if we are better or worse than they. Often we have sinned unwittingly. We did things the way our parents did things. Maybe only now, after many years do we understand what we should have done or not done. Hindsight seems to be better than foresight.

The glory of the gospel is that "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

God is on our side in this business of parenting. "And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins." (1 John 2:1,2)

Jesus died for imperfect parents as well as for wandering children. His blood can cover our sins as well as theirs. He will be a perfect Father to our children, making up to them where we may have failed them.

Read Joel 2. It is a beautiful promise of what God can do for parents when we come to Him in repentance, seeking His mercy and grace for ourselves and our children. He promises to "do great things" for us..to "restore the years that the locust hath eaten." . . . and to pour out His spirit on our sons and daughters. Good news for imperfect parents!

Myth # 6: Perfect Christian Kids is the ultimate goal of Christian Parenting.

"Stop trying to produce perfect saints," says Tom Bisset. "It can't be done nor does God expect that it should. Christian maturity involves struggle and growth. Our children are going to have moments when it seems they haven't learned a thing we've tried so hard to teach them. . . . To expect perfection is to stir up needless fear and guilt in parents and unnecessary anxiety and resistance in children." (*Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, p. 145, 146).

Is it possible that the desire for perfect Christian children could be actually a misplaced spiritual priority by which we hunger for our children's love instead of hungering for God's love?

Is it possible that our longing for perfect Christian children who do all the right things comes from a selfish motive of what it will make us look like as successful Christian parents?

Is it possible that in our concern for our children we might be over-loving them in a subconscious attempt to ensure that they will love us in return?

In God's value system is not the freedom to choose of higher priority than the following of rules, traditions, and a problem-free existence?

Could our reluctance to share the reality of our concern for our children be the peer pressure we feel from other church members to appear as good parents, good Christians who have done things right?

Could our focus on trying to get our children to behave the way we think they should, be a distraction from attending to our own spiritual condition and need for the power of God in our own lives?

Says Bisset, "Children are not at the apex of the Christian value system. (See Ephesians 5 and 6) We love them intensely and we want the best for them personally and spiritually. But when we place them first, however honorable our motives, we dishonor God and create problems for ourselves and for them." (p. 143)

III. Parent Showcase: Trish's Parents (5 minutes)

In his book *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, Tom Bisset tells the story of Trish:

Trish was fourteen when her parents became Christians. She didn't like the change in lifestyle. Dancing, drinking, and partying were gone. Instead there was a constant round of meetings at church, youth camps, and evangelistic activities. It didn't make much sense to Trish. She hated the rules and regulations. She felt like an outsider at school. There was a constant conflict with her parents over dates, clothes, and curfew.

Before she finished high school, Trish ran away from home. She was angry, bitter, and disillusioned. She began drinking, taking drugs, and living a promiscuous sex life. She got pregnant and had an abortion. Her boyfriend shot himself and died in her arms.

"My father never stopped praying for me," Trish testified. "Wherever I went, I kept meeting Christians. Two people connected with the bank where I worked were Christians and were praying for me. My cousin became a Christian during this time and began witnessing to me. I couldn't believe how many Christians were coming into my life."

Nobody got through to Trish until one day she was watching the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. The subject was demon possession, something Trish had been fascinated with from her association with people in the drug culture.

A priest on the program said, "Satan hates humans because they're created in God's image and his ultimate objective is to destroy them."

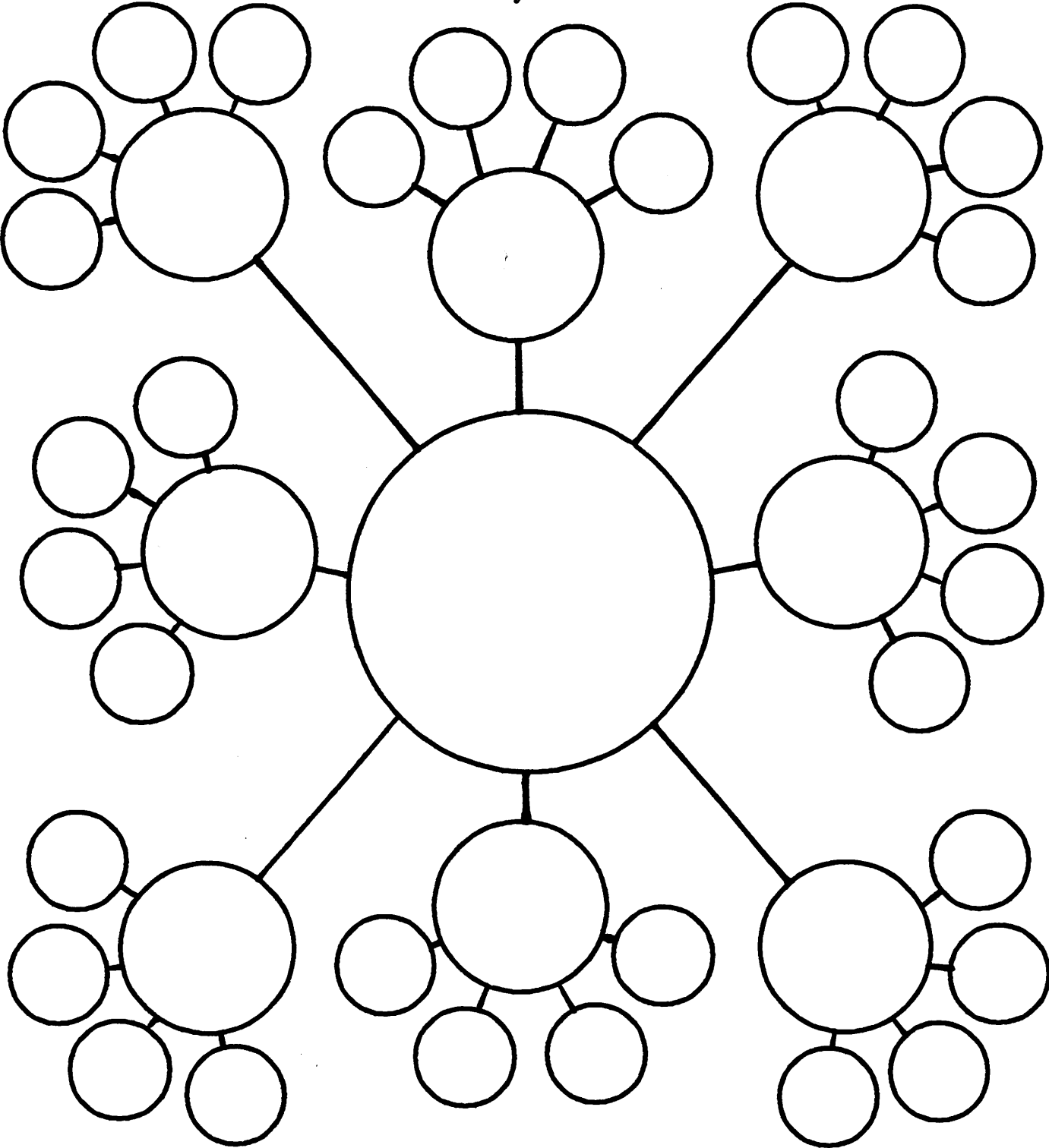
Trish listened as a woman shared her testimony of how she had tried to murder her child under the influence of demons and how she had been delivered through the power of Jesus Christ.

Trish says, "It became clear to me that Satan was alive, real and right there in the room with me. I could feel evil all around, and I knew he wanted to destroy my soul. A rush of Bible stories and verses went through my mind. Memories of lessons learned at Youth Camp and church school came over me. The words of John 3:16 came clearly to my mind, word for word. I knew I was being given another chance to have a new life in Christ at age twenty-three. There on my bedroom floor in front of the TV, I broke into tears and wept bitterly. I asked Jesus Christ to come into my heart and change me." (Tom Bisset, *Why Christian Kids Leave the Faith*, pp. 210-212).

God followed Trish when she ran away from home. He never gave up until she responded to His voice calling her back.

IV. Handout: Lesson 1, A.

Family Tree



Handout: Lesson 1, B.

It's Your Move, Child

*I gave you life,
but I cannot live it for you.
I can teach you things,
but I cannot make you learn.
I can give you directions,
but I can't always be there to lead you.
I can allow you freedom,
but I cannot account for it.*

*I can take you to church,
but I cannot make you believe.
I can teach you right from wrong,
but I can't decide for you.
I can offer you advice,
but I cannot accept it for you.
I can give you love,
but I cannot force it upon you.*

*I can teach you to be a friend,
but I cannot make you one.
I can teach you to share,
but I cannot make you unselfish.
I can teach you respect,
but I cannot force you to show honor.
I can advise you about friends,
but I cannot choose for you.*

*I can teach you about sex,
but I cannot keep you pure.
I can tell you about drinking,
but I cannot say NO for you.
I can warn you about drugs,
but I cannot prevent your using them.
I can warn you about sin,
but I cannot make you moral.*

*I can pray for you,
but I cannot make you walk with God.
I can teach you about Jesus,
but I cannot make Him your Saviour,
I can show you the way of life,
but I cannot make you walk in it.
I can tell you how to live,
but I cannot live it for you.*

—Source Unknown

V. Bible Study: Samuel's Sons (1 Samuel 8:1-7 CWB) (10 min.)

As Samuel grew older he turned over more and more of the responsibilities of governing Israel to his two sons. (verse 1).

The name of Samuel's firstborn son was Joel and the second was Abijah. They lived in Beersheba, which was at the southern end of the country. (verse 2).

They didn't follow their father's example, but became more interested in making money than in serving the Lord. Soon they were accepting bribes and perverting justice. (verse 3).

Then the leaders of the tribes came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, (verse 4).

"You're getting up in years and are giving more and more responsibility to your sons. But they're not at all like you. So we have decided that we need a strong central government with a king. We need to be recognized as a kingdom like the other nations around us instead of being only loosely-knit tribes." (verse 5).

When Samuel heard this he was deeply hurt. He felt that his leadership was no longer appreciated and that he was being set aside. He said nothing but took it to the Lord in prayer. (verse 6).

The Lord rebuked Samuel, saying "You're not listening to what they're really saying. They're not rejecting you, they're rejecting me. They don't want me to be their king because they want someone they can see and show off. They don't want to be different. They want to be like the people around them." (verse 7).

* * * *

1. Notice the reason why Samuel felt hurt. Was it the life of his sons, the desire of the people for a king, or his concern for what people thought about him as a leader? Can you relate this in anyway to how Christian parents feel today when their children don't follow their example?
2. Where did Samuel place the blame for the problem in Israel? On his sons, on the people, on God, or on himself? Was he correct in focusing the blame on himself? Why or why not? (See *Patriarchs and Prophets* p. 604).
3. Does this story illustrate the falsehood of any of the six myths of parenting discussed in this lesson? Explain.
 - Children who are taught right will never rebel.
 - Parents are responsible for the sins of their children.
 - Parents must rescue their wayward children.

- Our children belong to us; they are ours.
 - It is possible to be a perfect parent.
 - The goal of Christian parenting is perfect children.
4. Note: God's promise to Samuel (1 Samuel 2:35) was not fulfilled in his sons, but was through his grandson, Heman. (1 Chronicles 25:5) and his great grandchildren (2 Chronicles 5:11-13).
 5. If Samuel could be present with your group, what advice do you think He would give to you who are parents of wayward children?

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 1 (20 minutes)

1. Make a list of parents from the Bible and from Christian history who did their best to raise good children, but had at least one child who became a prodigal.
2. What relationship do the five myths in today's lesson have with righteousness by works and righteousness by faith? If we had a correct view of God's love and the power of the gospel, would we be so inclined to believe these parenting myths? Who do you think is behind such parenting myths?
3. Can you think of other parenting myths that can cause us trouble as parents? Share with the group.
4. Which of the six parenting myths do you think causes the most pain among Christian parents and grandparents? Which one do you think causes the most pain for children?
5. Think back to the story of Marj and Tom. Imagine they came to your group for the first time and shared their story. What encouragement would you give them based upon the Word of God and your own experience?
7. Can you share a time when your parents showed real but tough love to you, refusing to take from you the responsibility that was yours alone? Can you share a time when God helped you to show this real love to your children?
8. What part do you see Christian peer pressure having in the guilt and anxiety parents face when their children make wrong choices?
9. Which of the myths is one that has been a problem for you in your own relationship with your children? What can you do now about having believed this myth? The purpose of sharing this is so that the other members can support you in prayer so that you might be able to face reality, find forgiveness for the past, and face the future.

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Take a moment to share ways you see God working in your life or the lives of your children.
2. Spend the first part of the prayer time in praising God for His love to your family and for a time of thanksgiving for specific things you see Him doing.
3. Pray for one another that you will grow in Christian maturity able to face reality rather than accepting the myths of parenting. Pray for yourselves, confessing your mistakes, and ask God to give you the joy and peace of His forgiveness.

Lesson 2

Facing Reality: Letting Go

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

- A. Make copies of the family trees filled out during the first session. Make up into folders for each couple or single parent. Arrange alphabetically by last names.
 - B. Pass out the folders. Explain that they may take these home to use as the focus of intercession for their friend's children during the week.
 - C. Go around the circle, each person sharing very briefly about the spiritual condition of each child and a specific request they have for that child. (Please remember: Do not share anything personal or anything that would be embarrassing if the child should learn that it was shared.)
 - D. Explain that one of the purposes for the PALS group is to hold up one another in prayer for their children. We gain strength as we pray for one another's burdens. Hand out brown paper lunch sacks to everyone.
2. Give them three minutes to find an object to put into their sack that has something to say about their relationship to God or His relationship to them. Any common object from their purse, the kitchen, or from nature should have something to say of God's love, power, and working in their lives.
 3. Call them back together. Go around the circle and ask each person to show their object in turn and give a two or three sentence explanation of what that object tells them of God's love and power.

II. Today's Topic: Facing Reality: Letting Go (15 minutes)

The following poem, "The Empty Nest" was written by Dorothy Eaton Watts shortly after the last of her three children had left home to begin life on their own.

*The house is empty; I sit all alone
With a vacant nest, for my birds have flown.*

*Does Mrs. Kingfisher when she is fishing,
Stop and sit awhile, thinking and wishing?*

*Is the Mourning Dove sitting and crying
Because her babies have now gone flying?*

*Perhaps Mrs. Crow and Mrs. Pheasant
Also remember times that were pleasant.*

*Maybe the Sparrows, the Mynas, and Hawks,
Feel lonely at times for mother-bird talks.*

*Does Mrs. Robin or Mrs. Parrot
Miss her little ones? Yes, I would swear it!*

*But I have noticed mother bird still sings,
Accepting the fact God gave them their wings.*

*So, I, too, can sing and be glad today,
Even though my birds are far, far away.*

Does that poem strike you as rather idealistic? In reality it isn't that easy to let children use their wings, to fly away and to live their own lives. There is something about parenthood that makes us want to hang on to our control even though we are far, far away. We still feel the need to advise, help, and protect. We aren't as good as the birds in letting our babies go.

Carol had a problem in letting go. She raised six children, two from a first marriage, and four from a second. After close to thirty years of mothering, she admitted she had a problem turning off her skills and "letting go of being a mother hen."

Carol looks back over the years and realizes that she had a tendency to hang on to her control. She says, "I did the footwork for my kids when they should have done it themselves. I remember when one of my sons was looking into colleges. He needed help finding the right resources. But I didn't just help him, I did the entire thing for him. I'm like that."

When her children expressed a need, she's quickly reponed with an idea, a book, a thought, a piece of advice. She replaced things that were broken or worn out and blocked the reality of the consequences. Her children didn't have to deal with difficult situations because she was always there to rescue them and to bail them out of their troubles.

Recently Carol's grown daughter became pregnant and moved back home. It's a difficult situation. Carol is struggling to let go and allow her daughter to make her own mistakes, to grow and mature. Carol has come to the place that she finally realizes how important it is to really let go and let God.

These days her constant prayer is, "She's in your hands, Lord. Help me to keep my hands off. Help me to let go and let You do Your job!" (*Restoring Relationships with Your Adult Children*, Karen O'Conner, p. 69 and 70.).

We and Carol can truly let our "birds" use their wings because we have God's promise that He will be there to take care of them. "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." (Psalm 142:9)

Parents find it easier to let children go physically than to let them go emotionally and spiritually. We feel somehow that to do so would be forsaking them, abandoning them. With this thought in mind, Psalm 27:10 takes on a new meaning for parents of grown children.

"When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up," says David. Perhaps, just perhaps, our children need for us to let them go, even though it feels like we are forsaking them, because it is not until then that God can really work for them with freedom. David may not have had that in mind, but it is certainly true that when we parents finally let go, when we release them fully into His care, then He is able to work for them as He couldn't before.

With apologies to an unknown poet:

*As children bring their broken toys
with tears for us to mend,
I brought my wandering child to God
because He was my friend.
But then, instead of leaving Him
in peace to work alone,
I hung around and tried to help
with ways that were my own.
At last, I snatched him back and cried,
"How can you be so slow?"
"My child," He said, "What could I do?
You never did let go."*

As our children grow into adulthood we must give them wings and allow them freedom to fly. At age five our influence on a child is 95 percent. By age 14 it is down to 65 percent. By age 19 it is a mere five percent. Allowing this to happen is scary for Christian parents.

"Sometimes it's difficult for us to see just exactly how and why we're holding on. We may crave being in control. We may want to protect. We may long to provide. We feel we have released our kids in most areas, and yet we have a feeling that in some ways we're still hanging on to some aspect of them for dear life." (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, Lee Ezell, p. 142).

What are some of the areas in which we need to let go?

A. Let go of pleasing.

Eighty-three year old Ethel controls her grown children by trying to always put them first, pleasing them, giving up for them. She doesn't express her own needs, but gives herself to the needs of her children. She has made it her life to be sweet, pleasant, and unreal.

One of her children commented, "She controls us by being sweet, putting us first, deferring her own needs. But sometimes it makes me mad. I feel as if I'm always walking on eggs around her. I don't know what she thinks or what she wants." (Karen O'Conner, *Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 51).

Pleasing can interfere with our relationship with grown children. We need to release ourselves from the need to control through pleasing. We don't need to anticipate and meet every need of our adult children. We don't need to spend more time, money, and emotional energy on our adult children than we spend on ourselves. Our children's approval should not be the goal of our existence.

B. Let go of rescuing.

Karen O'Conner, author of *Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, admits to being a rescuer. She was quick to do dishes when her children had other plans. She was the "good old mom" who was always there when her children needed her. She was the type to put on a party for her teenagers, run to the library to return their overdue books, and help them with last minute assignments. She began to wake up when her children were grown and the pattern was still going on. (p. 56).

Bill is always there for his adult children, sending them checks to help with dental bills and house payments. If anything goes wrong his kids know where they can go.

Emily is always available as a baby sitter for her grandchildren. If the kids need anything the parents can't provide, grandma is there to get it for them. They'll never lack for clothes, toys, or spending money as long as grandma is there. She is the family rescuer.

Parents need to let go of that feeling that it is their duty to take care of whatever children can't handle. We need to stop rescuing them from pain in order to win their affection. It is only as we allow them responsibility that children can learn to make mature, responsible decisions. We need to stop feeling guilty if our children need help and we can't afford to give it. We don't have to supply all the needs of our children. We can let go and let God do that. Our children need to learn to trust Him just as do we.

C. Let go of being a martyr.

Martyrs are always suffering. They let everyone know about their fear, fatigue, hunger, aches and pains, and mental anguish. They need only get sick or feel bad and children will rush to their side to make them happy, to give attention.

Martyrs make children feel guilty for not doing more for them after "all I did for you children." Martyrs use their physical or mental condition to garner sympathy and exercise a form of control over their children, keeping them by their side.

Parents need to let go of their martyrdom. They need to grow up themselves, depending

on God instead of their children. They need to stop trying to exercise control by making children feel that they owe them something.

D. Let go of manipulation.

Manipulation is another form of control that some of us are not beyond using. Arlene insists her grown children come home for Christmas every year. She tells them, "It just isn't Christmas unless you are all here." If one has other plans she puts on pressure, "But the others are all coming. You don't want to spoil everyone's Christmas!" (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 91).

Eighty-five-year-old Henry is a manipulator. If his daughter doesn't phone every week, he gets into a stew. He calls her and says, "You'll miss me when I'm gone!" He isn't beyond even using mention of his fasting and prayers on her behalf to try and get her to see things his way.

Parents need to let go of manipulation of their adult children. We need to let go of using guilt and shame to get what we need or want. We need to stop blaming our children for our problems or feelings of inadequacy. We need to let go of the feeling that our children owe us.

E. Let go of the need to correct.

It is easy for parents to see the mistakes of their children, to want to give advice, correct those mistakes, even when the children are grown up. After all if we don't tell them what's wrong with them, how will they ever change? Parents point out faults they say "for your own good."

Criticism makes a child feel stupid. In actuality the parent is saying to his adult child, "You aren't as smart as I am. You can't see that you are doing it wrong. Listen to me and you'll do better." Adult children resent parents who find fault and point out error. They feel the parent's continued need to control their behavior and it makes them want to avoid the parents if possible.

Criticism is destructive of a relationship with our adult children. We need to let go and let God do any correcting that needs doing. He will do it when the time is right, and with just the right amount of love and caring.

F. Let go of anger.

Betty was angry. The more she thought about the reckless behavior of her son, the madder she got. She was upset that he had given up going to college, had just quit a good job, and was ruining his life with alcohol and drugs. Life just wasn't fair. Other parents hadn't tried half as hard as she to be a good mother, and then this was the reward she got.

She felt justified in her anger. Her son's behavior warranted her reaction. However, the

relationship kept getting worse until she let go of her right to be angry, and came to the place of forgiveness of her son.

G. Let go of false hopes.

Cameron had waited long for a son. He put his whole life into that boy. He had such high hopes for him. He would grow up to be a great man, a physician ready to take over Cameron's practice when he was ready to retire.

But His son hated medicine. He tried the premed course and dropped out. He loved mechanical things, cars, old machines. He got a job in a repair shop. But every time he came home for a visit, Cameron kept talking about him going back to college, finishing medicine, taking over his practice.

It's time for parents to give up their dreams for their children, and let them have their own. It's time for us to forget our fantasies about the magic moment when our children will see the light and become what we had always dreamed they would be.

H. Let go of our parenting role.

In short what we need to do is to let go of our parenting role. We need to be willing to push them out of the nest not only physically, but emotionally, and spiritually as well.

Letting Go

To let go doesn't mean to stop caring; it means I can't do it for someone else. To let go is not to cut myself off; it's the realization that I can't control another. To let go is to allow learning from natural consequences.

To let go is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands. To let go is not to try to change or blame another, for I can only change myself.

To let go is not to care for, but to care about. To let go is not to fix, but to be supportive. To let go is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being. To let go is not to be in the middle, arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to effect their own outcomes.

To let go is not to be protective, it is to allow another to face reality. To let go is not to deny, but to accept. To let go is not to nag, scold, or argue, but to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.

*To let go is not to criticize or regulate anyone but to become the best I can be. To let go is not to regret the past, but to grow today and prepare for the future. To let go is to fear less, trust in Christ more, and freely give to others the love He's given to me. (Source Unknown, quoted in *Pills for Parents in Pain*).*

III. Parent Showcase: Karen O'Connor (5 minutes)

Karen O'Connor is an award-winning author of over thirty books, including *Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*. She is an experienced teacher, speaker, and seminar leader.

She learned an important lesson about parenting and prayer one Sunday morning shortly after she became a Christian. She joined a prayer support group because she was depressed about her relationship with her grown son. They were estranged and she couldn't stand the alienation. Everything she tried to do for him was met with rejection. She was at her wits end.

As she shared her concern with the group she struggled to keep back the tears. Letting others know how she had failed was very upsetting for her. She was wondering if she'd done the right thing to attend the group.

Then a woman sitting on the other side of the room got up and went over to Karen and put an arm around her shoulder. "Your work in the flesh is over," the woman said softly. "All he needs now are your prayers—a mother's most effective tool."

Karen writes, "Relief coursed through me like a warm wind. You mean I don't have to do anything? Such as go to Los Angeles and rescue him? Or wire him money? Or send food? Or get him another car? Or look into a treatment program? You mean I could still be a good mother without doing anything? It was a totally foreign concept. To think of prayer as my most important tool was a new idea. I liked it. It felt right. I was eager to learn more about prayer and to practice praying—for my son, for my daughters, and for myself as their mother." (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 175, 176.).

About letting go and letting God, Karen writes, "Once you have placed your relationship in God's hands, and you have acted on the wisdom He provided, let go! God knows what you and your children need in order to be fully restored to one another. He knows the perfect time and place for the result to occur. Don't turn over your situation to the Lord and then monitor His actions! You can't watch a flower bloom. Yet how hard some of us try to do just that."

"Prayers for our children are often painful because we discover that we don't want to let go. We may believe it is safer to cling to a familiar past than to trust in a new future . . . So go to Him with your flaws. Offer Him your anger, fear, hate, bitterness, and disappointment. He will replace them with peace, trust, love, serenity, and contentment. And He will take on the responsibility of bringing the perfect result." (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 178).

IV. Handout: Lesson 2

A Prayer for Letting Go

In her book *Pills for Parents in Pain*, Lee Ezell suggests a prayer parents can pray for their children. She suggests we put in our children's names as we pray this prayer of release.

Dear Father God,

Thank You for my children, _____ . I acknowledge that they were Your idea, and I received them from Your Hand to be meant as a blessing. Now, as a parent, I let go of my claim to ownership of my children and ask You to forgive my stumbling ways in parenting.

When I receive any conviction of sin from You, I will repent and do whatever is necessary to rectify the problem. But I reject any guilt, accusation, and condemnation that Satan, our mutual enemy, would want to put on my family. In the name of Jesus Christ, I break any evil power that would seek to hinder _____ .

I believe You are not willing that _____ should perish, but have everlasting life. I pray for a spirit of repentance to overtake _____. Convince him/her that he/she can still be a part of the plan You have for his/her life.

I ask that You would deliver my children from evil and give them every opportunity to turn back to You. I also ask You to apply whatever pressure it takes to effect the change.

With faith in Christ, I cling to the hope of Your divine intervention in _____'s life. Grant me the peace and hope to endure and see Your will come to pass Your way, and in Your time.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

V. Bible Study: Hannah Lets Go (1 Samuel 1:7-11, CWB) (10 min.)

1 Samuel 1 is the story of Hannah, one of Elkanah's two wives. She was miserable because the other wife had children and she was barren. Every chance Peninnah, the other wife, got she ridiculed Hannah telling her the Lord loved her more because she had children. Hannah felt tormented and humiliated.

This went on year after year, especially when they went to Shiloh to worship the Lord. It got so bad at the festival that Hannah left the table and burst into tears. (verse 7).

Elkanah tried to comfort her. "Hannah," he said, "don't cry. You need to eat something while we're here. Don't be so sad. Don't I mean more to you than having children, even more than if you had ten sons?" (verse 8).

One day after the family had eaten, Hannah went to the Sanctuary to pray. Eli, the high priest, was sitting by the entrance to minister to the needs of the people. (verse 9).

Hannah stood not far from where Eli was seated. In anguish she silently cried and prayed to the Lord, telling Him that what Peninnah was doing was getting to be too much for her. (verse 10).

She made a vow to the Lord, "Almighty Lord, please look down on my misery and help me. Please open my womb and let me bear a son. If you do, I'll give him to you and he'll be yours forever. I promise to carefully raise him and not cut his hair as a sign that he belongs to you." (verse 11).

The rest of the chapter tells how God heard her prayer and gave her a son, Samuel. She kept him until he was able to care for himself, then took him to Eli and gave him back to the Lord as she had promised. Chapter 2, verses 1-10 gives her joyous prayer after letting go of her son, giving Him back to the one who had given her the child on loan.

* * * *

1. If you had been in Hannah's place, would you have been willing to fulfill your vow after learning about the situation with Eli and his own two sons?
2. When Hannah let go of her son Samuel, giving Him to the Lord in the care of Eli, what are some of the means of control that she gave up?
3. How do you think Hannah was able to let go of her son so soon? Do you think it was any easier for her than for you? What was her secret? How was it possible that He turned out so well without the close control of his parents to guide him?
4. How did the Lord reward Hannah for her "letting go" of her son? Can you find at least three rewards she got? (1 Sam. 2:21)

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 2 (20 minutes)

1. Think back to your own growing up years and leaving the nest. Did your parents have difficulty in letting go? In what area did they find it difficult?
2. Which of the areas of control do you find it most difficult to relinquish?
3. Give some Bible examples of children who left home, or were forcibly removed from their parents, and who did well in spite of the lack of parental control. How do you account for this?

Brainstorm with your group. (Some ideas: Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Daniel).

4. In your own decision to "let go and let God" which Bible story holds the most comfort for you? Share with the group what message that particular story has for you.
5. Proverbs 11:21 is a precious promise to parents who struggle to let go of their control of adult children. Read it in several versions. Has your experience borne this out? Share instances when you know this has been so.
6. Read Isaiah 54:13. What hope does it give to the parents of wandering children?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Use the handout for today's lesson during your prayer time.
2. The leader will read the prayer. When it comes to the blank, he/she will give the name(s) of his/her children and pause.
3. Each person will go around the circle, and name his/her children.
4. The leader continues on through the prayer, pausing each time there is a blank for all to put in the names of their children.
5. Let all repeat the last sentence together.
6. Covenant to each one to pray that prayer for themselves and for their children for the next week. Read it to the Lord, if necessary, until the thoughts become an automatic way of releasing children into the hands of the Lord.

Lesson 3

Facing Reality: Your Feelings

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Think back to your most recent encounter with one of your children. Spend a moment reliving it in your mind. Think about what he/she said, what you said, how he/she acted, and how you acted.
2. Allow two to three minutes of quiet meditation, perhaps with soft music while the group members think.
3. What emotions did you experience? Joy, annoyance, relief, anger, disappointment, concern, frustration, peace, love, thankfulness, grief, pain? Try to be as specific as possible. Perhaps you had some mixed feelings.
4. Divide into groups of two or three. Share a little of the experience and the honest feelings you had. Be certain to focus on *your* feelings and not on your child's behavior.

II. Today's Topic: Facing Reality: Your Feelings (15 minutes)

Sometimes as parents we feel like a ship's captain struggling to keep our vessel afloat on a stormy sea. The circumstances of the moment hang over us like a dense fog. The statements of our children, the things they do or don't do give us a sense of being out of control. What is it that keeps us from being the wonderful, happy, contented parents we would like to be at this stage in our lives?

Perhaps the negative emotions we experience are the winds that blow us off course as parents of adult children. Problems in our own lives, problems in the lives of our children, their reactions to us, their rebellion, insensitivity, or whatever threaten to arouse emotions in us that could dash us against the rocks. Like an oil tanker broken apart on hidden obstacles, we are torn open by our troubles and those of our children, and we spill out angry, hurtful words.

What can we do to stay on course in spite of the troubles we face and the difficulties we see our children going through?

There are six Biblical principles that will help us in dealing with our feelings:

A. God understands our feelings.

Jesus sympathizes with parents. He truly can feel what we feel. Although no one else may understand our disappointments and struggles, He does. Did He not live on earth? True, He didn't marry and thus had no children, but He took twelve disciples under His care and training. How slow they were to learn. How often they did not follow His example. How many times they misunderstood. How often they blew it!

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) Have you ever thought of Christ being tempted to react as you react when faced with things your children do?

Read through *The Desire of Ages* and pay close attention to the disappointments and difficulties He had with His disciples. Make a list of His struggles with those twelve men of very different personalities and backgrounds and you will see that you face nothing He hasn't already dealt with.

Study the chapter about Judas. Christ gave that disciple every opportunity to do right, and yet Judas disappointed Him and in the end betrayed Him. "Yet Jesus spoke no word of condemnation. He looked pityingly upon Judas, and said, For this hour I came into the world. A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly. With amazement they beheld the forbearance of Christ toward His betrayer." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 722)

Most of us would have been hurt, devastated, angry, upset, and terribly discouraged. We might even get angry at God for not doing something about our rebellious child. Ah, yes, Jesus does understand.

B. Contact with God transforms our emotions.

"To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." (Isaiah 61:3) This is what God wants to do for parents of wandering children.

Jesus has a balm for every emotional sore spot. He can give us joy for our depression and peace for our pain. He can give love for our hatred and relief for our bitterness. He has hope for our despair and acceptance to apply to our low self-worth. He can transform our critical attitude into one of affirmation and encouragement.

Think of the transformation that came to Hannah's emotions when she brought her humiliation and disappointment to the Lord in prayer. He filled her heart with hope and her mouth with songs of praise and thanksgiving.

Think of the mothers who brought their children to Jesus long ago in Galilee. They

probably were ordinary naughty, restless, misbehaving children that caused their parents pain. They were typical mothers, tired, overburdened, and worried about the future of their kids. Jesus did a wonderful thing. He took those children into His arms and heart. I'm sure those mothers went away from Jesus their hearts light with joy and hope for the future. God loved their children so much! With divine blessing how could they fail?

C. God can supply the emotional needs of parents.

Minirth and Meier in their book, *Happiness Is a Choice*, list 12 needs that we all share: air, food, water, stimulation, sex, love, self-worth, power, control, comfort, security, and relief from psychic tension.

As the years go by children sometimes deplete our feelings of self-worth, power, and control. They sometimes aren't the comfort in old age that we had hoped; they sometimes don't give us much sense of security. How often their problems only increase our psychic tension.

God wants to meet all the needs of parents, emotional as well as physical. He never intended that our children should supply all our needs; He has promised to do that for us. He can supply us with love, acceptance, comfort and security. He can provide us with strength to face any problem and relief from the tensions of parenting.

Georgia suffered the effects of a dysfunctional family. Her children didn't turn out as she had hoped. She tried to fill her need for love with church work and community activities and caring for other people's children. She found it hard to sleep at night and got caught in a cycle of taking sleeping pills at night so she wouldn't think about the mess her kids were in, and then had to take wake up pills in the morning just to get moving and functioning the next day. She went to church every week. Everyone thought she was a marvelous Christian. They didn't dream of the pain she was experiencing because of her adult children. It wasn't until she finally was able to face her feelings, hand them over to God, and accept His unconditional love for her and her wandering children that she was able to find release from her negative emotions.

There "is a balm in Gilead" for weary, heartsick parents. There is rest in Jesus for parents burdened by the choices of their adult children. "Come unto me," said Jesus. "And I will give you rest."

D. God also uses prepared people to help heal deep hurts.

Just as God used Gideon, Moses, Joshua, and a host of other people to bring victory from bondage, so He uses specially trained/prepared people today to help bring healing to damaged emotions. There is a time and place to seek out and use professionals trained in healing damaged emotions. As followers of Christ, we should never be arrogantly closed to the assistance of skilled people. To do so would be to limp through life when we could run. God still used people to accomplish His purposes, and it is a spiritual benefit to take

advantage to these opportunities when they are needed.

When we have a broken leg, we do not hesitate to seek the best medical advice available. So if we have damaged emotions, or feel we are unable to handle feelings about the past, we need to seek the best help available.

E. Feelings follow actions.

"And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten." (2 Chronicles 20:22).

The Israelites must not have felt victorious when faced with the superior forces of the enemy, but they went to battle singing the song of victory. The feeling of victory followed their conscious choice to step out in faith and act out victory.

Praise and thanksgiving are ways many parents have found the way out of their discouragement about their wandering adult children. It's amazing what miracles God begins to work when we stop complaining about our kids, and begin to thank Him for the children He has given us, to praise Him for them in spite of how they live and what they say. There is always something we can find to praise the Lord about our children.

Ruth Bell Graham is one who knows that thanksgiving and praise can do wonders, even when you don't feel like it because of the condition of your children.

On night while on tour in another country with her husband, Ruth lay awake thinking about her prodigal son, Ned. She thought about the struggles she had had with his older brother, Franklin, who had been rebellious. He had started out smoking, but ended up causing trouble at school and getting hauled in by the police. Now her fifth son, Ned, was also turning away from the values of their home. He was involved in drugs and she was terribly worried.

Realizing there was no more sleep that night, she turned on the light and reached for her Bible. The verse she turned to was, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding shall govern your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:6)

She says, "Suddenly I realized the missing ingredient to my prayers had been thanksgiving.. So I sat there and thanked God for all that Ned was and all he had meant to me through the years. As I began to thank the Lord, I realized worry and work were mutually exclusive. When we're most concerned, we should start thanking the Lord for the lessons He is teaching us through the tough times. And invariably, it's during those tough times that the Scriptures really come to life." ("Tough and Tender Moments,"

Today's Christian Woman, November/December 1991, page 53).

In commenting on the principles she had learned from her experience of being a mother of a prodigal, Ruth said, "Prayer is so important. Our children never outreach God's reach. This doesn't mean they won't go astray. This doesn't mean they won't mess up their lives. But sometimes we forget God is omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient, and eternal. Our children can run, but God knows where they are, and He is watching over them. I'm just thankful I didn't have to wait any longer for my sons to return." (Ibid.)

F. We can choose how we will feel.

"Choose you this day," said Joshua. When God made us, He created us with the power of choice. He gave us the last say in the matter of what we will do with our lives. We can choose life, or we can choose death. We can choose to be negative, or we can choose to be positive. We can choose to be happy, or we can choose to be miserable.

"Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional," is the title of chapter one of Barbara Johnson's book *Stick A Geranium In Your Hat and Be Happy*. She says, "We can choose to gather to our hearts the thorns of disappointment, failure, loneliness, and dismay due to our present situation, or we can gather the flowers of God's grace, unbounding love, abiding presence, and unmatched joy." (p. xi).

The Johnsons lost one son in Vietnam, another was killed by a drunk driver, and her remaining son announced that he was a homosexual. About the same time she discovered she had diabetes. In spite of all her troubles, she has chosen to change the only thing she can, her own attitude. (p. 1-5).

She quotes a poem by an unknown author that has been meaningful to her:

Acceptance

*Acceptance is the answer to all my problems today.
When I am disturbed, it is because I find some
 person, place, thing, or situation—
Some fact of my life—unacceptable to me, and
 I can find no serenity until I accept that
 person, place, thing, or situation as being exactly
 the way it is supposed to be at this moment,
Nothing absolutely nothing happens in
 God's world by mistake.
Unless I accept life completely on life's terms,
 I cannot be happy.
I need to concentrate not so much on what needs to
 be changed in the world as on what needs to*

be changed in me and in my attitudes.

Barbara Johnson also has some wonderful words of wisdom for parents of prodigals who want to release their children into the hands of the Heavenly Father, and with it all their bad feelings, and negative emotions. She outlines five stages we parents go through in dealing with our negative emotions that come from the our reaction to things our adult children do.

1. *Churn.* You feel as if your insides are full of knives, chopping you up in a grinder!
2. *Burn.* That's right, you want to kill your child, and then you want to kill yourself. You are so full of red hot anger and the anguish of frustration that your temper is out of control. You literally feel as if you are burning up inside.
3. *Yearn.* Oh, you want so much for things to change! You just ache inside for things to be the way they were before you knew about this. You yearn for the happy past, and this stage often lasts the longest of all.
4. *Learn.* You talk with others; maybe you find a support group, and you learn that you're in a long growth process. You become more understanding and compassionate. Spiritual values you learned in the past will suddenly become real to you.
5. *Turn.* You learn to turn the problem over to the Lord completely by saying, "Whatever, Lord! Whatever You bring into my life, You are big enough to get me through it."

Now you can relinquish your heaviness to God, knowing that He is in control When you nail your problem to the foot of the Cross and say you have deposited that problem with the Lord and truly mean it, then you will be relieved of your crushing burden. (Quoted in *Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 125, 126).

(This lesson has been adapted from a chapter from Dorothy Eaton Watts' book *The Best You Can Be*, pages 59-66).

III. Parent Showcase: Catherine Marshall (5 minutes)

In her book, *Light In My Darkest Night*, Catherine Marshall tells of the challenges she faced in marrying Len LeSourd and taking on the responsibilities of three young stepchildren, one of whom was Linda. Linda and Catherine soon began to clash over all sorts of things: clothes, food, bedtime, money, duties around the house.

Teenager Linda didn't feel her new mom understood her. She only seemed nice when Linda measured up to her expectations. As a result she felt she somehow had lost her

father and became a very unhappy, rebellious girl. By the time Linda graduated from college, she still was having problems with Catherine and felt deep resentments toward her father. She couldn't seem to find peace with God, either. One night there was a bad scene when everything Catherine said to Linda seemed an insult. "Oh, Mom," she said. "Do you always have to think the very worst of me?"

Eventually at her father's urging, Linda was able to get on her knees and seek the Lord's forgiveness. As she confessed her rebelliousness and irresponsibility, her tears flowed freely, and she accepted the inner peace and

freedom that Jesus offered her. It was easy then for her to get up and go to her parents and ask their forgiveness.

The next morning Catherine sat down beside Linda at breakfast, her Bible in hand. She said, "Linda, I'm sure you recall the story of the prodigal son. Please read it now." Linda read. When she finished Catherine said, "I have a confession of my own to make, Linda. When you received God's forgiveness last night, my reaction was: All those years of anxiety and turmoil you put your father and me through, and now you're forgiven by God instantly. Isn't that too easy?"

"Well this morning I received my answer. I was awakened to a clear, incisive, internal message: 'Remember My story of the Prodigal Son? Catherine, you're in grave danger of taking the place of the elder brother in that drama. Let all negative thoughts about Linda go as of this moment. You are to confess this all to her this morning. So as your brothers would say, I have been properly zapped. Linda, will you forgive me?'"

Linda was at loss for words, overwhelmed by the wonder of it all. How neat that God would care enough about her to speak to her celebrated stepmother about their problem! God must really love her! "Oh, Mom, I'm blown away. Of course I forgive you. Oh, Mom, I really love you," Linda embraced her mom.

"And I love you, Linda," Catherine replied. Linda cried for pure joy. She thought, *If Mom, who always seemed so close to God, isn't mad at me, God probably isn't either!* (*Light In My Darkest Night*, p. 138 - 141).

IV. Handout: Lesson 3

Feelings Worksheet (To Do At Home)

Below are a list of negative emotions. Put a check beside those that you are feeling now or have felt recently:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Frustration | <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Rage |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Envy | <input type="checkbox"/> Jealousy | <input type="checkbox"/> Hatred |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pessimism | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear | <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self pity | <input type="checkbox"/> Discouragement | <input type="checkbox"/> Depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regret | <input type="checkbox"/> Shame | <input type="checkbox"/> Guilt |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief | <input type="checkbox"/> Bitterness | <input type="checkbox"/> Low Worth |

Below are a list of positive emotions. Which ones do you feel in particular need of at the present time?

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Love | <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding | <input type="checkbox"/> Compassion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Peace | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Joy | <input type="checkbox"/> Patience | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trust | <input type="checkbox"/> Tranquility | <input type="checkbox"/> Security |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Happiness | <input type="checkbox"/> Expectancy | <input type="checkbox"/> Hope |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strength | <input type="checkbox"/> Power | <input type="checkbox"/> Control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self worth | <input type="checkbox"/> Assertiveness | <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure |

1. You will need a notebook. At the top of each page write one of the negative emotions you checked above. Under it explore that emotion. Why do you feel that way? Offer each negative feeling to God in a Palms Down prayer. Then turn your palms over and ask him for the positive emotion you want Him to give you in its place.
2. Using a concordance, search for Bible verses that promise the very positive emotions you need. Look up each promise in several versions. Using 3" by 5" cards, write out at least one promise for each positive emotion. Put these in strategic places where you can read them often.
3. Try paraphrasing Bible promises. Write out the promise, inserting your name in the appropriate places. What is God telling you in that verse. Then write out your response in a prayer of acceptance and surrender.
4. The Psalms are full of references to emotions. Read through a Psalm, underlining negative emotions in one color and positive emotions in a different color.
5. Read "Rejoicing in the Lord" in *Steps to Christ*. Make a list of positive actions you can take when dealing with bad feelings.

V. Bible Study: Hagar's Struggle (Genesis 21:9-20, CWB) (10 min)

Sarah gave birth to Isaac in her old age and was extremely happy until he was about three years old. Then Ishmael, the son of Hagar and Abraham, who was 17 years old began to make fun of Isaac. Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away. God told Abraham to do as she had requested.

Then God said to Abraham, "I know you feel hurt, but don't worry about the future of Ishmael and Hagar, his mother. I'll watch over them. Do what Sarah asked you to do, because Isaac will be your heir and should be treated as your firstborn." (verse 12).

"I'll take care of Hagar and will bless Ishmael and increase his offspring so that he will become a great people because he, too, is your son." (verse 13).

The next day Abraham talked to Hagar and told her what God had said. She accepted God's instruction and when she was ready to go, Abraham gave her all she needed plus food and water for her trip. So the mother and son made their way south on one of the trade routes toward Beersheba. (verse 14).

Their food and water supply were soon gone. No caravan had come by. Hagar was hoping to get a ride to Egypt. She found a large bush and told the Ishmael to stay in the shade while she went to find water. (verse 15).

She walked a short distance and fell on her knees and said to herself, "If God wants me to die from thirst, I'm willing, but to see my son die out here is just too much." Then she started crying. (verse 16).

However, God was watching over Hagar and heard both of them crying. He sent an angel from heaven to speak to Hagar and said, "Hagar, don't be afraid. Don't worry. God has seen your tears and heard your prayers and has sent me to help you." (verse 17).

Get up, go back and take your son's hand, and I'll show you where you can find water. You will both live and your son will become the father of a great nation." (verse 18).

When she looked in the direction the angel was pointing, she saw a spring. She went and filled her jug and they both had plenty to drink. (verse 19).

God took care of Hagar and her son and they caught a caravan going south and settled just this side of Egypt. This is where the boy grew up and became a very skillful hunter. (verse 20).

1. What negative emotions did Hagar experience? Abraham? Ishmael?

2. Which of the six Biblical principles from this lesson can you see illustrated in this story?
 - God understands our feelings.
 - Contact with God transforms negative emotions.
 - God can supply our emotional needs.
 - God uses prepared people to help heal deep hurts
 - Feelings follow actions.
 - We can choose how we will feel.
3. What message does this story have for parents of prodigals?

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 3 (20 minutes)

1. Think about a time when contact with God transformed your negative emotions. Share with the group.
2. Think of a time when God supplied not only your physical needs but also your emotional needs. Share with the group.
3. Have you experienced the truth of the statement "Feelings follow actions?" Share your experience with the group.
4. Do you believe that "Pain is inevitable but misery is optional?" Explain your reasoning.
5. Share a time when you chose to change the only thing in life you could, your own attitude toward a situation.
6. Do you see any of the Biblical principles from today's lesson illustrated in the story of Linda LeSourd and Catherine Marshall?
7. What message did the story of Catherine Marshall have for you?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Lead your group in a Palms Down, Palms Up prayer.
2. Stand in a circle. If the group is larger than eight, divide into smaller groups of four or five or six. Try to imagine Jesus standing in the center.
3. Hold your palms down, as though you are throwing things at the feet of Jesus. You will be acting out the text, "Casting all your care on Him, for He careth for you." Go around the circle and each person can give the Lord one negative

emotion that he/she wants to get rid of. (**Note:** *People may give their concern or emotions silently, only to the Lord, or they may choose to do it out loud; no one should be made uncomfortable about not sharing private feelings*). Go around several times for as long as it seems that people have things they want to give.

4. After three or four minutes, the leader will pray and thank God for accepting their emotions.
5. Turn your palms up, as though waiting to receive something from God. Go around the circle again and each person asks the Lord for the gifts they need, the positive emotions you need in place of your negative ones. Ask not only for yourself but for your children.
6. Keep going around the circle, and each time every person asks for one thing. After three or four minutes the leader closes that part and leads into the next one.
7. You may wish to join hands and sing a prayer song to close. One song might be "What A Friend We Have in Jesus" or "Whisper a Prayer in the Morning".

Lesson 4

Facing Reality: Differences

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Ask the members to think about their parents. How are they like their parents, how are they different?
2. Which parent was more different from them. Try to think of specific incidents when these differences were apparent.
3. Go around the group and share about some of the more marked differences in personality between you and one of your parents.

II. Today's Topic: Facing Reality: Differences (15 minutes)

People are all different. Just as no two snowflakes have the same design, so no two individuals have the same combination of genes, chromosomes, and DNA. Each of us is a unique human being with our own finger print, footprint, and voiceprint. We don't all think alike, communicate alike, or socialize in the same way. We see things differently, hear things differently, and feel things differently. Understanding these differences can help us to have better relationships. In this lesson we will focus on three specific ways we are different. We will look at (1) the differences between the sexes, (2) the differences in personalities, and (3) the differences in learning styles.

A. Differences between the sexes

Men and women are different! We are different physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and sexually. For a few moments we will take a look at only one narrow range of differences, the way we communicate differently. Many books have been written on this topic. We will simply list a few of these differences without too much comment. One word of caution. Every individual is different. All of these characteristics may not apply to the men or women in your family. These are true over the broad spectrum of population, but may not be true for every male or female.

1. *Women tend to be other focused; men tend to be self-focused.* A subsidiary of this is that women are more people focused and men are more things focused.
2. *Women need more closeness; men need more distance in relationships.* Emotional intimacy is much more important to women than it is to men.
3. *Men's biggest fear is engulfment, while women's biggest concern is abandonment.* Male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is

threatened by separation. Thus males tend to have difficulty with relationships, while females tend to have a problem with being their own person.

4. *Women tend to over identify with people; men over identify with work.* The focus of a woman's life is her relationships with husband and family; the focus of a man's life is his work. This leads a woman to sacrifice her own needs for those of her family. Sometimes this causes adult children to feel smothered. The man's focus on work can lead to workaholism and can lose touch with their families more easily.
5. *Men tend to talk about things while women talk mostly about people.* Women are interested in problems, reactions and responses. Men are more interested in how things work, facts, and statistics.
6. *Men take words at face value while women search for hidden meanings.* A mother's probing to find out why an adult male child said or did something will be very annoying to him.
7. *Women's language tends to be more circumspect; a man's more direct.* Men like to be straight and to the point, clear, succinct, and honest. Women are more concerned about hurting someone's feelings so they approach things from a more indirect stance. Women want men to take a hint, to read their minds about what they want. Men can't figure out why women can't just say what's on their mind.
8. *When it comes to people's problems, men tend to give advice while women give empathy.* When an adult daughter tells her father her problems, she is looking for sympathy and understanding, a shoulder to cry on. She usually doesn't want advice, to be told what to do.
9. *Men look upon conversation as a form of competition, to see who can come out on top. Women look upon conversation as a form of connecting with someone.* Thus men see no need to converse a lot with family members where competition isn't an issue, and women need lots of conversation with family members to feel connected.
10. *Being right is more important to men than to women.* Women do not have so much invested in being experts. Great family arguments can go on about who is right or wrong. Parents have a tendency to go on feeling "parents know best" even when the children are grown. It is harder for fathers than mothers to give in to adult children, allowing them to have their own ideas and opinions which differ from theirs. (This section based on information from *Opposite Sides of the Bed*, Chris Evatt).

B. Differences in personality types.

When Jesus was on earth, He studied the character traits of those with whom He worked. Here are a few quotations that show the importance of understanding these basic differences in people. Whenever Ellen White speaks of character traits, we can substitute personality traits, which means the same.

"The Saviour knew the character (personality) of the men whom He had chosen, all their weaknesses and errors were open before Him . . . and His heart yearned over these chosen ones." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 291, 292)

"When he came into association with Jesus, he had some precious traits of character (personality traits) that might have been made a blessing to the church." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 295).

"The disciples differed widely in habits and disposition (personality) . . . the fiery zealot Simon . . . the generous, impulsive Peter, and the mean-spirited Judas; Thomas, true hearted, yet timid and fearful, Philip slow of heart, and inclined to doubt, and the ambitious, outspoken sons of Zebedee." (*Desire of Ages*, p. 297).

We can see in these disciples examples of what we today call the four basic personality types: sanguine, choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic.

1. *Sanguine*. Generous. Impulsive Peter is an example of the sanguine personality. Sanguines are spontaneous, in the middle of everything, quick to speak their mind, unafraid of taking the limelight, easily hurt, but quick to make up. Sanguines are talkative, enthusiastic, curious, eager, and sincere of heart. They make friends easily and don't hold grudges. However, they are sometimes undisciplined, speak before they think, and don't always follow through with their promises.
2. *Choleric*. Simon, the fiery zealot was probably a choleric. James and John, were also likely of this personality. Choleric believe that their way is the only right way; they grab for power and leadership, are self-sufficient and independent. They are strong willed and unafraid to correct the wrongs of others. They are organizers and goal oriented. They may come across as bossy, quick tempered, and selfish. They seem to thrive on controversy and arguments.
3. *Melancholy*. Thomas shows some of the characteristics of the melancholic personality. He was timid and fearful, unsure of himself. Melancholy people are deep and thoughtful and very conscious of details. They are cautious about making friends, but faithful and devoted. They often focus on negatives and see the worst side of things. They are often critical of others and suspicious.
4. *Phlegmatic*. Philip was probably a phlegmatic. He was slow of heart and doubtful.

He was a diplomat in his dealings with others as evidenced by his encounter with the Greeks. Phlegmatics have a low-key personality. They are easy-going and relaxed, calm, cool, and collected. They are easy to get along with and have a great deal of compassion and concern for others. They are competent and steady, but avoid conflicts. They are hard to get moving and they resist change. (*Based on: Your Personality Tree, Florence Littauer*).

In her book *The Best You Can Be*, Dorothy Eaton Watts tells about the difficulties she faced in dealing with children of different personalities.

Ron came home after a lengthy trip to find Dorothy upset about the actions of the three teenagers in their home. In fact, she was so impatient that she went to the train station to meet him, and before the poor man had his luggage in the car she started her recital of woes. He listened all the way home. By the time he had unpacked, bathed, and eaten breakfast, she had told him all.

"Do you know what your problem is, Dorothy?" he asked.

Her tears stopped. She looked at him in disbelief. "What? My problem? I don't have a problem. They have a problem!"

"Yes, Dorothy, your problem!" Ron chuckled. "You're trying to play God to those children. You're trying to make them over into your choleric, workaholic image. There's no way our children are going to turn into the serious, hardworking, always-do-what's-right, get-things-accomplished sort of person you are. They aren't made that way. So why don't you stop trying to change them?"

"Humph!" she grunted. "Maybe you're right."

The more she thought about it, the more she agreed with him. That's exactly what she had been trying to do, remake the children into her own image.

David was the family clown. He could make them laugh even when he was naughty. On his first day of school she told him, "You'd better be good, or you'll get a spanking from your teacher!"

He shook his head, rolled his big brown eyes, and said, "Nobody will spank a nice little boy like me!" And no one did, though he deserved it more than once. David had a sanguine personality.

Esther was a quiet, thoughtful girl, but very, very slow. She was always the last one ready for anything, and this tried her mother to no end. However, her room was always clean and tidy. Her drawers were organized, and the bottles on her dresser were arranged

according to height. Esther had a melancholy, phlegmatic personality.

Stephen was a happy-go-lucky boy whose room was always a disaster area. He had lots of friends and was ready to go anywhere and try anything. He was generous, willing to share anything he had with friends. Stephen had a sanguine personality.

Dorothy decided Ron was right. God created each of us as unique individuals. There was no need for her to become so impatient with those who did not have her particular choleric temperament. Things went a lot better when she stopped trying to change her children and began instead to appreciate them for what special people they were.

C. Differences in learning style.

Recent research shows that individuals prefer different styles for learning and communication. There are three broad categories of learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic.

One study showed 40 percent as visual learners; 20 percent as auditory learners, and 40 percent as kinesthetic learners. (Marlene LeFever, *Virtue*, September/October 1989, p. 16).

Another study showed 10 percent auditory, 15 percent visual, and 75 percent auditory. (Monte Sahlin, *ABBA*, May/June, 1991, p. 6).

Still another study showed 30 percent visual, 25 percent auditory, 15 percent kinesthetic, and 30 percent mixed. (Walter B. Barbe and Michael N. Milone, Jr., *Instructor*, 89(1980), p. 44-47.).

The percentages may vary according to the age, educational level, or culture of those studied. The point is not the exact percentage for each category, but that people do learn and communicate differently.

Communication is more real to us when we are using our preferred sense or senses. Relationships grow best when individuals relate in their preferred

communication style. Taking these differences into account will do much to improve relationships.

1. *Visual Learners.* The visual person uses words such as: look, see, appear. "I see what you are getting at." "It doesn't look good to me." "Now look at what you've done!" Visual people are very interested in the way things look. They are worried if colors don't match or if the chairs aren't lined up straight in a meeting hall. They are often critical of appearances.

If you want to communicate with a visual person, you will do well to demonstrate, show in some visual method, or tell a story with high visual images. They need to be communicated with on a very concrete visual level so that they can "see your point." They will appreciate gifts such as flowers, clothes that are of the style and colors they are most comfortable with. They'll be more impressed with a lovely table setting than with the music in the background. A written communication gets through to a visual person better than a spoken message.

2. *Auditory Learners.* The auditory person uses words such as: listen, hear, speak, sound. "That doesn't sound right to me." "I hear you!" "He won't listen to me!" Auditory people are very interested in the way things sound. They enjoy listening to tapes of sermons. Music is an important part of their life. They are concerned with disharmony of sounds. They will be critical of the words people choose to express themselves. They are tuned into words, talking, and sound.

If you want to communicate with an auditory person, you will be able to do so with well chosen words and arguments. They will appreciate poetry and messages in song. They will be more impressed by the music in a church service than by the flowers on the platform. A message sung or spoken will mean a lot to an auditory. They want to hear you say "I care about you" more than they want to receive a visual gift. Words are very important, and spoken is more important than written.

3. *Kinesthetic Learners.* The kinesthetic person uses words such as: feel, touch, taste, handle. "It just doesn't feel right to me." "I was so touched by that story." Kinesthetic people are very interested in the way things feel. They will be disturbed by bad smells in a room or one that is not comfortable because of air or temperature. They like furniture that feels good. They are more interested in the taste of food than in the table setting or musical background. They are critical of the way people make them feel. They are tuned in to touch, taste, and smell.

A kinesthetic wants to feel your love through hugs and physical contact. It's hard for them to relate to a person who doesn't touch much. They enjoy gifts that smell or taste or make them feel loved. What you do for a kinesthetic is much more important than the words you say or write. A hug can convey a lot more than a poem or a bouquet of flowers. We usually tend to communicate love the way we like to receive it. Therefore a visual male may give flowers when the kinesthetic daughter would much prefer chocolates and a hug. The auditory female may write a poem or send a tape that is seldom listened to because the visual daughter wanted something more tangible that she could see as a reminder of her mother's love.

By becoming more observant about the way our adult children talk, what they complain about, what they seem to enjoy, we'll better understand what we can do

to communicate in their learning style. After all, what good does it do to send a message that cannot be received? The more we understand about our children, the better we will be able to relate to them. Many relationship problems are based on the unacceptance of another's differences.

Understanding that our children's communication style is different from ours, can alert us to alternate ways we might use to communicate. Spoken words of love may be the method used by an auditory parent. However, if she is aware that the child is kinesthetic she can use more messages that include more touch, taste and smell. Should the child be a visual person, the parent can adapt this communication to include the visual, such as the way we dress, the table setting, or a lovely bouquet of flowers for a special occasion. Telephone calls, written notes, tangible gifts, hugs, and favorite foods may be all appreciated, but some things will be reassured more than others depending on the communication style of the persons involved. Instead of doing the same old things that doesn't work year after year, understanding differences can help us try new and innovative ways to communicate until we find something that does work for our particular child.

As loving parents we will seek to understand all the ways that children are different so that we can affirm their uniqueness, and not get upset because they are not like us. Understanding differences can help us set each child free to be his or her own person, being the unique individuals God made them to be. Many misunderstandings could be avoided if parents would accept the differences of their children, learning to appreciate each child's uniqueness, and looking for ways to meet his or her particular needs.

III. Parent Showcase: Jill Briscoe's Parents (5 minutes)

Jill Brisco was born in Liverpool, England. She married a minister and they serve as pastors of the Elmbrook Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin. She is the author of more than twenty books and director of Women's Ministries for her church. The following is from the book *What My Parents Did Right*, edited by Gloria Gaither.

"I also appreciate the way my parents allowed us to be our own persons and discover our own gifts. Looking back, I realize now that my father had hoped I'd be a boy and take over the family business to fulfill his dreams. I never knew his disappointment in this regard until he was gone. He hid his feelings and set about being the best father a girl could have. Perhaps the fact that my sister wanted to go into the business helped, but at first he resisted her desire to learn mechanical skills and train for a man's job in a man's world at a time when women didn't do that sort of thing. But after sharing his concern for her, he did draw Shirley into the firm, gave her his blessing, and allowed her to blossom and grow. At the same time, he encouraged me to pursue my dream of being a teacher.

"Finally, my parents let us go. How hard it was for them; I'll never know. Now that I am

a grandparent, I look back at my struggles to release my own children. How hard to set their sails and push them off from the jetty and into the sunset! But, with the Lord's help, I've learned that to grab or clutch kills the very thing I'm trying to keep intact--some very precious adult relationships. The dilemma is how to hold them lightly, not tightly. When I was a major crossroads as a parent, my parents' example helped me.

“One day I traveled to Liverpool to tell my widowed mother that we were moving to the United States. Tears rolled down my cheeks when I saw her shock. When I heard her say, ‘How could you leave me?’ I felt torn between the people I loved best—my mother and my husband. Then came an expression of the generous, giving, and sacrificial love so typical of her—‘I’m sorry, Jill. How selfish of me. Of course, you must go. Your place is at Stuart’s side.’ We clung to each other, knowing she would never come to see us (she had an inordinate fear of flying), yet learning together once again the importance of release and sacrifice in love. When my time came to let go of our children, I was able to do so largely because my mother had taught me that you don’t let go of a relationship—only your dependence on it. She had done it well, and for this and all the other things she and Dad did, I give thanks to God.” (p. 33, 34).

IV. Handout: Lesson 4

Rate Yourself

Suppose the social committee in your church is planning a picnic that would include a softball game. What part would you like to play in the picnic? Where would you feel most comfortable performing?

1. **Picnic coordinator.** You are the one in charge. You call the shots and organize everyone else. You are the one with the whistle, calling everyone together for various activities. You might even be the umpire for the ball game.
2. **Softball player.** You want to be in the center of the action, whether it is the baseball game or a tug-of-war. You like to hear the cheers of the crowd as you come in for a home run or pull the knot across the line. During lunch you gather a group around you and tell jokes.
3. **Food committee.** Or any other committee, for that matter. You like to work behind the scenes, attending to necessary details that make the picnic a success. You are pleased to prepare food, make posters, send out invitations, buy supplies, or go ahead of time to lay out an obstacle course.
4. **Cheering section.** You bring your lawn chair or blanket and are content to sit in the background and watch the others work and perform. If you do participate in games, it is because others urge you, and you do it to please them and not make a scene. You want to avoid conflict.

Which number best describes you?

1. **Picnic coordinator.** You are likely a choleric. You like to get things done . . . now! You are energetic, dynamic, hardworking, disciplined, and well organized. You are also bossy and opinionated. You need to be in control.
2. **Softball player.** You are probably more sanguine. You like people, action, fun, and the limelight. People energize you. Being with friends is very important.
3. **Food committee.** If you chose this you are likely a melancholy. You enjoy details, creativity, and you want things done right. You are a perfectionist. You may be the one to write up the event for the church newsletter.
4. **Cheering section.** You probably have a phlegmatic temperament. You would rather be the audience, sit back, relax, and enjoy. You are dependable and easy to get along with, a mediator. (*The Best You Can Be*, Dorothy Eaton Watts, p. 105, 106).

V. Bible Study: Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:22-27, CWB) (10 min).

Even before the two babies were born, Rebecca could tell that she was going to have twins because there seemed to be a struggle going on between them. Rebecca said to herself, "I wonder what this means? . . . So she asked the Lord. (verse 22).

The Lord said, "This means that two nations and two kinds of people are in your womb. The twin boys you're carrying are totally different from each other and there will always be rivalry between them and their offspring" (verse 23).

So when the time came for her to be delivered, she had twin boys, just as the Lord had said, (verse 24),

The first boy that came out was reddish with lots of hair all over his body so they called him Esau, which means Hairy. (verse 25).

The other twin came out holding tightly to his brother's heel and they called him Jacob, which means Heel-holder (verse 26)

As the boys grew, the parents could see that there was considerable difference between the two. Esau was the restless type and interested in hunting, at which he became quite skilled, while Jacob was quiet and preferred to stay at home and take care of the sheep. (Verse 27) *Clear Word Bible*

"Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac, presented a striking contrast, both in character and in life Esau grew up loving self-gratification and centering all his interest in the present. Impatient of restraint, he delighted in the wild freedom of the chase, and early chose the life of a hunter. Yet he was the father's favorite. The quiet, peace-loving shepherd was attracted by the daring and vigor of this elder son, who fearlessly ranged over mountain and desert, returning home with game for his father and with exciting accounts of his adventurous life. Jacob, thoughtful, diligent and care-taking, ever thinking more of the future than the present, was content to dwell at home, occupied in the care of the flocks and the tillage of the soil. His patient perseverance, thrift, and foresight were valued by the mother. His affections were deep and strong, and his gentle, unremitting attentions added far more to her happiness than did the boisterous and occasional kindnesses of Esau." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 177.

1. The four personality types are all represented in this family, each person representing one of them: sanguine, choleric, melancholy, phlegmatic.
2. Make a list of all of the personality traits listed in scripture and in the quote from *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Think of Rebecca's actions when the servant came to look for a wife and also how she dealt with the two boys and her husband. It should be clear which type she is: organizing, doing things her way, taking charge.

Having listed all the characteristics of each person, decide which type fits each.

VI. Group Discussion: Lesson 4 (20 min.)

1. What personality type are you? If you have a hard time with this, let the others say how they see you. Does your personality type put you in conflict with your children who have a different temperament?
2. Think of your own children now. Which of the personality types do you see in each one. Everyone is a combination of all four, but usually one is predominate. Go around the room, each person trying to give a two or three sentence description of the personality of each of their children. If the group is large, divide into groups of four to six.
3. What is your own preference for learning. Is it visual, kinesthetic, or auditory? Is it different from that of your children? Share misunderstandings this might cause.
4. Think of your own children again. Try to decide whether they are more visual, auditory, or kinesthetic in the way they relate to giving and receiving information. Ask each group member to describe each of their children as either visual, auditory, or kinesthetic.
5. Do you get along better with your male or female children? Think about male and female differences in relationships. Do you think this might have some bearing on how you relate differently to your different children? Do you prefer the ones who relate more in your own style?
6. Do you think male/female differences, personality types, and learning styles are something inherited or something learned? What is the basis for your belief?
7. Do you think either the male or female way of communicating is better or worse?
8. Is it better to be sanguine, choleric, melancholy, or phlegmatic? Do not all have weaknesses as well as strengths? Could it be that Satan works on the weaknesses of our particular temperament to destroy relationships? Might we strengthen our relationships by doing as Christ did with His disciples and concentrate on the good traits of character?
9. Is there any advantage to being either auditory, visual, or kinesthetic? Should we strive to be all three equally? Does it matter? Is there a right or a wrong way to learn? Does God try to communicate with mankind in only one of these styles, or does He not adapt to all three in order to relate to us?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

Lesson 5

Building Bridges

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Share about something stupid you have done.
2. Share about an embarrassing moment.
3. Tell about a time when you were a child and got into trouble with teachers or parents.

II. Today's Topic: Building Bridges (15 minutes)

Imagine yourself as living on an island with each of your children living on a different island. There are no telephone or ferry connections. You must build a bridge from your island to theirs, so that you may pass back and forth freely.

In a sense, we are all islands in a sea of humanity. Communication is the bridge we build to connect with another individual. Communication is a bridge of love connecting us to others, but especially to our children.

Picture your bridge as having four pillars. Each one has a letter of the word LOVE on it. L-O-V-E. Each letter will stand for one of the things we can do, even now at this stage of life, to repair our bridges of love so that we can communicate with our adult children.

L—Listen.

"Everybody should be quick to listen, slow to speak." (James 1:19 NIV). Listening is one way to show love to our adult children. Most of us are not good listeners. When our children are talking, we are usually thinking of our own stories to tell, our response to what they are saying.

Books have been written about how to listen, but we can boil it down to three basic principles: (1) Use the body language of a listener, (2) Use open questions, (3) Use reflective listening.

1. *Body Language.* Experts tell us that 90 percent of our communication is through body language. We often say one thing, but really mean something else, and our body language shows it.

A good listener faces the person who is speaking squarely, shoulder-to-shoulder and face-to-face. He maintains an open body posture with his arms and legs uncrossed. He leans

slightly forward toward the speaker and maintains eye contact.

Allen Ivey and John Hinkle, psychology professors, set up an experiment to prove the importance of paying attention. They trained six college students in the body language of listening. They then videotaped a class with the six students listening to the speaker. He knew nothing about their secret plan. He started by reading from his notes. He spoke in a monotone, used no gestures, and paid little attention to the students. He was boring!

At a given signal, the six students uncrossed their arms and legs, leaned forward in their chairs, fixed their eyes on the speaker, and gave their whole body to paying attention. Within 30 seconds the speaker made his first hand movement. His voice became vibrant, more alive. He looked at the students, talking from his heart. He became alive and interesting! The transformation was accomplished by simply giving attention! (Robert Bolton, *People Skills*, p. 33, 34).

Another important part of listening body language is eye level. To stand above your son or daughter as you talk is putting yourself as the one in authority, the one who is in control. If you want real communication, the communication of friends, then maintain the same eye level, or better yet, sit below them so that it gives them the feeling of superiority.

Parents who show their interest in their children by the body language of listening have gone a long way to building the bridge of love. Sometimes by our posture, we shut out our children, not realizing the message we are giving.

2. *Open Questions.* Open questions accomplish more than closed questions. Closed questions ask for facts. They have one right answer. They are conversation stoppers. Too many closed questions make children feel like mom and dad are putting them on trial. They clam up.

Open questions ask for reasons, opinions, thoughts, feelings, and explanations. They allow the other person to express herself/himself in any way they desire. Open questions are nonrestricting and nonthreatening. Open questions tell your children that you value their opinions and will not judge them. You are truly interested in what they have to say.

3. *Reflective Listening.* The child has an idea in his mind. He chooses words, putting his message into code. The parent receives the coded message, but must then try to figure out the real message their child is trying to convey with those words. Often the message is quite different than what the words indicate.

Good listening parents check back with their children to make sure they got the correct message. They don't pretend to read minds. A perception check shows we really care about the person. We want to understand.

Sharon says, "I'm not coming home for Christmas this year."

Mom thinks, "She doesn't want to be with us. I must have offended her when she and Pete were home last time. She's avoiding coming on purpose."

However, that may not be Sharon's message at all. She could be saying, "Funds are tight just now, and I don't have the money to make another trip so soon." Or she might be saying, "Pete and I have decided to take our vacation and go to Mexico this year." Or she could have in mind "I have to work during the holidays so that I will be free to come for your 50th wedding anniversary later on."

Instead of jumping to conclusions, the loving parent will hold his tongue, not try to read minds, but gently check to find out if his perception is correct.

Parents who want to build bridges of love will learn to listen, not only to the words, but to the feeling behind the words. Love takes time to check to see if the message received is the one given.

O—Overcomes roadblocks.

Imagine for a moment that friendship is a two-way street. You want to enjoy your adult children's friendship and they would like to be your friends, too. You both set out on this road called friendship hoping to meet, but roadblocks bar the way. You try to communicate, but turn around disappointed.

Sue had that problem whenever she went home with her family to visit Mom and Dad. She'd hardly be in the door before Mom would make some remark about how she or the children were dressed. She'd make a comment about something and her Dad would say, "Now, that's no way to talk! You should know better!"

"I never could do anything right around here," Sue pouts. "You're just mad because we couldn't come for your dinner last week."

The first thing you know everybody would be upset and Sue would tell everybody to pile in the car; she was going home. Mom and Dad felt bad and wondered what had gone wrong. They had meant to have a good time together as a family. Sue and her folks were facing roadblocks to communication.

Roadblocks are expressions we use to communicate unacceptance. They are words we use to communicate our desire for someone else to change, to think, feel, or act differently. Roadblocks communicate unacceptance and unfriendliness.

There are three basic kinds of roadblocks: judging, sending solutions, and avoiding the other's concerns.

1. *Judging.* Judging roadblocks include criticizing, name calling, diagnosing, labeling, blaming, and shaming. The judging roadblocks make a person feel unaccepted and unacceptable. "Judge not," Jesus said. Parents must tear down the judging roadblocks if they want to communicate love to their adult children.
2. *Sending solutions.* Parents are particularly good at this. These roadblocks include ordering, commanding, demanding, threatening, preaching, moralizing, interrogating, and advising. These roadblocks cause resistance and resentment in our children. They imply that the adult child's judgment is unsound. By such remarks the parent makes their adult children feel unloved, worthless, and helpless. Parents must break down the sending solutions roadblocks if we want to communicate love to our adult children.
3. *Avoiding the other's concerns.* We avoid the other's concerns by diverting, distracting, arguing, and reassuring, all things we do to try to get our children to stop feeling bad. We change the subject or tell them it's not really so bad as they think. They'll feel better after a good night's sleep. The use of this type of roadblock communicates our desire to withdraw from our children's pain. If we would communicate love, we must overcome the roadblocks of avoiding the other's concerns.

Example: Marlene calls up her mom to tell her what a bad day she's had at school. "It was awful, Mom. I'm just going to quit teaching. I had a terrible day. I'm an awful teacher."

"Stop talking like that, Marlene," Mother orders. "You're a good teacher and you know it!"

"No I'm not," Marlene argues. "I did a lousy job."

"It's not as bad as you think," Mother returns. "You'll feel better after a good night's rest. I think the problem is, Honey, that you are staying up too late at night watching TV. You know you need your rest. I don't know how many times I've told you that!"

"Oh, Mom, you don't understand," Marlene is upset. She slams down the receiver. Mom frowns and wonders what she did wrong. She was only trying to make Marlene feel better. What she didn't realize was that she had erected a bunch of roadblocks that had stopped the communication and made Marlene feel more incompetent than ever. Marlene went to bed and cried. "Why can't Mom understand me for once!" she wailed. "There's no use talking to her at all!"

V—Vulnerability.

Jesus gave up His high position to come and be as we are. He became approachable, but

at the same time He opened Himself to attack. He made Himself vulnerable, able to be hurt and rejected.

Love will strip away our layers of pride and make us approachable. We will become vulnerable to our children, willing to show our humanity. We need to let them know that we are not perfect, that we, too, struggle with temptation and problems. Sometimes we need to confess when we have been wrong. It's alright to let our children know we have made mistakes. Only by being open and honest can we establish a bridge of communication with our adult children.

Pastor Timothy Sharpe was one who learned how important vulnerability is to building bridges of love. His son, Tim, had begged to drive his car, promising to be careful. However, while turning around in a parking lot, he managed to put a big dent in the fender. Pastor Sharpe was boiling mad.

"I almost never let you drive my car, and when I do you wreck it!" Pastor Sharp stormed. "Don't ask for it again!"

For the next two weeks Tim and his dad avoided speaking to each other, Dad because he was so angry, and Tim because he figured anything he'd say would only make matters worse.

Then it was communion Sabbath and Dad, known to everyone else as Pastor Sharpe, was having a hard time with his sermon. He was preaching about the attitude of the disciples at the Last Supper.

He said, "True Christian love will lay aside differences, and each will serve the other. Even if you have a reason to be upset with others, you have to let it go. Jesus forgave us, we can do no less for those who have wronged us. Foot washing is a time to wash these feelings away."

Inside Pastor Sharpe was feeling miserable. He cut his sermon short, dismissing the people for the foot washing. At the door of the men's room he caught the eye of his son, Tim. "Do you have anyone to serve you yet?" he asked. Tim shook his head.

While Dad was on his knees washing his son's feet he was praying silently, *Lord, please help me to release my anger towards Tim. It is destroying my relationship with him and with You.*

Then as the two stood, the anger was suddenly gone, and Pastor Sharpe felt only love welling up in his heart for his son. "I'm sorry, son," he said. "You're more important to me than any stupid car. I love you, Tim."

"I'm sorry, too, Dad, I" Then the two were in each other's arms, hugging. (Timothy Sharpe, *My Feet Need Washing, Too*).

E—Encouragement.

"Let us encourage one another." (Hebrews 10:25 NIV).

Voicing our appreciation is the most effective way to encourage someone. It is simply doing what God did for His Son at the Jordan River, speaking words of sincere appreciation. "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Words have a tremendous power. A word spoken at the right time can change the whole course of a person's life.

Tony Campolo remembers a mother who was very affirming, encouraging. He writes, "My mother had a way of minimizing my failures and accentuating my accomplishments. Over and over again she told me how proud she was of anything I did that had any value. I don't ever remember her saying, "You could have done better." Instead, she always made me feel that I had done more than had been expected of me. I would hear her tell her friends, "That boy of mine is really something. He doesn't have the advantages of most kids in this neighborhood, but look how well he's doing in school. Who would have guessed that my boy would be so successful!"

"Every day as I left the house, the first thing she would say to me was 'Remember! You can go over the top for Jesus!' We joked about that, but the last conversation I had with her before she died ended with those exact words. My mother made me feel special. She made me feel that I could do great things. She convinced me that any limitations in my background could be overcome." (*What My Parents Did Right*, Gloria Gaither, editor, p. 37).

Norm Sonju, who has been manager of both the Buffalo Braves and the Dallas Mavericks basketball teams, writes about his 92-year-old mother. "She still continues to be an encouragement to me. At the beginning of this year's season we were in first place with a 4-1 record, but during our fifth game we lost our best player for the entire year. Another key player was lost for the season as well, and all of a sudden our plans and hopes were shattered. Yet each time I talk with my mother, she only sees the good that is still to come. I feel blessed to have such a positive influence in my life." (*What My Parents Did Right*, p. 194).

(This lesson is based on *The Best You Can Be*, by Dorothy Eaton Watts, pages 68-77).

III. Parent Showcase: Chuck Swindoll (5 minutes)

Chuck Swindoll was under stress from too many things to do and not enough time to do them. He was irritable and short tempered at the breakfast table.

One of the children answered back and the angry words flew across the table from father to child and back again from child to father.

His wife, Cynthia, frowned. The direction of his angry missiles changed. This time Cynthia was the target.

The children stopped eating and watched wide-eyed as their dad scolded their mom. Curt, the oldest son, could stand it no longer. He threw down his napkin and walked out, slamming the door behind him.

What is happening to me? Chuck thought. He looked around the room at his family. All were in tears. He began to shake from embarrassment and pressure. *Why am I doing this to them? I have just lost what I have spent years trying to gain, a respectful authority.*

Chuck left the table that morning with a plan. He canceled his appointments for the weekend and scheduled an afternoon powwow with his family. Only Curt couldn't make it as he had gone to work.

They sat on the floor in a circle and Chuck confessed his sin of the morning. There were tears all around and other confessions as well. By the time they were finished, relationships had been restored and hearts were happy again.

After the family conference Chuck took the whole family to the office building that Curt was cleaning.

"I've had such a hard day," Curt said. Chuck noticed the tears welling up in his son's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Son," Chuck said, finding a catch in his own throat. "I'm sorry for my impatience this morning."

For the next hour the family talked and then they all helped him finish his job. Later they went to a restaurant for supper to celebrate the restoration of friendship in their home.

That night Chuck Swindoll went to bed a happy man for he had been able to repair the communication bridge between himself and his children. (Paul Lewis and Dave Toht, *Famous Fathers*, p. 17-29).

IV. Handout: Lesson 5

Love Work Sheet (To Do At Home)

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate yourself on the following ways of communicating love.

1. Love listens not only to the words a person says, but to the meaning and the feeling behind the words.
1 2 3 4 5
2. A good listener faces the speaker, keeps body in an open position, and maintains eye contact.
1 2 3 4 5
3. A good listener asks more open questions than closed questions.
1 2 3 4 5
4. Love overcomes the judging roadblocks.
1 2 3 4 5
5. Love overcomes the sending solutions roadblocks.
1 2 3 4 5
6. Love overcomes the avoiding the other's concerns roadblocks.
1 2 3 4 5
7. Love becomes vulnerable. It makes us open, honest, and human.
1 2 3 4 5
8. Love encourages by voicing appreciation and affirmation.
1 2 3 4 5
9. Let this week be "Affirmation Week." Find an opportunity to give at least ten honest statements of praise, appreciation, and affirmation to each of your children. You may do it in person, write a note or use the telephone.
10. Catherine Marshall once went on a fast from criticism. She wouldn't allow any critical words to escape her lips all day.

Try it. It's harder than you imagine.

V. Bible Study: Isaac's Sorrow (Genesis 25-28, CWB) (10 min)

Jacob and Esau were the twin boys given to Isaac and Rebecca after 20 years of marriage. Isaac was 60 years old when they were born. He was 100 years old when Esau married two Hittite girls.

As the years went by, Isaac favored Esau because he loved deer meat, while Rebecca favored Jacob. (25:26).

Now when Esau was about forty years old, instead of marrying one of his distant relatives as his father Isaac had done, he married two Hittite girls. One was Judith . . . the other Basemath. (26:34).

They were a constant source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca. (26:35).

From then on Esau hated his brother Jacob because he had tricked his father into giving him the family fortune. He decided that he would kill Jacob as soon as Isaac his father died. (27:41).

1. What three sources of grief did Isaac and Rebecca have in their old age?
2. Communication seemed to be a real problem in this family. There seemed to be a lack of listening skills. Lots of roadblocks were in operation, vulnerability and open honesty were certainly not there. The only pillar that seemed to be standing in the bridge Isaac had with his boys was that of encouragement.

What facts from these four chapters support the statements given above? Where do you see a lack of communication skills?

Where do you see the strong pillar of encouragement?

3. In what ways did both boys disappoint their parents?
4. What moves did Isaac make to try and set the relationships in his family in order? (See 27:34-40 and 28:1-5).

Isaac listened to Rebecca and agreed that Jacob should go to Mesopotamia to find a wife there . . . find a wife for him. So Isaac called Jacob in and told him not to stay home and marry one of the local Hittite girls. (28:1).

He told him to go to his grandfather Bethuel in the city of Haran in Mesopotamia as his mother had suggested . . . (28:2).

Then Isaac forgave Jacob and prayed, "May the Almighty God bless you and keep you and

give you a safe journey. May He give you many children so that your descendants will become a great nation. May the blessings of God be with you and your descendants forever, and may you eventually inherit the land which He promised to your grandfather Abraham. (28:3, 4)

Then Isaac and Jacob hugged and kissed each other and Jacob said good-bye and left for the city of Haran. (28:5).

5. If Isaac could be here today, what advice would he give you?

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 5 (20 minutes)

1. Try an "Alphabet of Love." Provide everyone with paper and pens. Write down the letters of the alphabet vertically on the paper. Beside each letter try to think of words that begin with that letter which describe what love is or how it behaves. (A—Love is affirming, appreciate, amiable . . .)

Let the group work on the list for five minutes. Then go through the alphabet and ask them to verbally state the words that they have written.

2. Our Heavenly Father has given us an excellent example of what it means to build a bridge of communication to us, His children who are separated from Him. With His love bridge all the pillars are in good repair. Brainstorm together to come up with texts or concrete examples of each of these pillars at work in His relationship with us.

L—Listen

O—Overcome roadblocks

—Judging roadblocks

—Sending solutions roadblocks

—Avoiding the other's concerns roadblocks

V—Vulnerability

E—Encouragement

3. Which of the four pillars of love need repair in your communication bridge to your children? Go around the group and let those who are willing to share their need for God's wisdom to help them be learn to be better communicators of love.

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

(Note to Leader: Choose one of the following.)

1. Try keeping a group prayer journal. Divide each page into two sections. One side is for requests; the other side is for answers. Each week as members of your group arrive they can add requests and make note of answered prayers.
2. Make a prayer chain. Write out requests on strips of paper. Join these together to make a prayer chain. Add names and requests from week to week. Hold the chain and pray for each link.

Lesson 6

The Cords of Love

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Pass out a flower bulb to everyone present.
2. Put on soft music and encourage everyone to meditate on the message of the dry, unattractive bulb. What message does it give about God's relationship to us or about our relationships to our children.
3. After five minutes ask the group to share thoughts that come to them about the bulb. (The ideas that will come out will include that God looks on us not as we are now, but as we can become through His grace and power).

II. Today's Topic: The Cords of Love (15 minutes)

"The Lord said, "When Israel was a child I loved him. Out of Egypt I called my son and brought him home. But the more I spoke to them, the more they turned away from me. Soon they were sacrificing animals to Baal and burning incense to idols. Yet, I was the One who took Israel by the hand and taught him to walk. I was the One who watched over him. But the people of Israel don't seem to know that I was the One who did all this for them and healed them. I drew them to me with the cords of love and kindness. I picked them up and held them to my cheek. I took the yoke from their backs and bent down to them and fed them." (Hosea 11:1-4 CWB).

What a picture of our Heavenly Parent in pain! What a picture of love, mercy, kindness, and grace! "Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with fullest confidence, that we may receive mercy for our failures and grace to help in the hour of need." (Hebrews 4:16 NIV). What a text for parents of prodigals! "That we may receive mercy for our failures" and "grace to help in the hour of need" with our adult children! Doesn't that thrill you?

William Herschel, the great astronomer, lived in constant fear of discovery for deserting the king's guards when he was seventeen. Should he be caught, the penalty was death. After several years of successfully dodging the guards, he received a summons to Windsor Castle to present himself before King George III.

Oh, no! I've been found out! I will surely be exposed and thrown into prison to await execution! he thought. It was with a racing heart and quivering knees that he approached the throne.

King George smiled as William approached. "Before we discuss astronomy," the king

said, "there is a little matter of business that we must attend to." With that he handed William a document containing the king's seal and signature.

Fearfully William opened the document. It was a pardon for his desertion! He no longer had to hide. He no longer faced death for his crime for the king had offered him grace. (Jacob Gartenhaus, *Famous Hebrew Christians*, p. 95-97).

A. What Is Grace?

Grace is favor that is undeserved; it is the gift of mercy in the place of punishment. Grace is the good news of salvation, already accomplished for us as well as for our children. The New Testament proclaims that God has already saved us and our wayward children. All either of us has to do is accept this priceless gift. Our behavior can never earn it. While we are helpless, ungodly, sinners, enemies of God, He died for us and for our children (Romans 5:6, 10). God justifies the ungodly (Romans 4:5). There is no necessity of pleading or interceding with God for our salvation or that of our children; that has already been accomplished in Christ. That salvation now can only be accepted or rejected by us as well as by our children. Our prayer for our children must be that our attitude toward them will reflect the grace that has been shown to us and to them in Christ.

A woman once approached Emperor Napoleon with the request, "Please pardon my son."

"No!" Napoleon replied. "This is your son's second offense. Justice demands his death."

"I don't ask for justice," the mother cried. "I plead for mercy."

"After the crime he's committed, he doesn't deserve mercy," Napoleon replied.

"If he deserved it, then it would no longer be mercy," she said. "Mercy is all I ask."

Moved by the mother's simple plea, the emperor declared, "Well, then I will have mercy. Your son is pardoned." (H. M. S. Richards, *The Promises of God*, p. 264).

Grace is a king granting pardon. It is a father running to meet the prodigal. It is the kiss of a mother when a child has been naughty. It is the presenting of a gift to an undeserving, ungrateful child. Grace is an unmerited, undeserved, and unexpected favor given to an unsuspecting, unlikely, undeserving person. It is the lavish gift God extends to us as we approach His throne with guilty hearts. It is the amazing message that He is for us, not against us!

B. Grace for Parents.

In her book *Prayer Treasures*, Dorothy Eaton Watts tells of one experience she had in receiving God's wonderful gift of grace for parents. She writes: "Often in prayer I have

found the treasure of God's grace. As I have approached His throne, feeling foolish and guilty, He has smiled on me with favor and loving kindness I didn't deserve."

"One morning I awoke at four o'clock and couldn't sleep. All my past mistakes, my imperfections of character, and the many times I had failed God (particularly as a parent) kept replaying in my mind until I felt completely discouraged. At last I got up and began reading in *Ministry of Healing* where I had left off the day before. One of the texts quoted was Micah 7:18, 19. After reading it in several versions, I wrote my own paraphrase: "Who is God like You who pardons my sins and forgives all my mistakes! You aren't angry with me, but You love me tenderly. You do not bring up my sins and failings, but You have thrown them far away from You, into the bottom of the sea where they will never be found again!"

"Lord, thank You! Help me do the same! Satan keeps trying to dig them up and bring them to mind. Help me to accept Your love and forgiveness. Lord, please, You've blotted my sins from Your records, but they are still in the computer chips of my mind. Please blot them out there, too!

"Often in the simplicity of a little child I allow myself to be gathered up in the arms of the Father to let Him sing His love song to me (Isaiah 43:4). That morning He quieted me with His love and grace (Zephaniah 3:17)." (*Prayer Treasures*, Dorothy Watts)

C. The Throne of Grace

When we approach the throne of grace in prayer, for ourselves or on behalf of our children, we do not go alone. Jesus walks with us to the throne. He introduces us to God as His sons and daughters, members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King! He speaks on our behalf, presenting our requests as His own.

When we kneel before God, Jesus kneels there with us. And we are told that when this happens, God the Father "lays open all the treasures of His grace" to us. We leave His presence knowing He has heard our prayers with our hearts full of "the riches of His grace." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 6, p. 364.).

Richard C. Foster expresses the same idea in his book *Prayer*. "The truth of the matter is, we all come to prayer with a tangled mass of motives—altruistic and selfish, merciful and hateful, loving and bitter. Frankly, this side of eternity we will never unravel the good from the bad, the pure from the impure. But what I have come to see is that God is big enough to receive us with all our mixture. We do not have to be bright, or pure, or filled with faith, or anything. That is what grace means, and not only are we saved by grace, we live by it as well, and we pray by it." (p. 8).

Isn't that special? Even when we pray, when we are interceding for our children, God's grace is at work granting us special favor through the merits of Jesus Christ!

D. We Can Offer Grace to Our Children.

Think of what God's grace means to us as parents. Think of how our Heavenly Father treats us, His wandering children. We can do the same for our children. They need this grace from us just as much as we need it from God. They need to experience this grace extended from their earthly parents so that they might have the hope of receiving it from their Heavenly Parent. Grace is perhaps the greatest gift we can ever bestow upon our adult children. This acrostic may help to anchor it in your mind.

G—Gentleness.

Your grace is gentle, Lord. How tender-hearted You are! You are gentle with my fragile emotions, never bruising an already wounded spirit. You nudge me ever so softly toward the way You want me to go. Your grace is gentle.

Lord, please give me this same gentleness with my wandering children. Help me to be gentle with their fragile emotions, never bruising an already wounded spirit. Make me gentle, Lord.

R—Refreshing.

Your grace is refreshing, Father. Like the dew of the morning or a gentle summer rain, it gives me life and new hope. It is reviving and revitalizing. Your grace refreshes me!

Father, please give me this same power to revive my children's sagging faith, their own disappointed hopes. Help them to believe that there can be a new life for them with You because of the new relationship we are going to have by your power. Make me like the dew of the morning to my children, Lord.

A—Acceptance.

Your grace is accepting, Lord. No matter how I have failed You, You don't throw me away. I feel totally accepted in Your presence, all I am, my strengths and my weaknesses, my possibilities and my failures. Your grace accepts me.

Lord, please make me just as accepting of my adult children. No matter how they have failed and disappointed me, help me not to throw away our relationship. Help them to feel totally accepted in my presence, all they are, their strengths and weaknesses, their possibilities and their failures. Help me to accept them, Lord.

C—Comfort.

Your grace comforts me, Father. In all the disappointments of life, even those of my own making, You comfort me. Your presence soothes, rubs salve into my wounded spirit, heals, and blesses me. Your grace is my comfort.

Father, please help me to be a comfort to my children. In all their disappointments of life,

even those of their own making, help me to comfort them. May my presence in their lives soothe, rub salve into their wounded spirits, heal, and bless. Father, may my grace to my children comfort them.

E—Encouragement.

How You encourage me by Your unmerited love and favor! What joy and hope I have because of You and the Gift of Your Son Jesus Christ. If He died for me, He will surely save me, and see me through all the trials of life! Your grace encourages me, Lord.

Lord, please help me to give encouragement to my children through my love and favor given to them even when they do not deserve it. Help them to find joy and hope in my presence. I believe Your Son Jesus Christ died not only for me, but for my children, too. You will surely save them and see them through all the trials of life! I trust You for that, to do what I can not do. Lord, please help my love to be an encouragement to my children to experience Your love!

Lord I praise You for Your GRACE. A grace that is:

Gentle
Refreshing
Accepting
Comforting
Encouraging

Father I need You to help me to offer the same gentleness, refreshment, acceptance, comfort, and encouragement to my children.

In my own strength this is not possible, but with You "all things are possible." (Adapted from a chapter in Dorothy Watts' book, *Prayer Treasure*).

E. Grace offers a new beginning.

Margaret had blown it. She had gone to see her adult son, Greg, and had become angry at what she saw. He was twenty-nine years old and still working at minimum wage jobs--when he worked, that is. It seemed he had no comprehension about how to make it in today's world.

Margaret felt sick at her stomach to realize he was living a hand-to-mouth existence. Half the time Greg didn't know where he'd be sleeping, let alone what he'd eat. His friends let him sleep on their couch or floor when he was out of work. Sometimes he slept in his car and showered at the beach.

"I let him have it," Margaret told her friend, Karen. "I couldn't hold my tongue another minute. But this time I went too far. I know it. I can feel it. What worries me is that I lost my temper. I did something I swore I'd never do. I compared him to his father. I told

him that if he didn't get hold of his life he'd end up a deadbeat, broke and alone just like his dad. That wasn't fair. I know it. His father left us when Greg was eight and there's a lot of hurt still inside of him. I didn't mean to sound so cruel. I just want him to pay attention more—to realize that it could happen to him. But it didn't come out right."

"How did Greg react?" Karen asked.

"He screamed at me—as if he hated everything I stood for. He told me to shut up and stop running his life. It was frightening. I can still feel his contempt," she said. "I felt like we were strangers. I didn't know how to talk to him. He seemed so stubborn, so determined to do things his way."

Greg needed his mother's comfort, but she had little to give. She had none for herself. She felt like an open sore. Greg needed her to listen. But so intense was her own her own fear and rage that she didn't have ears to hear. Greg needed her to be there for him, but she couldn't even be there for herself.

"You can start over," Karen suggested. "You can acknowledge your mistakes and start over."

"Start over?" Margaret asked. "How? Greg's twenty-nine. He'll never be my little boy again."

"I remember hearing a sermon once," Karen told her friend. "About our God of a second chance, and a third and a fourth or more, if need be. He never turns His back on us. I have to believe that He'll give you another chance. He'll make it possible. It can happen for you and Greg."

After Margaret was gone, Karen thought a lot about the God of the second chance. Karen O'Connor writes: "As I drove home that morning, I was overcome with the idea of a second chance, and what that could mean to other parents like Margaret and me—mothers and dads who longed for the opportunity to restore a troubled or broken relationship with their adult children.

"And I was filled with the reality of God's love for me and for Margaret and for all parents. A love so powerful that He sent His only Son to die for our sins. He didn't hold us to the law. He didn't judge us or manipulate us. He loved us and gave us a second chance through Jesus Christ. What an awesome gift! Surely, I thought, that same God wants to redeem our parenting!" (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 3 - 9).

Grace, grace, God's grace; Grace that is greater than all our sin. The cords of love are fashioned from the threads of grace.

III. **Parent Showcase: Davy Crockett's Parents (5 minutes)**

The heart of 15-year-old Davy Crockett beat faster as he walked the familiar trails near the Nolichucky River in what is now Tennessee. The very air smelled like home. In the dusk he paused a moment before a large weather-beaten log cabin. Several wagons were already parked in the large yard. A hand-carved wooden sign above the door read, "Crockett's Tavern, Room and Board."

"I can't do it," Davy shook his head. "What if they don't remember me. After all, it's been two years, almost three!"

He remembered his leaving as if it were yesterday. He was only 13 and for the first time was attending school. On the fourth day of school he had beaten up a boy. Fearing a beating from the stern schoolmaster, Davy hid in the woods. When his father found out about his truancy he promised a whipping the next day if Davy didn't go to school. Caught between two whippings, Davy hired himself to a man who was about to drive a herd of cattle to Virginia. Now he was back. What can of a reception would he get?

"I'll go in just like any other traveler," Davy decided. "Maybe they won't even recognize me." They didn't. After all, they had long ago given him up as dead. It was not until they were seated around the supper table that his oldest sister recognized him.

"Davy!" she screamed and ran around the table and gave him a big hug. "Davy, my lost brother! Where have you been?"

"I can't believe it!" his mother cried through her tears. "All this time we thought you were dead! Oh, I'm glad you've come home."

"The joy of my family at my return humbled me," Davy wrote later. "It made me sorry that I hadn't submitted to a hundred whippings, sooner than cause so much affliction as they had suffered on my account."

Davy had experienced what it was like for the prodigal son to come home. The love and acceptance he knew that night illustrates what every sinner feels when he returns to his Father's house.

The Crocketts knew how to offer grace to a prodigal son. (Adapted from *Stepping Stones*, Dorothy Eaton Watts, p. 232).

IV. Handout: Lesson 6

**Worksheet on Grace
(To Be Done At Home)**

Rate yourself on your ability to give the gift of grace to your children.

1. I am gentle with my children's fragile emotions, never bruising an already wounded spirit.

1 2 3 4 5

2. My children find my presence refreshing, like the dew of the morning, bringing them new life and hope.

1 2 3 4 5

3. No matter how my children have failed and disappointed me, I accept them. They feel totally accepted in my presence, as they are, their strengths and weaknesses, their possibilities as well as their failures.

1 2 3 4 5

4. I am a comfort to my children. In all the disappointments of life, even of their own making, they know they can come to me for comfort, healing, and blessing.

1 2 3 4 5

5. My children are constantly encouraged by my love and favor.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Do a study on the word *grace*. Each day choose a different text where the word appears. Read it in context. Look up any cross references. Read it in several versions. Write your own paraphrase of the verse, inserting your name. Rewrite it. Insert the names of your children. Here are some verses to get you started:

Romans 3:24	Galatians 1:6	Ephesians 2:8
I Peter 3:7	Psalms 84:11	Romans 5:20
1 Cor. 15:10	2 Cor. 12:9	2 Peter 3:18

7. Read the chapter "The Privilege of Prayer" in *Steps to Christ*. Find five reasons why we should come boldly to the throne of grace.

V. Bible Study: Grace for Isaac (Genesis 22:9-14, CWB) (10 min)

Finally they reached the top. Together they found some stones, arranged them to make an altar and put the wood on top. Then Abraham told Isaac what God had said. Though Isaac was sad, he saw it as a privilege to give his life for God while still young. Isaac let Abraham tie his hands, then willingly laid down on the altar. (verse 9).

Abraham offered a prayer, then trembling, picked up the sacrificial knife and raised it high above his head so he could bring it down with quick force to end his son's life. (verse 10).

At that moment, the Lord shouted, "Abraham!" He turned and said, "Yes, Lord, here I am!" (verse 11).

The Lord said, "Stop! Don't hurt the young man. You have proven your loyalty to me in the sight of the whole universe, because you have not held back your only son whom I know you dearly love." (verse 12).

Abraham wept for joy, untied Isaac's hands, then saw a ram caught by his horns in some thorn bushes. Quickly they got the animal and Abraham offered the sacrifice God had provided in place of his son. (verse 13).

So Abraham named the place Jehovah-Jireh, meaning The Lord Sees and Provides. Ever since then people have called the place The Mountain Where the Lord Provided. (verse 14).

1. Eighty-some years later, when Isaac himself was an old man, and a father with two sons who gave him grief, he must have often remembered that day on the mountain. How do you think that experience tempered the way Isaac treated his adult sons?

How might that experience have comforted him as he watched his family seem to fall apart?

2. Think about some of the mountains that your adult children face in their lives. Share with the group some of the mountains you might be facing.

- Financial difficulties
- Problems at work
- Sexual problems
- Marital problems
- Substance abuse
- Doubt
- Physical handicaps
- Relationship problems
- Mental illness
- Debts
- Problems with church
- Erosion of faith

3. What message do you think Abraham would give you if He were here today? (Verse 14)

4. Share a Jehovah-Jireh experience from your own life.

VI. Group Discussion: Lesson 6 (20 minutes)

1. Divide into groups of three or four. Work together to write an acrostic about what the word grace means to you as parents of prodigals. Try to come up with something different than what was presented in today's lesson. One way to do something different is to begin each sentence with that particular letter. For instance: G - Giving my children back to God is a step toward grace. Share the acrostics. Or form an acrostic on the letters of the one who made grace possible—**Jesus Christ**.

2. Go around the circle and share a time when you experienced God's undeserved blessing, His gracious forgiveness, or deliverance from danger. Praise God for His mercy and loving-kindness.

3. Allow ten minutes of quiet time for the group members to write love letters to God showing appreciation for His goodness and mercy in their lives. Write to Him your own needs asking for grace toward your wayward children. Allow time for those who are willing to share their letters, or portions from them. No one should feel they have to do this.

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Let this prayer session be one of thanksgiving and praise for God's marvelous grace.

2. Go around the group and ask each person to offer a brief prayer of thanksgiving for one incident of God's grace to them or their children.

3. Continue as long as people's hearts and mouths are filled with joyous praise and thanksgiving.

4. Sing a song about God's grace. Perhaps "Amazing Grace".

5. As an alternative, find a recording of a hymn about grace, and play it while all sit in quiet meditation.

Lesson 7

Mending Fences

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. This is the seventh time the group has met together, sharing laughter and pain, experiences and hopes. They should have a fairly good idea of each other's character.
2. Put all the names of the members present into a bowl. Mix them up and let each person draw a name. If they get their own name, they need to put it back and choose again.
3. Allow them two or three minutes of quiet meditation during which time no one talks.
4. They are to think about the person whose name they have. They are to try and think of an animal or bird that somehow reminds them of the person whose name they have.
5. They should think of only complimentary comparisons, not anything about their looks, but about their character and how they relate to their children and the problems they face in life.

Example: Mary reminds me of a beaver. She's always at work on her home making repairs, and doing everything she can to keep it secure.

Ted reminds me of a lion, fiercely protective of his lioness and cubs.

Sharlot makes me think of a determined little chickadee, hanging in there through winter times as well as the summer times of life, singing the song of her life, "Chickadee-dee-dee. I love my kids, I do, I do."

II. Today's Presentation: Mending Fences (15 minutes)

An old farmer had been fighting with his neighbor over the placement of a fence for thirty years. Because of the dispute neither one would mend that fence.

On his deathbed, the old man decided to make things right. Calling his wife he said, "Please tell Abner that I'm dying and wish to speak to him."

Before long she was back with neighbor Abner. The old man trembled as he spoke. "Abner, you and me have been feudin' about the fence nigh unto thirty years. I've said some pretty hard things about you, and I want to tell you I'm mighty sorry. I'd just like to be friends with you

before I die. Will you forgive me?"

"Of course," Abner said, his eyes moist. "I reckon I've said some pretty hard things about you in the last thirty years as well. Yep, it's time to be friends."

After a solemn handshake, the sick man shook a finger at Abner and said, "But, mind you, Abner, if I get well, you can fergit all that I just said! I'm right about that fence!" (Cecil G. Osborne, *The Art of Getting Along With People*).

Neighbors sometimes have a hard time mending fences but if the truth were known families often have an even harder time. Hurts, injustices, hard feelings, and misunderstandings pile up through the years on both sides of the fence. The older we get the more we want to mend those fences, but the harder it seems to do. Yet, mending fences means restoring relationships and this is what parents of wandering children want more than anything else.

"Forgiveness is a crucial step in restoring relationships with our adult children," says Karen O'Connor. (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 167).

A. Why Should We Forgive?

1. Because God tells us to forgive.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32)

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:14, 15).

2. Because forgiveness is the only way to heal hurt.

"Forgiving is the only way we have to a better fairness in our unfair world; it is love's unexpected revolution against unfair pain and it alone offers strong hope for healing the hurts we so unfairly feel." (Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget: Healing the Hurts We Don't Deserve*, p. 160).

Imagine for a moment that a poisonous snake crawls into my sleeping bag on a camping trip and bites me. Then just suppose that after attending to my wound, I go in search of the snake and catch it. I take it home and keep for a pet. Every once in a while I take it out and play with it and let it bite me again. What would you think of me?

Yet, that's what some people do with the vipers of unfair treatment. Instead of destroying them, they keep them so they can hurt some more. Forgiveness is getting rid of the viper that keeps biting us.

Smedes continues, "Your own memory is a replay of your hurt—a video tape within your soul

that plays unending reruns of your old rendezvous with pain. You cannot switch it off. You are hooked into it like a pain junkie; you become addicted to your remembrance of pain past. You are lashed again each time your memory spins the tape . . .

"The only way to heal the pain that will not heal itself is to forgive the person who hurt you. Forgiving stops the reruns of pain. Forgiving heals your memory as you change your memory's vision. When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you cut a malignant tumor out of your inner life. You set a prisoner free, but you discover that the real prisoner was yourself." (*Forgive and Forget*, p. 170).

B. What Forgiveness is Not.

If we understand what forgiveness is NOT we should better be able to understand what it IS.

1. *Forgiveness is NOT easy.* In fact, it is one of the most difficult things we will ever do.
2. *Forgiveness is NOT feeling good about the bad thing someone has done to you.* According to Lewis B. Smedes, there are four stages: *hurt, hate, healing, and coming together.* To acknowledge your hurt is to take the first step toward forgiveness.
3. *Forgiveness is NOT denying your feelings of anger and hate.* Rather it is facing those feelings, then choosing not to act on them. It is choosing rather to love. It also means that the bad feelings can return; you may need to forgive yourself again and again. You even need to rebuild trust in oneself as well as giving the other individual opportunity to build a relationship of trust with you.
4. *Forgiveness is NOT making excuses for someone.* We excuse people when we understand they are not to blame. Forgiveness is necessary when we can blame someone for what happened. Forgiveness is holding a person accountable, but then clearing the record by a conscious choice.
5. *Forgiveness is NOT forgetting.* We forget little hurts that are too trivial to even remember. It is because you have not forgotten a hurt that you need to forgive. Remembered hurts are like stored up pain. Forgiveness is the way we get rid of the pain. Forgiveness is also a process—we may be able to deal with only a small part at a time. We also must face our own part in the relationship breakdown, acknowledging our mistakes, admitting them, and accepting the consequences that come from them and seeking to make justice.
6. *Forgiveness is NOT a feeling.* Forgiveness is a choice we make to treat a person as a friend even though we don't feel like doing it. It is a choice we make not to hold a hurt to another person's account. IT is erasing the record of their sin.

7. *Forgiveness is NOT something we can manufacture.* Forgiveness is a gift from God. It is the "outrageously impossible act." It is something we cannot do without the power of God. (Lewis B. Smedes, *Forgive and Forget*).

C. What Forgiveness Is.

1. *Forgiveness IS releasing another from your personal judgement.*

In her book *Something More*, Catherine Marshall says that forgiveness is releasing another from your own personal judgment. Taking your personal judgment off a person doesn't mean that you agree with what he has said or done. It simply means you will not act as his judge. You will not pronounce a guilty verdict on him.

Forgiveness IS refusing to play God with the other person. The Bible says, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (Romans 12:19) Because He's going to take care of it, I don't have to. Forgiveness releases people from my personal judgement.

2. *Forgiveness IS refusing to play God with our children.*

As parents we must never relate to our children as a lord. Parents aren't obligated to get people to heaven. That's the work of Jesus. Our part is simply to love and accept and forgive.

In his book, *Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness*, Jerry Cook suggests that if we want someone to be saved, healed, and brought to wholeness, then our part is to offer them three guarantees:

- a. That they will be loved, always, under every circumstance with no exception.
- b. That they will be totally accepted, without reservation.
- c. That no matter how miserably they fail or how blatantly they sin, unreserved forgiveness is theirs for the asking, (even without asking), with no bitter taste left in anybody's mouth.

He goes on to suggest that if we cannot offer a person these three guarantees we will never be able to lead them to a restored relationship with ourselves, the church, and God. (*Love, Acceptance, and Forgiveness*, pp. 1 - 21).

3. *Forgiveness IS doing yourself a favor.*

"To release the child who has hurt us by extending and receiving forgiveness is to turn our attention away from pain and toward life, to free our mind from the sting of going over the incident again and again, and to disengage from wounding memories that can only intensify the hurt. To forgive another is an act of love on our own behalf. If the other is set free in the process, so be it. He is not off the hook. He is still responsible for what he did. He will still have to answer to God." (Karen O'Connor, *Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 173.).

4. *Forgiveness is a decision.*

"We do not have to feel forgiving in order for it to be valid. It is enough to decide to forgive. The feelings will follow. But feeling good is not the only result to work toward. Those who forgive have a greater vision. They are looking forward to a restored relationship." (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 173).

5. *Forgiveness is letting go of past hurts.*

In his book *Prayer That Heals Our Emotions* Edie Ensley tells about an experience he had while visiting his parents. He pulled out an old junior high school yearbook. When he came to the picture of a certain teacher he felt a surge of fury begin to build within him. The hurting memories after twenty-five years flooded through his mind and all the old feelings of hate and bitterness were there.

That night in his prayer time the Lord spoke to him, "Edie, you need to forgive that teacher." He tried, but every time he pictured the teacher and tried to say the words, "I forgive you," the words wouldn't come out. There was too much anger and bitterness there. So he just told the Lord about his feelings, talking the whole incident over with Him on his knees.

This procedure went on for many nights. Edie would try to forgive, but ended up rehearsing all the hurts and feelings before the Lord. The Lord listened. Gradually He brought to Edie's mind pictures of the crucifixion with Jesus hanging on the cross saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Edie asked the Lord to put His forgiveness in his heart for that teacher, and the Lord did that for him.

About the experience Edie writes: "I couldn't have gone through the process of saying I forgive you without first acknowledging my feelings and letting go of the resentment and bitterness. I couldn't have worked through these feelings without Jesus beside me.

"For several weeks after this experience, I found a freedom and joy, a new lightness in my life that surprised me. For over twenty-five years, I had been carrying this heavy load exiled deep within me. I felt a profound thankfulness that we don't go into that 'lonesome valley' alone, but that we have Someone to walk it with us.

"One of our greatest obstacles to love is our failure to let go and forgive. Holding onto bitterness poisons our health and impedes us from loving people in the present moment. One of the greatest things that can free you to receive and give love here and now is forgiving past hurts. The Greek word for forgive is the word that means 'let go.'" (Edie Ensley, *Prayer That Heals Our Emotions*, p. 23, 24).

6. *Forgiveness IS facing the future, not the past.*

"As you give and receive forgiveness, concentrate on restoring the relationship, on coming together, on putting the past behind. Forgiveness is not about setting the record straight. It's about letting go of emotional baggage, blame, shame, and the need to be right.

"If you are sincere in your desire to forgive yourself and others, you will not waste time trying to reconstruct former conversations, explaining your position, accusing and counter accusing, or assigning responsibility for who said what to whom when and where. Attempts to recreate past grievances often widen the gap between people instead of closing it. Focus on the relationship and your desire to restore it. Leave the rest to the Lord." (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, Karen O'Connor, p. 174).

III. Parent Showcase: Nell B. Thompson (5 minutes)

The following appeared in *The Listening Heart*, the women's devotional for 1994: For almost 12 years my only child, Keith, and I had been estranged. He had allowed various circumstances to separate him from his family. Even when his father suddenly died, there was no response. Five years slipped by before I even discovered that he had moved East with his family. Continually I prayed for a reconciliation, but nothing happened. I did not know how to break the stalemate.

One spring, while recovering from an illness, I listened to a tape by Gary Smalley entitled *Keys to the Human Heart*. A message just for me! It provided me with some deep insights concerning my role as a parent and how I had failed in some ways to meet the needs of my sensitive, musical child. Oh, how that realization hurt, but with that realization came an idea.

It was as if my guardian angel spoke loud and clear—urging me to write a letter to my family. Through a flood of tears I wrote, and now when I read that letter I feel certain that an angel held my pen and guided my thinking. I asked for forgiveness and understanding and sent the letter by registered mail.

That same day my housemate, Enola, called friends ("Prayer Warriors") to ask for prayer support. What an anxious time! Finally on Mother's Day, 1991, a beautiful floral arrangement was delivered to the house. The card accompanying it read, "All my love, Keith." What a thrill! Once again the tears flowed from grateful hearts.

My son also made arrangements with Aunt Pinkie (as he calls Enola) for us to fly back East where he and his family were living. I still had not spoken to Keith directly and did not know if the family would meet us at the airport, but there they were—granddaughters as tall as I; granddaughters I had not seen since they were infants. What a delight!

Our first day in church was a thrill. The pipes of the organ rang with praise as Keith opened the crescendo pedal and played to the glory of God. Misty-eyed Mom was most

grateful—twice grateful!

The Lord had truly answered our prayers and performed a miracle. That letter marked the beginning of a new, warm relationship between my son and me. Each day that has passed since has been a joy. God is alive. He cares. He reigns. I learned firsthand the value of James' admonition to confess our sins to each other and to pray for each other so that we may be healed (James 5:16 NIV).

IV. Handout: Lesson 7

Twelve Steps for Parents in Pain

The following is Lee Ezell's adaptation of the original twelve-step program, based on Alcoholics Anonymous *Big Book*. She has adapted them to accommodate the needs of parents who are trying to recover from their endless battle with pain that comes from unsatisfactory relationships with adult children.

Step One: Admit that you are powerless to control and think for your adult children, and that whenever you've tried to play God in their lives, the situation has become unmanageable.

Step Two: Accept the fact that God is the only one who can restore your relationship.

Step Three: Make a decision to turn your will and your concerns for your children over to God.

Step Four: Make a soul-searching examination of yourself as a parent.

Step Five: Admit to God, to yourself, and to another human being the exact nature of your past mistakes—your parental weaknesses and your inadequacies.

Step Six: Prepare yourself to take your failures to God, while giving up your perfectionism and unreasonable expectations.

Step Seven: Humbly confess your parenting faults and failures to the Lord. Ask for forgiveness and that He will remove your shortcomings.

Step Eight: Make a list of the things you may have done to injure or disappoint your children and prepare yourself to make whatever amends are necessary.

Step Nine: Make amends to your children for the past through conversation, improved performance, and any restitution you may feel necessary.

Step Ten: Keep your past patterns in mind, stay on top of your behavior, and quickly deal with relapses into old, unhealthy habits.

Step Eleven: Seek a closer relationship with God, and ask Him to reveal His will to you.

Step Twelve: Reach out to other parents in the spirit of mutual support and compassion. (*Pills for Parents in Pain*, p. 157-160).

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V. Bible Study: Joseph Forgives (Genesis 45 CWB) (10 min)

Then Joseph said to them, "Come closer! Come!" When they finally did, he said to them, "I am really Joseph, your own brother, the one you sold as a slave into Egypt." (4)

You can now stop condemning yourselves over what you did in a fit of anger when you sold me to the Ishmaelites. God has turned what you did into a blessing to preserve our lives . . . (5)

So it wasn't you who sent me here, but God. It was He who arranged for that Ishmaelite caravan to come by just when you were deciding what to do with me. He has made me the highest official in the land, next to Pharaoh . . . (8)

Hurry home and tell Father that his son Joseph is still alive and that I'm the governor of Egypt. Then as quickly as you can, move down here so you can make it through the next five years of drought . . . (9)

I will personally see to it that you're taken care of for the next five years so that you and your families will survive". . . (11)

Next he hugged all of his brothers and cried with each one of them. Then the brothers got up courage and talked to him.(15)

1. Which of the following principles of forgiveness does the story of Joseph illustrate? Find evidence in the story.
 - Forgiveness is releasing another from your personal judgment.
 - Forgiveness is refusing to play God.
 - Forgiveness is doing yourself a favor.
 - Forgiveness is a decision.
 - Forgiveness is letting go of past hurts.
 - Forgiveness is facing the future, not the past.
2. What relationships were restored because of Joseph's forgiveness?
 - Joseph and his brothers
 - Joseph and his father
 - Jacob and his sons
 - The brothers' relationships with each other
3. Try to imagine the great pain that the aging father Jacob experienced because of his grown sons behavior. Which do you think was worse, the pain of losing Joseph, or the learning of the deceit of his sons? Would you have found it hard to forgive your sons for doing such a thing?

"Another act of humiliation remained for the ten brothers. They now confessed to their father the deceit and cruelty that for so many years had embittered his life and theirs. Jacob had not suspected them of so base a sin, but he saw that all had been overruled for good, and he forgave and blessed his erring children." (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 232).

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 7 (20 minutes)

1. What do you consider the most compelling reason to forgive?
 - Because God commands it?
 - Because it is the only way to heal hurt?
 - Because it restores relationships?
 - Because it does you a favor?
 - Because it frees you to give and receive love?
 - Because it offers hope for the future?

2. Go over the six things that forgiveness **is**. Do these principles of forgiveness apply in all situations? If not, then which principle does not apply? Is there any situation when it is not possible for us with God's help to forgive?
 - When the one who has wronged you asks for your forgiveness?
 - When the one who has wronged you doesn't believe or understand that he has wronged you?
 - When the person who has wronged you is dead?
 - When the person who has wronged you keeps on doing things to hurt you?
 - When the person who has hurt you doesn't even care?
 - When the person is someone you have never met?
 - When the person doesn't want your forgiveness and, in fact, rejects it.

3. Read Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 5:20. Do these texts make forgiving easier or harder for you? Why?

4. What do the following texts tell you about your ability to forgive? Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 3:20; Mark 10:27?

5. Where does forgiveness originate? Is it not a manifestation of love? (1 Corinthians 13) And is not love for others a gift God wants to give us? (1 John 4:7) Is it not the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives? (Galatians 5:22).

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

Do an **ACTS** prayer today. Lead the group from one section of the prayer to the next after two to three minutes on that topic. *(If anyone feels uncomfortable praying such a prayer out loud, assure them that they may just pray silently.)*

A—Adoration. Give particular attention to praising God for the wonderful love He shows to us and our children.

C—Confession. Particularly confess your own sins as a parent, for the times you have not been as loving and accepting as Christ.

T—Thanksgiving. Thank the Lord for ways you are seeing Him work in your live and the lives of your children. Thank Him for your children and the present circumstances, good or bad.

S—Supplication. Offer your concerns and requests.

Lesson 8

Interceding for your Child

I. Sharing Together (10 minutes)

1. Together prepare a list of modern inventions that have come during the past 40 or 50 years.
2. Ask a few to share what it was like in the days before microwaves, fax machines, copy machines, computers, jet airplanes, space shuttles, etc. How is housework different? How is travel different?
3. What does your group consider the most powerful force in the universe? Gravity? Nuclear power? Lasers? A growing seed? Love? (Let them brainstorm on this).

II. Today's Topic: The Power of Intercession (15 minutes)

"Prayer is the mightiest force in the universe," says Dr. Courtland, a twentieth century scientist. (Dick Eastman, *No Easy Road*, page 114.)

Charles Spurgeon wrote, "The power of prayer can never be overrated. They who cannot serve God by preaching need not regret. If a man can but pray, he can do anything." (*No Easy Road*, p. 114).

E. M. Bounds suggests, "Prayer can do anything God can do." (*No Easy Road*, p. 115).

Jeremiah gave the words of God, "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and shew thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not." (Jeremiah 33:3)

Why is there this power? Richard C. Foster puts it this way: "If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them, and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way of loving other." (*Prayer*, p. 191.)

Dr. E. Stanley Jones put it this way, "In prayer you align yourselves to the purpose and power of God and His is able to do things through you that He couldn't do otherwise. This is an open universe, where some things are left open, contingent upon our doing them. If we do not do them, they will never be done. For God has left certain things open to prayer—things which will never be done except as we pray." (Helen Smith Shoemaker, *The secret of Effective Prayer*, p. 15). So it is that we seek God's help and begin to be part of the answer to that prayer.

Perhaps a quotation that best gives us the reason for intercessory prayer, and that shows its power is found in Ellen White's *Steps to Christ*. She writes, "Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You can't burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His

children. . . . His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is no perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or in which He takes no immediate interest." (*Steps to Christ*, p. 99-100).

Said the poet:

*"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day:
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."*

—Tennyson

A. The Power Is Available.

Too often we have been like the old timer in Oklahoma. When oil was discovered on his land, he suddenly became very wealthy. He had lived his days in a small shack without electricity. He had always used his horses for transportation and work on his farm. Suddenly he was thrust into the modern world with all his wealth.

He went to town and bought himself a new suit of clothes and a brand new, shiny Cadillac, which he had delivered to his shack. He dressed up in his new clothes and drove to town sitting in his grand car, but pulled by a team of horses!

Power was available to him. The power of a hundred horses, but he had never learned to access that power. He didn't know how to turn on the switch and make it work, so he used the only power he knew—two horses.

Could it be that on some days we go through life like that? Using the two-horse-power of our own ability when we could tap into the hundred-horse-power of heaven? To paraphrase an old expression, "Prayer is the key in the hand of faith that turns on the power of heaven."

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," said Jesus. (Matthew 28:18) And He has promised that we can access that power if we will but ask. (Matthew 7:7-11).

B. Power Over Satan.

Samuel D. Gordon in *Quiet Talks on Prayer* writes, "Prayer is power, the time of prayer is the

time of power. The place of prayer is the place of power. Prayer is tightening the connections with the divine dynamo so power may flow freely without loss or interruption."

Dick Eastman adds to this, "It is power to defeat Satan's hellish demons any place, any time, no matter what odds . . . In fact, more dread blows are driven Satanward by prayer than hell would care to mention." (*No Easy Road*, p. 119).

Ellen White agrees, "Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before His strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 346).

"Satan is enraged at the sound of fervent prayer, for he knows that he will suffer loss." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 295).

"When we humbly entreat the mighty Conqueror for help, the weakest believer in the truth, relying firmly upon Christ, can successfully repulse Satan and all his host." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 340).

Says Samuel Chadwick, "Satan dreads nothing but prayer. The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." (Joe Engelkemier, *Whatever It Takes Praying*, p. 93).

C. Prayer Makes A Hedge.

Janis Vance tells a story of powerful intercessory prayer in *A Gift of Love*. For six months she had been part of a prayer group that met every Wednesday morning. For three hours they studied a Bible text and prayed for each other.

One morning after the study she headed home on the freeway at about 12:30 p.m. As she drove along she was impressed to pray. A still small voice came so urgently, "Pray for your children. Pray out loud for them."

Not knowing what to pray for, she began to pray for their health, their relationships, schooling, anything that came to mind. She talked out loud to the Lord as she kept her eyes on the road.

Shortly after Janis arrived home the phone rang. It was Jason, her oldest son. "Mom, there's been an accident," he said. "I'm okay, but my car isn't."

He had been driving down the winding mountain road from camp and just as he entered a curve, a large delivery truck suddenly appeared on his side of the road.

On one side was a 30-foot drop-off and on the other was a bank. Somehow (he still doesn't know how) he managed to go behind the truck and land in a ditch next to the dirt bank. He was not injured, but his car had a very flat tire. Janis realized that the accident had occurred

at the very moment that she had been impressed to pray for her children. (*A Gift of Love*, p. 249-250).

D. An Example: Moms In Touch

When Fern Nichols moved from British Columbia to San Diego, California she was faced with a problem. She couldn't afford to put her son in a Christian school. She feared for the influence ungodly associates and teachers would have on him.

She asked for the Lord to send another Mom who felt the same as she did. Soon she met a neighbor who was also concerned about her child being in public school. Once a week they began meeting to pray together for their children.

The idea caught on. Today there are 10,000 "Moms in Touch" groups in the United States, 300 groups in Canada, and at least 100 other groups in Japan, Austria, China, Egypt, and Africa. Some of these are Adventist "Moms in Touch" groups who meet at the church school once a week to pray for their children and their teachers. They pledge to spend one hour a week together doing nothing but praying for specific concerns for their children. There are no refreshments or other incentives, only prayer.

Fern says, "Women need a vision for the power of prayer, from the very moment we go on our knees, the instant we say, 'Dear Father.' Satan has blinded Christians into believing that being productive is doing and going and getting things done. The real productivity in getting things done is on our knees. If we don't pray for our kids, who will?"

Fern tells a story about her sister Gail, whose son had a teacher who was grumpy and irritable. Gail didn't want her son to be in that class. "However, God calmed Gail's heart," Fern says, and told her, "I want you to minister to that woman." Gail began ministering in the classroom, praying for the woman, and bringing her encouraging notes. By the end of the year this woman with tears in her eyes told Gail how special their relationship had been for her. Gail saw a change in the school situation that year because of her prayers. (Debra A. Bell, *Virtue*, September/October 1991, p. 52-55).

What might happen to the youth in our schools, academies, and colleges if we had more moms, dads, and grandparents who were in touch with God? And pleading for their children before God's throne, praying for teachers by name, and giving to Him every problem they know about, Give God permission to work in Adventist schools as He has never worked before?

E. Prayer Can Go Everywhere God Can Go.

An air force flyer was shot down in the Pacific. He spent many days on a raft before he was picked up. Up until that time he had not been a Christian, although his parents prayed for him day and night.

He wrote to his folks, "What kept me going during those days was knowing that you folks and everyone over at the church would be praying for me. I remember how you used to

pray at supper for various people, Dad, and I knew you'd be remembering me. I also remember how we'd always pray for the sick and the guys in service and others at church, but it never meant much to me—until this past week. It's funny, but you know those prayers meant everything while I was sitting on that raft." (A. Dudley Dennison, Jr., *Windows, Ladders, and Bridges*, p. 155).

Yes, prayer can go everywhere God can go. "Wither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." Psalm 139:7-10.

III. Parent Showcase: Caleb and Elizabeth LeTourneau (5 minutes)

Robert Gilmore LeTourneau was an inventor, builder, engineer, lay missionary, and Christian benefactor. Look across the job site of any large construction project and if you see a monstrous piece of machinery, one that does the work of a hundred men or more, or one that can move scores of yards of dirt on a single pass, or one that combines seven operations into one—the chances are R. G. LeTourneau had something to do with its invention or original design. He is also the one who designed the offshore oil rigs that probe the ocean floor for inexpensive crude oil. He invented the modern roofer and bulldozer and applied rubber-tire technology to heavy machinery. (John Woodbridge, *More Than Conquerors*, p.344-345).

LeTourneau's personal salvation experience occurred when the family lived in Portland, Oregon. Young Robert quit school and went to work in a foundry. "The heavy physical work of the foundry exactly suited his lively and restless nature. He had served about half of this time as an apprentice when he had the experience which changed the whole course of his life. This young man, strong of body, powerful of will, impatient of restraint, ambitious, imaginative and talented beyond his years, came suddenly to the Valley of Decision.

"He said of himself at this time: 'I was raised in a Christian home by my father and mother who loved Jesus and served Him with all their hearts. We had a family altar where we worshiped God. Father prayed and asked God to make his children useful in His kingdom. In spite of that, at the age of sixteen I found myself on the wrong road going the wrong way. I knew the right way, but I'd forget about it.'"

He continues His own story, "I began to realize that something was wrong in my life. I tried to turn over a new leaf many times, but each time I failed and each time I got worse. It wasn't that I didn't know the Bible or the way of salvation. The trouble was I knew it too well. In our home we had to memorize Scripture, and I had memorized a great deal. But I recited it in a parrot-like way. I knew the words, but they had no meaning for me. Revival meetings would come to town, and I would go and get all worked up; but after the revival I'd go back to my old kind of life.

“Then a special revival came and everybody said, ‘Are you going tonight?’ and I said, ‘Oh, yes, I guess so.’ I went for four nights and then decided I wasn’t getting anywhere. I was looking for something, but I didn’t know exactly what. I thought I was seeking after God, but I was really seeking after the things which He had. The next night I stayed home and thought the whole thing over. I saw myself going down into sin and realized I was a lost sinner. The next night I went to the meeting, and when the altar-call was made, I went forward.

“The workers asked me, ‘Do you believe that Christ died for sinners?’ But I knew all the Scripture answers. There was something between my soul and salvation. I couldn’t seem to believe it; it wasn’t real for me. I went home from that meeting that night and went to bed. As I lay there, this thought came to me: If I were to die tonight, I would go out into a lost eternity. I had heard the gospel and rejected it.

“Then I cried out in desperation to God, ‘Lord, save me or I perish.’ Right there something happened. The glory of the Lord came over me, and the full reality of salvation came into my soul.

“My first thought was of my mother, who had been praying for my salvation for a long time. I thought she might be praying for me at that moment. I got out of bed and ran to her bedroom.

“‘Mother,’ I said, ‘It’s all settled now. You don’t need to pray for me anymore; I am saved and on my way to heaven.’ His mother wept tears for joy. This was the answer to her prayer.” (From *God Runs My Business: The Story of R. G. LeTourneau*, A. W. Lorimer. Reprinted in *Forty Fascinating Conversion Stories*).

Later LeTourneau had spiritual setbacks as he got involved in his business and making money. He endured a broken neck in a stock-car crash. He survived a fire in his repair shop. He nearly died of Spanish influenza. He lost his firstborn son. He was plunged into bankruptcy.

LeTourneau began to take stock of his spiritual life and asked the question, “What went wrong?”

He believed the Lord spoke to him, saying, “My child, you have been working hard, but for the wrong things. You have been working for material things when you should have been working for spiritual things.”

To mind came a verse he had memorized as a youngster, Matthew 6:33. About it he said, “That I had not been doing. I had been seeking first my own way of life, and I firmly believe God had to send those difficulties into our lives to get us to look up into His face and call upon Him for His help and guidance.” (*More Than Conquerors*, p. 347).

It is evident that his parent’s prayers and teaching affected LeTourneau throughout his life.

IV. Handout: Lesson 8, A.

The Power of Prayer

- "Prayer is the mightiest force of the universe." —*Dr. Courtland*.
- "The power of prayer can never be overrated. They who cannot serve God by preaching need not regret. If a man can but pray, he can do anything. He who knows how to overcome with God in prayer has heaven and earth at his disposal." —*Charles Spurgeon*
- "It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask." —*Great Controversy*, p. 525.
- "In prayer you align yourselves to the purpose and power of God and He is able to do things through you that He couldn't do otherwise. . . . God has left certain things open to prayer—things which will never be done except as we pray."—*Dr. E. Stanley Jones*
- "Satan cannot endure to have his powerful rival appealed to, for he fears and trembles before His strength and majesty. At the sound of fervent prayer, Satan's whole host trembles." —*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 340.
- "Satan dreads nothing but prayer. The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from praying. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray." —*Samuel Chadwick*.
- "By sincere, earnest prayer parents should make a hedge about their children. They should pray with full faith that God will abide with them and that holy angels will guard them and their children from Satan's cruel power." —*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 43.
- "Come in humility, with a heart full of tenderness, and with a sense of the temptations and dangers before yourselves and your children; by faith bind them upon the altar, entreating for them the care of the Lord. Ministering angels will guard children who are thus dedicated to God. It is the duty of Christian parents, morning and evening, by earnest prayer and persevering faith, to make a hedge about their children." —*Testimonies*, Vol. 1, p. 397, 398.
- "When we talk with God in eternity we will quickly learn everything of worth that was accomplished was connected to an intercessor's prayer." —*Dick Eastman*
- "The power of a mother's prayers cannot be too highly estimated. . . . If she is connected by faith with the Son of God, the mother's tender hand may hold back her son from the power of temptation, may restrain her daughter from indulging in sin." (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the times*, March 16, 1891).

Handout: Lesson 8, B.

The Gift of Your Prayers

The greatest gift you can ever give your children is the gift of your prayers. When you pray for them, you are asking God to bless them with something only He can give: salvation, health, wisdom, understanding, love, joy, peace, and faith. Below are some statements from children who eventually recognized the tremendous gift of their parent's prayers.

● "I believe I should have been swept away by the flood of French infidelity, if it had not been for one thing, the remembrance of the time when my sainted mother used to make me kneel by her side, taking my little hands in hers, and caused me to repeat the Lord's Prayer."
—*John Randolph*

● "My mother's prayers and letters followed me, and from the moment I set foot on American soil, the Lord began to work miracle upon miracle until all the prayers of my mother in Switzerland were answered one by one." —*Emilio Knechtle*

● "Though I had gotten over sermons and arguments and churches and everything else, I could not get over my mother's prayers." —*Reuben A. Torrey*

● "I doubt I would be a Christian today if it had not been for prayer warriors praying for me when I was a reckless, rebellious teenager. One night I was driving home from a party in the wee hours of the morning when an overwhelming convictions came over me that I was lost. I could not shake it off. It was an unexplainable, oppressive feeling. I was miserable the whole way home. When I walked in the door I found out why. My father was sitting in the living room with his Bible on his lap, praying for me. That night was a turning point in my life. There is power in prayer! —*Clayton S. Peck*

● "It was owing to the faithful and daily prayers of my mother that I did not perish."
—*Augustine*

● "Our own experience leads us to believe that God will answer prayer. I must not speak for you; but I may speak for myself. If there be anything I know, anything that I am quite assured of beyond all question, it is that praying breath is never spent in vain. If no other man here can say it, I dare say it, and I know that I can prove it. My own conversion is the result of prayer, long, affectionate, earnest, importunate. Parents prayed for me; God heard their cries, and here I am to preach the Gospel." —*Charles Spurgeon*

V. Bible Study: Jairus (Mark 5:23, 23, 35-42, CWB) (10 minutes)

While He was by the lakeside, one of the local synagogue leaders, Jairus, came and fell on his knees in front of Jesus (verse 22).

and begged Him, saying, "My young daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her and heal her so she will live!" (verse 23).

Jesus said he would come and began following Jairus to his house. A huge crowd went along with him. (verse 24).

(Story of woman who touched Jesus' garment). (verses 25-34).

While he was speaking, others who had just come from Jairus's house pushed through the crowd and said to Jairus, "Sir, your daughter is dead. There's no use bothering the Master anymore." (verse 35).

Jesus overheard the news and said to Jairus, "Don't lose hope. Believe in me, just as this woman did." (verse 36).

Then He turned to the people and asked them not to follow Him. He also asked the disciples to stay with the people, but He did take Peter, James and John with Him. Led by Jairus, they went to his house as quickly as they could. (verse 37).

The professional mourners had already arrived, as had some of the relatives, and the house was full of mourners, weeping and wailing for Jairus' twelve-year-old daughter. (verse 38).

Jairus, Jesus and the disciples had to push their way in. Jesus then said to the professional mourners, "Why are you crying and making such a scene? The girl isn't dead; she's sleeping." (verse 39).

They laughed in His face. Then He insisted that everyone leave the house. When everyone was out, He, the parents and the three disciples went into the bedroom where the dead girl was lying. (verse 40).

Jesus took the little girl's hand and said, "Little girl, I want you to get up." (verse 41)

Instantly, she opened her eyes, sat up, and got out of bed. She looked around, then ran to her father and mother who had stopped crying and stood there dumfounded. (verse 42).

1. Why didn't Jesus answer the request of Jairus and go immediately to his house?
2. Of the people in this story, with whom do you identify at this point in your life? Why?
 - Jairus interceding for his child.
 - The mother waiting anxiously, hoping against hope.
 - The mourners and servants who had given up.
 - The curious crowd.
 - The disciples left behind.

- The three disciples who witnessed the miracle.
 - The girl who was dead.
3. What principles of intercession did Jairus observe?
 4. What is God saying to you in this story?

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 8 (20 minutes)

1. Let the members share a time when they saw Satan and his host tremble through the power of intercessory prayer. Let two or three share briefly. Try to think of a time from your own experience to add.
2. Prayer can go anywhere God can go was one of the points about the power of prayer. Share briefly a time when you saw God work a miracle in the life of someone you know because you prayed, even though you were separated by many miles. Let one or two share.
3. Have you had an experience in which you believe your prayers provided a hedge about your children? Let one or two share.
4. What are some of the concerns you have about children, grandchildren, or youth in general in church academies and colleges? Do you believe that prayer alone could make a difference? Why or why not?
5. What encouragement did you gain from the story of Caleb and Elizabeth LeTourneau's prayer for their son Robert?
6. If prayer is so powerful that it can go anywhere God can go and do anything God can do, then why do you think it is that we see so little of that power at work?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Divide into groups of two or three.
2. Go around your group and share where in your life and in the lives of your children you want to see God's power manifest during the next week. Be as specific as possible.
3. Make notes in your family tree booklets of the needs expressed.
4. Try to think of a Bible promise to claim for each need.
5. Go around the circle and pray for each other and for your children.
6. Make plans to telephone one other member of your group this week to pray together over the phone for your needs and for the needs of your children. Chose a time and decide who will make the call.
7. Before the next meeting, look for small indications that God's power is at work in the lives of your children.

Lesson 9

A Model for Intercession

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Think back over your past week. Where did you see God's power at work in your own life?
2. Where in the past week did you see God's power at work in the lives of your children?
3. Where else have you seen God's power at work? In the church? In your neighborhood? In world affairs?

II. Today's Topic: A Model for Intercession (15 minutes)

Now it is time to show you a model for effective intercession. For our model we will go to Scripture. There we find Mary Magdalene, a woman who desperately needed to change. We have combined Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, and the woman caught in adultery into the same person. There are some indications that this could be the case. Imagine with me how it must have been, how many people must have seen the need for change in her life, and how they tried to change her. Watch for how each one made a point of interceding with the Lord on behalf of Mary. What was wrong with their intercession?

A. The Wrong Way

1. Martha

There is so much to do! I should have had the food on the table long before this! I know Jesus must be terribly hungry after His long journey. Where is that sister of mine? There's no way one person can watch the ovens, stir the pots, arrange the fruit, and mix the wine all alone.

There she is! Sitting at the feet of Jesus as if she doesn't have a care in the world. That's the way she always is—so inconsiderate! She ought to be here helping me! Lazy bones! Why can't she be more like me, dependable, organized, hardworking, busy doing what must be done, accomplishing things! I don't know how many times I've told that girl! She just doesn't listen! I don't know what to do to change her. Perhaps I should ask Jesus to make her change. She'd sure be a lot easier to live with if she did.

There's no doubt about it, Martha wanted to change Mary. She used several methods to accomplish it: scolding, nagging, demanding, and confronting. She even tried intercessory prayer! She asked Jesus to order Mary to change!

2. The Pharisee

Did you hear the latest about Mary? I can't believe how far she has gone! Why she's nothing but a common slut, a prostitute, a whore, an adulteress. Disgusting!

She's from such a good family, too. How sad they must be. I feel so sorry for them. She ought to be stoned for her behavior for bringing disgrace on the whole community like that! She should be made an example of lest we have an epidemic of immorality!

That's it! We'll set out spies; catch her in the act; drag her through the streets; shame her publicly. We'll take her to court and have her punished. Maybe then she'll be more like us: upright, correct, obedient to the law and respectable.

Mary needed to change. The Pharisees set out to do it by naming, shaming, blaming, and punishing. They even brought her to Jesus in intercessory prayer asking Him to help them straighten her out!

3. Judas

I can't believe what I am seeing, smelling! Spikenard! The most costly of perfumes! Why that's equivalent to a man's wages for a whole year! Incredible waste! Has she no sense about the value of money? What a poor manager! She has just thrown away a year's wages!

Why I would never do such a thing! I know how to pinch pennies and save up for more worthwhile venues. She should be more like me, shrewd, careful, a wise investor, intelligent, a respected financier.

She needs a little education in finances. Perhaps I should give it to her, and the rest of this motley group of Jesus' followers while I'm at it. They need to know that a penny saved is as good as one earned!

Hmmm! I say there, to what purpose is this waste? If she had only given us the unbroken alabaster box we could have sold it for a good profit. Imagine how many poor people could have a good meal for that amount . . . more than a thousand! The Lord expects us to be good stewards of our means, doesn't He?

Oh, yes, Mary needed changing and Judas thought he knew how to do it: point out errors, criticize, argue your case, educate. He even spoke to Jesus about Mary's need to change, expecting no doubt that the Lord would respond to his intercessory prayer with a rebuke to Mary.

One woman who needed to change and three people ready to change her: Martha, the pharisee, and Judas. Among them they tried all the ways you and I so often use to try and change people: scolding, nagging, demanding, confronting, naming, shaming, blaming, punishing, pointing, criticizing, arguing, and educating. They all used intercessory prayer. They all presented the need for change to the Lord, but they didn't have it right.

B. The Right Way

Yes, Mary needed to change, and she did change. But how did that change occur? It came about by her own choice to yield to God's will. It came by her own decision to allow God to transform the weaknesses of her personality into strengths for His cause.

You and I can never change another human being, not even our children. Only God has that power. However, there are some things we can do to facilitate that desire for change.

For our model for facilitating change, for intercession, we look not to Martha, the Pharisee, nor to Judas, but to Christ. Let's see how He helped Mary change.

A—Accept

The first thing He did was accept her just as she was with all of her strengths and all of her weaknesses. She was a package and He loved her and accepted her as a total person, affirming her good points and overlooking her past mistakes. He accepted her with unconditional love. In that total acceptance of Jesus, Mary found the power that made her want to change.

B—Believe

The second thing Christ did was believe in Mary and her power of choice. It is expressed so beautifully in *Desire of Ages*, p. 568. "When to human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. Through His grace she became a partaker of the divine nature."

Christ saw hope and beauty in Mary when she couldn't see it in herself. He looked on the positive side of her character. He chose to talk about the good He saw. He believed in her. He believed that inside she wanted to overcome her weaknesses, and He believed that given the opportunity she would choose to have Him supply the power. He did not try to force her into change, for He believed in the power of choice He had given her. It was that belief in Mary that gave her hope.

C—Commit

The third thing Jesus did is found in *Desire of Ages*, p. 568. "He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. It was He who had lifted her from despair and ruin. Seven times she had heard His rebuke of the demons that controlled her heart and mind. She had heard His strong cries to the Father in her behalf. She knew how offensive is sin to His unsullied purity, and in His strength she had overcome."

Jesus prayed to the Father for Mary. He committed her into the hands of the only One who could give her the power to overcome. He prayed for her not once, but seven times, all the while being very specific, earnest, and courteous. (The above model for intercession is found in *The Best You Can Be*, by Dorothy Eaton Watts).

C. An Example of the ABC Model

In her book *The Best You Can Be*, Dorothy Watts tells the story of Marilyn and Virginia. Marilyn turned away from God after getting involved with a man and having a baby out of wedlock. Through this experience Virginia tried very hard to put the ABC model of intercession into practice.

Virginia felt like setting Marilyn straight, telling her a thing or two about whose fault the whole mess was, but she didn't. There were lots of things Marilyn needed to change, but Virginia kept quiet.

Instead Virginia looked for ways to show her daughter that she loved her even in Marilyn's anger against God. She looked for ways to encourage, to affirm the good things Marilyn was doing. Sometimes she listened to Marilyn's problems for hours and all she said was, "We love you, Honey. We believe in you. You're going to come out on top. You're a survivor. Don't worry if you can't pray. Daddy and I will pray double to make up for you."

It was hard for Virginia to watch her daughter doing things she had raised her not to do, living a different lifestyle, groping to find the answers, yet refusing to turn to the only One who could give the answers.

Virginia knew preaching, scolding, blaming, or shaming would not do the job, as much as she felt like using these methods. It was hard to watch Marilyn go in a downward path, and to still love her unconditionally, to accept her totally and express her belief in her, but she did it.

Little by little Marilyn found her way back to God. She began taking her baby to church. She attended a Bible study group. The pastor came to her home for studies. Eventually she was rebaptized.

One day Marilyn wrote a note to her mother that said in part, "Mom, I love you! I thank God for you. I thank Him for the inner strength and patience that you have that allows you to see the best in me and have faith in me in spite of all my faults and the mess I've made of my life."

That note helped Virginia to see that she wasn't a failure as a mother after all. She praises God that He had helped her to follow His method of intercessory prayer.

God had helped her accept Marilyn just as she was, with all of her blunders, mistakes, and sins. She tried to treat her with the same love that God showed to her.

Next Virginia believed in Marilyn. She tried to see the best in her and to affirm the good. She believed in her daughter's power of choice and was willing to give her the freedom that God allows, believing that eventually she would decide for the right.

Virginia daily commits her daughter to the One who loves her more than even she, her mother, could love her daughter. She gave her into the hands of the One who died on the cross to give her a chance of eternal life.

None of this was easy for Virginia. "It's only by God's grace and power that I've been able to do it," she testifies.

"God is working," Virginia declares. "I know His model for changing people really does work.

- Jesus accepted Levi-Matthew and Zacchaeus, both tax collectors, and despised by society. He showed his acceptance by eating with them and visiting in their homes. As a result of His acceptance we are told that they "longed to become worthy of His confidence. Upon their thirsty hearts His words fell with blessed, life-giving power. New impulses were awakened, and the possibility of a new life opened to these outcasts of society." *The Desire of Ages*, p. 274.

- The trust Jesus showed in asking the Samaritan woman for a drink, awakened within her trust. By sharing some of the most profound truths of Salvation with this immoral woman, Jesus showed His belief in what she could become by His power—a wonderful witness of His love. She did not disappoint Him. So powerful is His affirmation of the possibilities in each human being, and His belief in them that it gave them the needed strength to believe in themselves.

III. Parent Showcase: Grant Swank (5 minutes)

Grant Swank sat on the edge of the bed and looked down at his son, Jay. The boy was curled up under the blankets, his face turned toward the wall.

He's expecting another scolding, Grant thought. Should I bring up his wrong doing now in prayer, lecturing him in the presence of the Lord? Or should I be more concerned with healing his hurt and restoring our relationship?

Just then Jay turned his face on the pillow, looking up at Grant with liquid brown eyes. Dad's own heart melted as he realized how very much he loved his son. Grant bowed his head and began, "Dear Lord, Thank you for Jay. You know how much I love him. He means the world to me. Thank you for giving him to us. May he always serve you. Now we thank you for a good night's sleep. Be near us all and help tomorrow to be a good day. In Jesus' name, Amen." Jay reached up and hugged his dad tightly around the neck. Grant folded his arms around his son.

"Daddy, do you love me even when I'm bad?" Jay whispered.

"Yes," Grant replied, giving him a squeeze, "I always love you."

"You're the best Daddy in the world," Jay said, laying his head on Grant's shoulder.

Thank You, Lord, for this moment, Grant thought. Thank you for helping me to remember that love overlooks wrongs. (J. Grant Swank, Jr., *Decision*, June, 1991, p. 42).

That night Grant Swank loved Jay as God had loved him. Without realizing it, Grant followed Christ's ABC model for intercessory prayer.

Grant accepted Jay just as he was, a child who had made mistakes, but one who also had marvelous possibilities for growth. He didn't scold or lecture. He didn't shame or blame. He simply loved. He was more concerned about healing the hurt and restoring the relationship than he was in pointing out error.

Grant believed in the infinite possibilities for growth in Jay. He believed that if he gave him freedom, Jay would want to do better. He chose to believe in the positive aspects of Jay's character.

Grant prayed for Jay. He committed him into the hands of the only One who can make change happen. He didn't use prayer as a subtle form of manipulation. He simply prayed for him.

IV. Handout: Lesson 9, A.

Accept, Believe, Commit

1. William Lovelace

“Throughout my life I had the clear knowledge that no matter what I did, good or bad, my parents would accept me. Mother, for all her concern for us children, was full of forgiveness and abundant in her ability to make us feel important. We were important to her, and she showed her joy openly when we succeeded. She also accepted our failures with understanding and support.” (*My Unforgettable Parents*, Kay Kuzma, p. 85).

2. Neal C. Wilson

“I knew (my parents) loved me, not because I was good and did everything they wanted me to, but because I was their son. Even if I failed or hurt them, they had faith in me . . . One must have faith in people, and even if they fail and hurt you, it is important to keep bringing out the best in them and thus encourage them to improve.” (*My Unforgettable Parents*, p. 145).

3. Virginia Cason

“When I grew older, I heard my parents (Elder and Mrs. H. M. S. Richards) pray for me on several occasions when they thought I was asleep. I awakened in the night, hearing voices in the next room. When I thought I heard my name, I crept from bed and pressed my ear to the wall. Sure enough, they were praying for me. Not because I was so wicked or had done something particularly appalling, but just because they loved me so much and wanted me to know the joy of a Christian life. That did something to me. I remember many times when I gave my parents cause to worry about me, but I cannot remember severe censure or harsh, reprimanding words. My dad would put his arm around my shoulders and give me a loving squeeze. ‘Honey,’ he would say, ‘Mother and I love you very much. God loves you too. And we’re just asking the good Lord to help you make the right decisions.’” (*My Unforgettable Parents*, p. 29).

4. Kenneth Wood

“(My parents) were able to accept people’s weaknesses as a natural part of the human condition. They always put the best possible construction on the motives and conduct of others.” (*My Unforgettable Parents*, p. 155).

Handout: Lesson 9, B.

Methods of Intercessory Prayer

- **The Simple List**

Keep a written list of people for whom you want to pray regularly. Pray for the entire list, visualize that person, and give his/her name to the Lord along with any concerns.

- **The Promise List**

Keep a list of people for whom you are praying. Beside each name write a Bible promise you are claiming for his/her particular need(s). Make a note of any answers to these prayers. Lesson 5 will focus on promises parents can use in praying for their children.

- **The Photo Album**

One lady, confined to bed, keeps a family album of those for whom she is praying. Every day she goes through the album and prays for the people she loves.

- **Birthdays and Anniversaries**

Some people keep a list of their family members birthdays and anniversaries. They have a special time of intercession for those loved ones on their special day. Others concentrate their prayers for a month or a week on any family members who have special days during the month or the week.

- **The Eggs Basket**

Catherine Marshall talks about the "eggs prayer" in her book *Adventures in Prayer*. She suggests that we turn our hopes and dreams into prayers and write them on slips of paper cut in egg shapes to symbolize our willingness to let God "hatch them out" in His own time. She did this for her children and tucked them away and forgot about them until one day she came across the slips of paper in an old Bible. She was amazed that a loving Father had fulfilled every single request.

David seemed to know about the principle of "eggs prayers" when he wrote, "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait I say on the Lord."

"God's purposes know no haste and no deals," says Ellen White (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 32). We can bring our requests to Him trusting Him to work things out in His own time. Here is how to use your "eggs basket" for intercessory prayer.

- Write each intercessory prayer on a piece of paper cut into an egg shape to symbolize your willingness to let God "hatch" it in His own time.

- Hide the prayers in a safe place, showing your trust in God to do whatever He thinks is

best with those prayers when the time is right. You might choose a small box or basket which sits on your desk or bedside table or they could be hidden in a file drawer or a Bible.

- After several weeks, months, or years take them out. You will be amazed at how God has worked.
- Consider those prayers that have not yet been "hatched." Are they still a deep desire of your heart? Then put them back and wait. Evidently God's timing hasn't come.
- Make a nest of eggs for each family member. Write the name of a loved one on each egg. Under the name write one desire that you have for that person. Turn the egg over and write a promise that you are claiming for that person. Put your eggs prayers away and let them hatch.
- Consider your daily prayers of intercession something like the act of a mother hen sitting on her eggs to keep them warm and just waiting for them to hatch when the time is right. As you attend to these eggs you will become aware of movement inside the egg, the hard shells cracking, and the working of God to answer your prayers. Praise Him for every indication the eggs are cracking! *Prayer Country*, by Dorothy Watts, p. 28, 29.

V. Bible Study: The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32, CWB) (10 minutes)

The Son Who Left Home

Jesus continued, “A certain man had two sons. The younger of the two was restless and wanted to leave home. One day he said to his father, ‘Father, I would like to have my inheritance while I’m still young and can enjoy it.’ The father reluctantly divided up the inheritance between his two boys and gave the younger his share of the money. After a few days the younger son got his things together and left. He went to another country and there spent all his money on riotous living, throwing big parties and having a good time. When all his money was gone, a famine hit that country and he was in need but couldn’t get a job anywhere. Finally, a man hired him to watch his pigs. The desperate young man accepted the offer and went to take care of the pigs, a most insulting task for a Hebrew. He was so hungry that what the pigs ate looked tempting to him. No one offered him anything. He finally came to his senses and said, ‘What am I doing here? Just think how many people my father has working for him — all well paid and well fed. In fact, there’s usually so much food left over that they have to throw some of it away! And here I sit among pigs! I’m going home! I’m going to say to my father, ‘Father, please forgive me for sinning against God and against you. I’m not fit to be called your son, but please give me a job as one of your workers.’ As weak as he was, he got up and made his way home.”

The Son Returns

“But while he was still a great way off, his father, who had been watching the distant road, spotted, him. His heart went out to his son with great compassion and love. He got up and ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. When the boy’s emotions were under control, he said, ‘Father, please forgive me. I’ve sinned against God and against you. I’m not fit to be called your son. . .’ But before he could finish, his father turned to the servants who had come running and said to them, ‘Run back to the house and bring my best robe for my son; bring my ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Then go out and find one of the best calves we have, slaughter it and prepare a feast! We’re going to celebrate! This is my son who was lost. I thought he was dead, but he’s home!’ The servants did what the father asked them to, and everyone began to celebrate.

The Older Son Comes

"The older son had been working out in the field when all this happened. When he came near the house, he heard music and saw everyone dancing for joy. So he called one of the servants and asked him what this was all about. The servant said, ‘Your brother has just come home! Your father asked us to slaughter one of the prize calves and prepare a feast to celebrate his safe return!’ Then the older son became angry and refused to join in the celebration. So his father went looking for him. When he found him, he begged him to come see his brother and take part in the festivities. But he said to his father, ‘All these years while my brother was gone I’ve worked hard for you to build up the farm and whatever you asked me to do, I did. Yet you never slaughtered a goat for me and my friends so we could have a party like this. But as soon as this son of yours comes home

from wasting the family fortune on prostitutes and riotous living, you throw a party for him!' Then the father said, 'Son, the farm and everything I have belongs to you; but your brother has nothing but us now. So it's right to celebrate his homecoming and be glad he's back. You see, I really thought he was dead, but he's alive. Don't you think that's reason enough to celebrate?'"

1. With which of the characters in this story do you most identify? Think carefully about how you treat people, particularly those who have done wrong, those who have disappointed you terribly.
 - The father
 - The older brother
 - The servants
 - The owner of the pigs
2. Why do you think the younger boy decided to leave home? What are some of the reasons why young people leave God and the church now?
3. Both sons in this story disappointed the father. What blame can you place on the father for their behavior? Should the father be blamed? (Think about free will.) Was there anything he could have done to make things different?
4. What was it that caused the lost son to come to his senses and decide to return home?
5. If you have a son or a daughter who has gone into the far country, what do you think they will remember about home that will draw them back again? What pleasant memories do you have that you believe your child also has?
6. Why do you think the father chose to stay home and wait for his son rather than go looking for him. No doubt there were detectives who could have helped him find his boy. Why didn't he go looking for him?
7. How do you feel about the way the father treated the prodigal? Was it a wise thing to do? Why or why not? Would you be willing to do that for your child?
8. What message does God have for you in this parable? Are these all true?
 - You should let your children go, even though you know they are going to make a mess of things.
 - Love has no strings attached.
 - Waiting for your children to come home is painful.
 - Love covers a multitude of evil.
 - Children are bound to disappoint you.
 - Your children need to know you're ready for a party.

- We can never be good enough for God's love.
- Relationships are more important than right behavior.

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 9 (20 minutes)

1. Ask the group to share experiences about when they were rejected, scolded, or criticized. How did it make them feel? Did it make them want to change?
2. Ask the group to think of someone in life who has accepted them unconditionally, loving them, affirming them, without any criticism or denunciation. How did it make them feel? Did it help them in anyway want to be different persons?
3. Who was the person who was most responsible for helping you find your way to the Lord or into the church. What kind of a person was he or she? How did they treat you? What was it about them that attracted you to Christianity?
4. Go around the circle and ask each person to name one of their children for whom you are praying. List as many good qualities about that person as you can. Make a plan this week for calling or writing a note to affirm your child about his or her good qualities, making no mention of changes that need to be made.
5. Think of other encounters Jesus had with people when He was living on earth. Can you give examples of how He used the ABC model for facilitating change in their lives? Some people think about Peter and the woman at the well. How did He show His acceptance of them? His belief in them? Do you have any evidence that He prayed for them?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Center your group prayer around the ACTS model for prayer.
2. The leader will begin and end each section of the prayer, urging the group to pray brief sentence prayers that fit into each topic.
3. Individuals may pray silently if they wish--public confession must not be asked for or forced.

A - Adoration. Give particular attention to praising God for the wonderful love He shows to us and our children.

C - Confession. Particularly confess your own sins as a parent, for the times you have not been as loving and accepting as Christ.

T - Thanksgiving. Thank the Lord for ways you are seeing Him work in your lives and the lives of your children. Thank Him for your children and the present circumstances good or bad.

S - Supplication. Offer your concerns and requests.

Lesson 10

Promises for Parents

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Place the following objects before the group: keys, pen, scissors, magnet, funnel, hammer, mirror, glue, spoon, knife, soap, sponge, tape, ruler, magnifying glass.
2. Ask the parents to choose one of the objects to represent their relationship with their children. They may want to say what the relationship is or what they would like for it to be. (Keep the focus on the parent, not the adult children.)
3. It is possible that they have a different relationship with different children.
4. Another way to look at it is to think about what the purpose of each of the objects is and how that says something about their purpose as parents at their stage in parenting.
5. Allow time for as many as wish to share. Draw them out a bit, getting them to tell why they chose a particular object.

II. Today's Topic: Promises for Parents (15 minutes)

Five-year-old Billy sat listening to his mom and dad discussing a perplexing problem.

"Whatever are we going to do?" sighed Mother.

"I don't know," Father shook his head, worry lines wrinkling his forehead. "I don't know where else to go for help."

"Why don't you ask Harold to help?" Billy asked.

"Harold?" Father replied. "Who's Harold? I don't know any Harold."

"Yes, you do," Billy insisted. "You know, Our Father which art in heaven, Harold be thy name!"

How often you and I have been like Billy's mom and dad, worrying, fretting, stewing, not knowing where to turn next. When all we need to do is "Ask Harold."

Of course, intellectually we all believe this. We know that we can depend on Jesus Christ the living Word, and on the Bible, His written word. We believe in Bible promises, that's

why we are meeting together each week. Today we will focus on some of the precious promises God has for parents. You may think of others as we go along. During our discussion time, you will have an opportunity to share promises that have meant a lot to you as a parent.

A. Claiming the Promises

"A promise is the handle of faith that we can grasp in prayer," writes Catherine Marshall in her book *Adventures in Prayer*.

"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." (1 John 5:14)

A promise in Scripture is the stated will of God for us. Knowing that it is His will for us, we can claim the promise in full assurance that He will do as He has said. As David Livingstone observed, "It's the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour!"

Peter Marshall once stated, "In these pages (of the Bible) are the living words of the living God. These words include a lot of promises, many of them with conditions attached. All we have to do is to meet the conditions, then step up and claim them."

According to Glenn Coon, author of many books on claiming the promises, there are 3,573 promises in the Word. He outlines the ABC method of claiming the promises. (*A Study Guide to the Prayer of Reception*).

A—Ask. Matthew 7:7.

"It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask." (*The Great Controversy*, p. 525).

"Every promise in the Word of God furnishes us with subject matter for prayer, presenting the pledged word of Jehovah as our assurance." (*The Mount of Blessing*, p. 190).

B—Believe. Mark 11:24.

"Talk and act as if your faith was invincible." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 146).

"While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith . . . we should have more faith." (*Ministry of Healing*, pp. 252, 253).

C—Claim. John 11:41.

"So we may ask for these blessings, and believe that we receive them, and thank God that we have received them." *Steps to Christ*, p. 51.

"I entreat you to let your trembling faith again grasp the promises of God. Bear your whole weight upon them with unwavering faith; for they will not, they cannot fail." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 497).

"True faith lays hold of and claims the promised blessing before it is realized and felt . . . We must send up our petitions in faith . . . and take hold of the promised blessing and claim it as ours...Here is faith, naked faith, to believe that we receive the blessing, even before we realize it." (*Early Writings*, p. 72).

"Whatever gift He promises, is in the promise itself. The seed is the word of God (Luke 8:11) As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise. If we receive the promise we have the gift." (*Education*, p. 253).

B. When One Family Prayed

In his book *Foolish Prayers, Fabulous Answers*, Glenn Coon shares the story of how the Calhoun family prayed for their son. Their reasoning went like this:

"The Word of God says, 'The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will' (Proverbs 21:1) Why would not a God who changed the heart of the king in answer to prayer of the Prophet Daniel (Dan. 10:12, 13), change the heart of the boy away from his father's home? . . . Anything He has ever done in ages past, He will do again, under like circumstances and with like faith.

"Brother Calhoun, his family, and a few friends knelt together in the sunny parlor of the homey farmhouse. All was still, save for the audible voice of each suppliant, and the ticking of the clock. In the midst of the prayers, three chimes rang out. Still the prayers went on, each person loathe to rise from his knees; each heart yearning after the alienated son.

"At that moment, on a nearby farm, the son glanced behind to the neatly plowed furrow and ahead to the distant object which helped to keep the furrow straight. A strange uneasiness possessed him. An odd compulsion seized him, and nothing would shake it off. His mind became flooded with thoughts of home . . . What if something was wrong at home? Suppose they needed him?

"He raised the plow, turned the mules, and headed for the barn . . . The owner followed him.

"'Having trouble with the plow?' asked the farmer. 'Has something gone wrong?'

"'No, I have to go home,' the youth replied.

"What do you mean 'go home'?" the farmer demanded. 'This is no time to close your work for the day.'

"I know it, but something has happened, and I must go home.'

"Oh, foolishness!' The farmer turned aside in disgust. 'You are just emotional.'

"No, it is not that,' the boy insisted. 'Something has happened and I must go home at once.'

"But you can't just leave!' the farmer remonstrated. 'I need you!'

"All during the conversation, the boy tugged at the harnesses, placed implements where they belonged and returned the mules to their stall.

"Gathering up a few belongings, the young man waved a cheery 'Good-bye' leaving the farmer fuming in his backyard."

Can you imagine how those parents felt when the boy showed up at home and they learned that at the same hour the family had knelt in prayer he had been impressed to come home? Not only did the boy return home, he found God and salvation. (*Foolish Prayers, Fabulous Answers*, p. 60-62).

The promise Glenn Coon suggests that was kept in this instance was one found in Jeremiah 24:6,7: "For I will set mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up. And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the Lord: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart."

C. Monica's Example of Claiming

How well Monica remembered the day her son Augustine was born, November 13, 354, in the little town of Thagaste, not far from Carthage in North Africa. From the moment of his birth she had been praying that he would become a Christian.

When Augustine was a teenager his father sent him to the best schools. The boy did well in his studies, but at the same time he succumbed to the temptations of the city and led a wicked life. Then one night he told his mother that he was going to say goodbye to a friend who was going to Rome.

Actually, Augustine was running away from home. Boarding a ship, he sailed away from his family.

The wayward life of her son nearly broke Monica's heart, but she would not give up

praying for him. On the night that he ran away from home Monica went into a nearby chapel, fell on her knees and prayed all night. Among the things she did in prayer that night was to place her finger on promises of God's word. (*Testimonies*, Vol. 5, p. 322)

One day she felt so bad about what Augustine had done that she talked to a Christian teacher about him. When she had finished her story, tears were streaming down her cheeks.

"Go thy way," the teacher said. "God will help thee. It is not possible that the child of these tears should perish."

God answered Monica's prayers in a remarkable way. By chance Augustine went to Milan, where he met a godly man Ambrose. He told Ambrose about the emptiness of his life and the restlessness he felt. He told how he had traveled many miles to many places, where he had done wild and wicked things, but he could not escape his mother's prayers.

After studying with Ambrose for some time, Augustine gave his heart to Jesus and decided to be baptized. Of course he wanted his mother to witness his baptism. So it was that Monica was there that day in 387 in Milan to witness Ambrose baptize her son. The prayers of 33 years had been answered at last! (Dorothy Eaton Watts, *This Is The Day*, p. 325).

What promises do you suppose Monica claimed? **Brainstorm.**

- "I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children." Isaiah 49:25.

- "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers (mothers) to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers (mothers)." Malachi 4:5,6.

- "The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9.

- "If any man see his brother (son, daughter) sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life." 1 John 5:16.

- "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:4.

- "Train up a child in the way he (or she) should go, and when he (or she) is old he (or she) will not depart from it." Proverbs 22:6.

- "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will

perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:6.

- "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." Hosea 14:3.

- "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." Isaiah 49:15, 16.

- "With God all things are possible." Mark 10:27.

- "Have I not spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it." Isaiah 46:11.

- "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us." 2 Corinthians 1:20.

- "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" Numbers 23:19.

- "Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof." Joshua 23:14.

- "Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." Psalm 119:90.

- "He is faithful that promised." Hebrews 10:23.

- "I thank thee that thou hast heard me." John 11:24.

- "I love the Lord because he hath heard my voice and my supplication." Psalm 116:1.

- "And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform." Romans 4:21.

- "There is nothing too hard for thee." Jeremiah 32:17.

- "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39.

- "I have called thee by thy name, thou art mine." Isa. 43:1.

III. Parent Showcase: Pam Caruso (5 minutes)

The following is taken from the women's devotional book for 1994, *The Listening Heart*, edited by Rose Otis. Pam Caruso is retired but still actively involved in community service work. She enjoys reading, writing, classical music, walking, playing the piano, and helping with the very young children in her church. She writes: "How often I have agonized about my failure as a mother! Though I did what I thought was best in rearing my children to know and love God, as they reached maturity one by one they chose to live their lives apart from Him.

"This despair I feel is not mine alone. Many other Christian mothers, some of whom are the most godly women I know, express the same turmoil of spirit. 'If only' they cry. 'If only I had done things differently.' If only! But even as I cry out to God in my deepest pain, I remember that He understands. He has been there! He was perfect, yet one third of His angels chose to live apart from Him. Even Adam and Eve had a son who chose not to follow God, though he had been to the gate of the Garden of Eden and knew the story of his parents' fall. I do not suggest that I have been a perfect mother. Yet my heavenly Father knows that I did my best, and He understands and weeps with me. It gives me courage and hope to know that the One who gave His only begotten Son to redeem me knows my pain.

"As I daily lay my children on the altar of God in heartfelt prayer, I am comforted by such promises as Philippians 1:6, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus' (NIV). I know that as much as I love my children, God loves them infinitely more. He will continue to draw them to Him. He will never give up."

"The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house . . . A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of divine love, is passed around every imperiled soul" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 202).

"Keep loving your children and praying for them," Pam Caruso says. "As long as there is life there is hope."

The text Pam chose for that day's reading was 1 John 2:1 (NIV): "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."

IV. Handout: Lesson 10

Claiming the Promises

A—Ask Matthew 7:7

"It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask." *The Great Controversy*, p. 525.

"Every promise in the Word of God furnishes us with subject matter for prayer, presenting the pledged word of Jehovah as our assurance." *The Mount of Blessing*, p. 190.

B—Believe Mark 11:24.

"Talk and act as if your faith was invincible." (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 146).

"While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words. If we would give more expression to our faith . . . we should have more faith." (*Ministry of Healing*, pp. 252, 253).

C—Claim John 11:41.

"So we may ask for these blessings, and believe that we receive them, and thank God that we have received them." *Steps to Christ*, p. 51).

"I entreat you to let your trembling faith again grasp the promises of God. Bear your whole weight upon them with unwavering faith; for they will not, they cannot fail." (*Testimonies*, Vol. 2, p. 497).

"True faith lays hold of and claims the promised blessing before it is realized and felt . . . We must send up our petitions in faith . . . and take hold of the promised blessing and claim it as ours. Here is faith, naked faith, to believe that we receive the blessing, even before we realize it." (*Early Writings*, p. 72).

"Whatever gift He promises, is in the promise itself . . . As surely as the oak is in the acorn, so surely is the gift of God in His promise. If we receive the promise we have the gift." (*Education*, p. 253).

Promises for Parents

Acts 2:39

Jeremiah 24:6,7

2 Peter 3:9

Philippians 1:6

Psalm 119:90

Isaiah 49:25

1 John 5:16

1 John 2:1

Numbers 23:19

Malachi 4:5,6

Hosea 14:4

Proverbs 22:6

V. Bible Study: The Canaanite Woman (Matthew 15:22-28, CWB) (10 min)

While Jesus was in the coastal area, a Canaanite woman approached Him and with tears in her eyes said, "Have mercy on me, Lord, son of David. My daughter is possessed by a devil." (verse 22).

But Jesus, contrary to His nature, completely ignored her, as any pious Jew would have done. Seeing this, the disciples thought that Jesus was condoning their practice and suggested to Him that He send her away because she was bothering them. (verse 23).

Jesus looked at the woman and said, "My commitment is to help the Israelites." (verse 24).

Then she fell on her knees in front of Him and bowed low, begging Jesus to help her. (verse 25).

But again Jesus rebuffed her by saying, "It's not right to take the family dinner and give it to the dogs." (verse 26).

The woman responded, "That's true, Lord, but family dogs are taken care of by their owners and are given the leftovers." (verse 27).

Then Jesus responded with His normal kindness and compassion, "Dear woman, you have a very strong faith. I really do care about you and your daughter. Your request is granted and your daughter is now well." The disciples then realized that Jesus was revealing the contrast between their cold cultural bias and the compassion that God wanted them to have. (verse 28).

1. Think through this story. Does the woman take the first step in claiming the promises? Does she ask? What is her request?
2. Does the woman take the second step to claiming the promises by believing? What statements and actions on her part shows that she believed?
3. Does she claim the promises of God, reaching out by faith and accepting what the Lord is willing to give? What action or words shows she was laying hold of the Word of God?
4. What was the basis for her asking? What hope did she have? What did she base her faith upon? Notice that she asks for mercy, certainly something God has promised. It is part of God's character. Can you think of any Old Testament promises of mercy? (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 130:7; Hosea 14:3).
5. She calls him Lord, Son of David, which shows that she recognized who he was,

the Messiah. What promised blessing of the Messiah might she have been claiming? (Isaiah 61).

6. Jesus walked a hundred miles out of his way to answer this mother's prayer. "Christ knew this woman's situation. He knew that she was longing to see Him, and He placed Himself in her path." (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 400) What hope does this give you about your petitions for your children?

VI. Group Discussion on Lesson 10 (20 minutes)

1. Do you agree that the promises of Scripture are "the word of a Gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honour?" What is the basis for your faith in God's Word?
2. Share a time when God kept one of His promises to you. (Allow several to respond).
3. Can you think of a promise God has given that you claimed and He did not keep His word? If you can remember such a promise, then what could be the difficulty? Are there conditions that are not yet met? Or perhaps has the time not yet come? Do you think the problem could be your faith?
4. "While words express thoughts, it is also true that thoughts follow words," says Ellen White. Can you think of a time when you talked faith and hope when in reality you felt something more akin to hopelessness and despair? What effect did your faith talk have on you, on others? Is this being a hypocrite to talk what you do not feel?
5. Can you think of some Bible examples of people who talked faith, acted upon faith, even when they had no evidence that God would do what He had said? (Gideon, Joshua and Jericho, Israelites singing song of victory when defeat looked certain. (There are many other examples.)
6. Share some of your own favorite Bible promises for parents. What hope do these verses give you?

VII. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Go around the circle, each person thinking of a promise they want to claim for their children. Make the promise as specific to the child's needs as possible. Help one another come up with suitable promises.
2. Divide into smaller groups of three or four.
3. Spend a few moments in praise for God's unfailing promises, for His mercy, love,

steadfastness, and trustworthiness.

4. Next spend a few moments in thanksgiving for promises already kept, for evidences that God is working to fulfill His word in your life and the lives of your children.

5. Next pray for your children, following the ABC pattern of prayer.

A—Ask for something God has already promised.

B—Express your belief that God will do it.

C—Reach out and claim the answer, thanking God that He is already doing what He has promised.

Lesson 11

Cementing Relationships: A New Beginning

I. Sharing Time (10 minutes)

1. Divide into groups of three or four. Each group should share for two minutes discussing the following questions. Allow about 30 seconds for each person. The leader should not participate in this. Signal at the end of two minutes and give an extra minute if it seems warranted.

2. Questions:

- a. Where were you living when you were seven years old? Describe the house and setting.
- b. How was your home heated in the winter?
- c. What was your favorite room in the house? Describe it. Tell what you did in that room that was so special.
- d. Who was the center of warmth in your home? How did they show that warmth to you?

II. Today's Topic: Cementing Relationships (15 minutes)

Seven-year-old Lauren ran into the house and threw himself on the bed and cried out, "Oh, that I had my life to live over again!"

With these words Faith Keeney, a grandmother, began her devotional in *A Gift of Love*. Faith had no problem knowing how Lauren felt that day. Lauren's life was short and he wished there was a way to undo the mess to just start all over and do it right. Faith's life was a lot longer, but she felt the same way. Oh, if only she could live life over again! How much wiser she would be!

Someone at a similar stage in life once wrote, "If life had a second edition, how I would correct the proofs!"

Looking back Faith made these statements of what she would do differently if she could. She would be:

- More thoughtful of her parents, a little more unselfish.
- Kinder, more thoughtful when they were tired.
- More helpful and try to cause her parents less worry.
- More appreciative of their work and sacrifices.
- A better wife and mother.
- Quicker to take her problems to God, sticking close to the principles she learned.

Faith can't turn back the clock, and neither can we. We can only start with now and do the best we can.

An anonymous friar in a monastery in Nebraska once expressed his regrets in the following letter.

*If I had my life to live over again,
I'd try to make more mistakes next time.
I would relax, I would limber up,
I would be sillier than I have been this trip.
I know of very few things I would take seriously.
I would take more trips; I would be crazier.
I would climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets.
I would do more walking and looking.
I would eat less ice cream and more beans.
I would have more actual troubles, and fewer imaginary ones.
You see, I'm one of those people who lives life carefully and sensibly hour after hour, day after day.
Oh, I've had my moments; and if I had to do it over again, I'd have more of them.
In fact, I'd try to have nothing else, just moments, one after another, instead of living so many years ahead each day. I've been one of those people who never went anywhere without a thermometer, a hot-water bottle, a gargle, a raincoat, aspirin, and a parachute.
If I had to do it over again, I would go places, do things, and travel lighter than I have.
If I had my life to live over, I would start barefoot earlier in the spring and stay that way later in the fall.
I would play hooky more.
I wouldn't make such good grades, except by accident.
I would ride on more merry-go-rounds.
I'd pick more daisies.*

It's not too late to start today!

If you could do your parenting over again, wouldn't you, too, have more of those "golden moments" with your children, "moments" of fun and laughter that cement relationships and bind families together?

It's not too late to start today!

That's what today's lesson is about, things we can do to have more "golden moments" with our adult children and our grandchildren. We can't turn back the clock, but we can make the most of the time we have left!

*The clock of life is wound but once,
And no man has the power,
To tell just when the hands will stop,
At late or early hour.
Now is the only time you own,
So live, love, laugh with a will.
Place no faith in tomorrow
For the hands may then be still.*

—Author unknown

So what can you and I do, **now, today?**

(Today's presentation is different in that it will be going over several ideas, then stopping to let the parents give their own ideas along the same line.

Thus the presentation, showcase, handout, and discussion time will all be together in one activity. There will follow a Bible study and prayer time.

Make a copy of the handout pages. Go over each section together and allow time at the end of each section for comments from the group.)

III. Handout: Lesson 11 (pages 117 - 123)

Cementing Relationships

Practical Suggestions of What Parents Can Do

A. The Cement of Affirmation and Appreciation

"Pleasant words are as honeycomb, sweet to the mind and healing to the body." (Proverbs 16:24 Amplified).

Our children never grow too old to need words of affirmation and appreciation to build them up, to give them courage to go on with life. In his book, *Orphans at Home*, Joe White suggests fifty great ways to tell our children and grandchildren that they are loved.

1. You're so much fun to be around!
2. You get better at that every time I see you. Way to go!
3. Hang on a second while I call *Sports Illustrated*—they'll want a picture of this!
4. I'm going to brag about this. That's great!
5. I look up to you.
6. That's the best I've ever seen.
7. You are so thoughtful!
8. This is a tremendous improvement.
9. Good for you!
10. You're such a joy to us!
11. I never did that well when I was your age.
12. Can I put this on the bulletin board at the office so I can see it every day?
13. You handled that beautifully!
14. That's incredible!
15. You're always teaching me something wonderful.
16. They just didn't make kids as good as you when I was growing up.
17. You're really special to me—and getting more special every day.
18. Keep that up and you'll be the world champion someday!
19. I really enjoy being with you.
20. What a super effort!
21. The guy who marries you will be so fortunate.
22. Your mom and I are so grateful to be your parents.
23. I need to get word to the White House about this—the President will want to know about it!
24. That's worth a trophy ten feet high!
25. I really enjoy your smile.
26. That's fabulous!
27. There you go! That's it!
28. You're so helpful. Thank you.
29. You're going to make it!

30. God is truly a miracle worker—to produce a kid as great as you from ordinary parents like us.
31. I wish I could have done it that well.
32. You'll always be in my hall of fame!
33. I'm impressed!
34. I know you worked very hard on that. Wonderful job!
35. You're the best!
36. You sure know how to do it right. Outstanding!
37. I love to hear your laugh.
38. You're something else!
39. That's amazing! How did you do that?
40. You take my breath away!
41. You never cease to amaze me!
42. I really like that!
43. Sensational!
44. Absolutely superb!
45. I believe in you!
46. Excellent! That's the way to do it!
47. You sure are growing up!
48. Fantastic!
49. You make me so happy!
50. I love you!

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B. The Cement of Memories.

Most parents and grandparents have boxes, albums, and drawers full of photos, souvenirs, and mementos kept to remind them of happy days with their children or grandchildren.

Recently Ron's mother passed away. In the process of going through her papers he discovered boxes of such treasures she had kept that told of what was precious to her about her children. Among those treasures he found:

1. The first letter he ever wrote to her, when he was about eight years old. It was a list of what he wanted for Christmas.
2. A certificate for perfect attendance he received in first grade. He had no idea she was so proud of that!
3. His grade slips from academy and college.
4. A newspaper clipping showing him as part of a crowd watching a holiday parade.
5. Every birthday and Mother's Day card he had ever sent.

6. Letters written by him and his wife during 35 years of living and traveling around the world. It was a veritable history of his life preserved.
7. Photographs by the hundreds.
8. News clippings of his graduation from college, his marriage, and his departure to India as a missionary.

Not once had she told him that she had those treasures. He had no idea that these things meant so much to her or that she was so proud of him and all his achievements!

Suggestions:

1. Make a scrapbook of certificates, awards, news clippings, and other moments you have saved that show you the happy memories of your child. Give it to them before you die.
2. Make a scrapbook or notebook of all the letters and cards they have sent you through the years. Sometime when they visit, show it to them. Let them know how precious their communications have been. Call attention to a few that are especially meaningful.
3. Prepare a photo album telling the life story of each of your children, along with brief comments of affirmation and history. Give it to them as a gift. Do the same for your grandchildren.
4. Arrange a fast moving slide show or video sequences that expresses the good times you have had together as a family. Show it at a family gathering. Make copies for all of your children and grandchildren.
5. Sometime when you are relaxed with your grown children, ask them to tell you three happy times they remember as a child; three sad times; three upsetting times, etc. It can be a time of laughter, tears, and healing.

C. The Cement of Special Celebrations.

In an article in *Today's Christian Woman* (January/February 1990, p. 33) Authors Dave and Claudia Arp say, "Too often we wait for special events like birthdays or holidays, and then we're rushed. We don't have to wait for a big event—but we do have to slow down. Stop right now and set aside some time today. Look at those special people and events that surround you. Think about the next few weeks and see if you can discover some reasons for celebrating."

Maybe family celebrations haven't been a part of your family traditions, but here are some ideas. It's never too late to start.

Here are some unusual, often-passed-by events that could be made a means to make a small celebration for some member of your family.

Suggestions:

1. Teenager gets his driver's license.
2. Small grandchild dresses himself for first time.
3. A son or daughter gets a promotion.
4. A grandchild has a music recital.
5. A grandchild's team has a football victory.
6. The anniversary of the day a stray cat came to live with you.
7. The anniversary of when you moved to your present home.
8. An empty nest party, for the day the last child left home.
9. Good test results from your latest mammogram.
10. The last payment on a house or car.
11. A grandchild's braces are removed.
12. The first day of spring.
13. A gorgeous sunset.
14. The return of the robins.
15. A child receives an employee of the month award.
16. A dog's birthday.
17. The first snowfall.

Celebrations don't always have to be a party or dinner at your house. Take the family out, make a bowl of popcorn, bake a favorite recipe, telephone, send flowers or a helium filled balloon, write a card or letter, write a poem, take some photos. The affirmation and recognition, the idea that you care about them is what makes the occasion special.

D. The Cement of Talk and Laughter.

Find opportunities to get together for a meal or just to sit around the fire, on the back patio, or at a picnic table and talk and laugh. Here are some ideas of what to talk and laugh about.

1. Switch places at the dinner table and each person acts like the person who usually sits in that place.
2. Wear a fake nose or outrageous wig to the get together.
3. Save your favorite cartoons. Put one on each plate. Pass them around and enjoy the fun.
4. Have a Question Box on the coffee table when the family shows up for Thanksgiving or some other special meal. Children and grandchildren get to put any question they want in the box for Grandma and Grandpa to answer about the

old days, when they were young, or whatever.

5. Have a joke jar. Tell your family to send their funniest jokes or cartoons. Put all of them in the jar and when it gets full invite everyone over for a joke party. After supper, or around the fire with popcorn, let everyone take a joke out of the jar and share. Keep going until it's empty.
6. Ask everyone to bring two or three small objects that remind them of something for which they are thankful. Everyone puts these in a basket as they arrive. Later sit around and take out the items one at a time. The person who brought it tells how that reminds them of something for which they are really grateful.
7. Have an end of the year party or a beginning of the year party for family members. Put the following categories in a bowl and ask the family members to pick one and to tell three things or incidents in that category. Each must refer to something that happened in the previous year.

Three things I learned this year:

- Three things I'm grateful for
- Three stupid things I did
- Three close calls
- Three things I'm proud of
- Three fun things I did
- Three decisions I have made
- Three wishes I have
- Three accomplishments
- Three friends I made
- Three places I went
- Three sports I enjoyed
- Three things that annoy me
- Three regrets I have
- Three people I love
- Three of my favorite animals
- Three of the best things I ate
- Three neat things that happened to me
- Three surprises
- Three books I read
- Three of my favorite songs
- Three things I've done well
- Three of the hardest things I've done
- Three most enjoyable days
- Three favorite TV shows
- Three things I like about my parents

E. The Cement of Written Communication.

There is nothing quite like getting a word of appreciation in the handwriting of a loved one. A word of encouragement said, lifts the spirit. However, there's something especially neat about a written word of love. It is there to read over and over again as many times as the person needs to be affirmed. Here are some ideas of ways to use this cement.

1. Write a special note to each child, grandchild on his or her birthday. Make a list of all the things you like or appreciate about them.
2. Fill the person's closet full of balloons. Inside each balloon have a written note of love and affirmation, something good about them that you appreciate. They'll have to pop the balloons to find out!
3. Put an appreciation notice in the classified ad section of a local newspaper. (You may have to make sure they read the classifieds that day!)
4. Put a note of love and appreciation under their pillows or in their lunch.
5. Make a banner to welcome them home from a trip or coming home from the hospital, or just to announce a special achievement.
6. Leave a message on their computer.
7. Send a fax with a cartoon or a note.

F. The Cement of Being There.

Karen O'Connor tells about the surprise birthday her husband had for her 40th birthday. She writes:

"I'll never forget how I felt as I entered the restaurant and saw loving friends amid flowers and music and a large display of photographs that spanned my life. I hurried from one table to the next, greeting each guest. Then suddenly at the rear of the room I spotted a gentle smiling man with snow-white hair and a vibrant blue-eyed woman on his arm.

"Mom, Dad," I gasped. They had flown to Los Angeles from Chicago just hours before. I burst into tears at the sight of these two who, more than anyone else, had taught me that being there is the greatest gift we can give to our children." (*Restoring Relationships With Your Adult Children*, p. 182).

Some times when we can use the cement of just being there:

1. Weddings
2. Birthdays
3. Child dedications
4. Anniversaries
5. Holidays

6. Victory celebrations
7. Illness and convalescence
8. Emotional trials
9. Recitals
10. Baseball, soccer, basketball, football games
11. Baptisms
12. Graduations
13. Births
14. Deaths
15. Moving to a new house
16. School plays and programs

Of course we don't always have to be there in person, but certainly in spirit. This can sometimes be done with a note, a phone call, or flowers. The best gift we can possibly give our children is being there for them in times of joy, sadness, jubilation, and desperation.

Sometimes parents will miss a festive occasion such as a child's wedding to show disapproval of what is happening; perhaps the son or daughter is marrying a non-believer or someone of whom the parent disapproves. Undoubtedly the adult child already knows of the parent's disapproval—being absent only drives a further wedge between the parents and child. This then prevents future reconciliation either between themselves or the child and the church. If this has already happened to you, you may need to seek forgiveness and let the adult child know that you may not always approve of what they do, but you will always love them and you want nothing to come between you.

IV. Bible Study: Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1 - 4) (10 minutes)

1. During what special times of joy, sadness, jubilation, and desperation was Naomi there for her daughter-in-law, Naomi.
 - a. Ruth 1:5
 - b. Ruth 2:2
 - c. Ruth 3:1 - 5
 - d. Ruth 4:8 - 10
 - e. Ruth 4:16, 17

2. In what ways did Naomi give a gift of herself to Ruth during their long years of being in the same family?
 - Friendship, companionship
 - Financial help
 - Grief support
 - Helping out with physical chores
 - Giving advice and counsel
 - Helping her make right contacts
 - Guiding through a business deal
 - Listening to her talk
 - Sharing her own trust in God
 - Sharing her family heritage
 - Encouragement and affirmation
 - Protection

V. Prayer Time (10 minutes)

1. Divide into groups of two.

2. Let each person share a plan they have to cement relationships in their family. Which of the ideas suggested is something they want to do.

3. Pray for each other that the Lord will give you strength to come up with a cement mix that will work.

4. Pray for each other's children.

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