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SEC Family

Connecting Lives for Eternal Living

A Publication of the South England Conference Family Ministry Department

In this issue:

Pastors Have Families Too

The Bible, Psychology and Christian Counselling

Upcoming Events

Recommended Reading

Useful Links

Pastors Have Families Too

Les Ackie

The 'call' to the gospel ministry is a great and solemn responsibility that God lays on the heart of an individual. Yet, pastors who are blessed with families also have another priority - the great privilege of leading them to the kingdom. Neither responsibility should be discharged to the detriment of the other. Isaiah 38 & 39 tell the story of Hezekiah's failure to testify of God's goodness to the Babylonian emissaries who had visited him to learn about his miracle-working God. The prophet Isaiah confronts him with the question, "What have they seen in your house?" (Isaiah 39:4). In light of the fact that the most natural first recipients of our gospel-sharing endeavours should be those in our families, this is a question we would do well to consider as church leaders within the context of our own families.

The prayer of affirmation known as The Shema is considered to be the most important prayer in Judaism. It states, ⁴Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength . . . ⁷These commandments

that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

The Shema stresses the importance of parents passing on a spiritual heritage to their children. Ellen White reiterated this thought when she wrote, "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home . . . There is no missionary field more important than this" (Adventist Home, 35). We cannot possibly meet the challenges of our calling in our own strength because pastoral families are specially targeted by the Enemy. It is no accident that Ephesians 6, which speaks of spiritual warfare, follows Ephesians 5 which emphasises the importance of family relationships.

The pastoral family is subjected to internal as well as external pressures. By definition, married pastors make two key vows, one to be faithful to their spouse and the ordination vow to be faithful to God through ministry. These vows often cause conflict in the minister's experience. This tension is emphasised by the following passages. Jesus stated, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37). Yet we are also counselled, "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Ministerial families will always wrestle with where to strike the balance between devotion to the ministry and responsibility to family. Unfortunately, the pastor's spouse often gets the raw deal of the conflict. Ministry hours are not family friendly and many ministry spouses may be reluctant to express their legitimate needs for fear of being seen as an obstacle to ministry.

With all the legitimate calls on the minister's time it is possible that 'the good can become the

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SEC FAMILY

enemy of the best'. In order for ministers to fulfil their responsibility to their ministry and their families, time must be budgeted just as we budget our limited finances. This may mean that many important activities may have to be left so that we may do that which is essential.

The very public nature of pastoral ministry often leads to ministry spouses experiencing the pressures of 'living in a fishbowl'. Churches must avoid unrealistic expectations based on out-dated stereotypes of what a ministry spouse should be and the role they should play. Pastors' spouses do not have a job description. Their role is simply to be the wife/husband of the pastor. Their ministry involvement should be based primarily on their individual spiritual giftedness, not on the position the pastor occupies.

God created three divine communities in order to safeguard our need for intimate relationships - marriage, the family and the church. We often make the mistake of prioritising the church over our families. The reality is that, 'As goes the family so goes the church.' The spiritual and emotional health of a pastor's family and the well-being of the church are interrelated.

Pastoral couples can strengthen their families and their ministries, by cultivating their spiritual foundation and emotional connectedness. Christian families, including ministry homes, often miss the blessing of intimate couple prayer and meaningful family worship. The marriage covenant is dependent on the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Solomon illustrates this principle when he states, "Two are better than one . . . ¹²And a threefold cord is not quickly broken" (Ecclesiastes 4:9,12). Marriage can only fulfil God's purpose when two genuinely spiritual people live by genuinely spiritual principles. The health of a ministry couple's marriage empowers them to authentically gather their children at the family altar.

Our worship must be more than something we do just because it is expected. How we relate to each other in our families will have a significant impact on how our children develop spiritually and emotionally and will be a strong predictor of their future relationships. We are counselled that, "If the parents would enter more fully into the feelings of their children and draw out what is on their hearts, it would have a beneficial influence upon them" (The Adventist Home, 19). Family worship can actually become a hindrance to spiritual growth unless parents are able to emotionally engage with their children and be "ministers of grace" (Child Guidance, 478) rather than ministers of religion.

When pastors do not achieve an equitable balance between home and ministry, children can often become resentful of the church. They may ask themselves, 'What kind of God would force parents to serve Him so obsessively that they don't have time and energy for their children?' According to George Barna's research, the optimum ages at which children make decisions for Christ are between 5-13 (www.barna.org). This is a confirmation of what Mrs White said many years ago that, "It is in these early years that the affections are the most ardent, the heart most susceptible of improvement" (Review and Herald, December 17, 1889). Barna also found that parents continue to be the major influence on the children's spiritual choices, being two to three times more effective in leading children to faith than any church programme.

The sadness of Hezekiah's story was that he failed to share his testimony and missed a gilt-edged opportunity to be a living witness of God's goodness. It is a sobering thought that our personal witness can change the course of history for our spouses and our children. The 'call' to be a pastor embraces the wonderful privilege to minister to their families as much, if not more, than to the communities in which we serve. We are counselled that, "Men and women, children and youth, are measured in the scales of heaven in accordance with that which is revealed in their home life. A Christian in the home is a Christian everywhere" (SDA Bible Commentary, Vol.5, 1085).

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The Bible, Psychology and Christian Counselling

Pr Les Ackie

When I decided to study to qualify as a clinical counsellor I received a mixed reaction from various quarters, some of which gave me pause for thought as to whether I should pursue such a course. Concerns were raised as to whether it was appropriate for Christians to expose their minds to the subtle deceptions of the psychological world.

Convinced that I needed to clarify the matter for myself, my concerns were actually heightened when confronted with disturbing statements

penned by Ellen White. For example, she wrote that through psychology the Enemy, “comes more directly to the people of this generation and works with that power which is to characterize his efforts near the close of probation. The minds of thousands have thus been poisoned and led into infidelity (*Mind Character & Personality, vol. 1 19*).

As a result of this and similar statements, many have felt safe to draw the conclusion that all psychology is therefore evil and should be avoided. However, Mrs White also stated that, “The true principles of psychology are found in the Holy Scriptures.” In an 1884 *Signs* article, she also wrote: “The sciences which treat of the human mind are very much exalted. They are good in their place; but they are seized upon by Satan as his powerful agents to deceive and destroy souls.” Our task then, is not to ‘throw the baby out with the bath water’ by rejecting psychology out of hand, but to discern between the true and the false. Paul counsels us in 1 Thessalonians 5:21, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

The term “psychology” actually derives from two Greek root words, *psyche* (spirit) which refers to the conscious part of man - the mind, and *logos* (word) pertaining to study. Therefore, psychology refers to the study of the mind. The aim of psychology is to describe, understand, predict, and determine the factors that influence mental processes and behaviour. We are told that, “To deal with minds is the greatest work ever committed to men” and that, “In order to lead souls to Jesus there must be a knowledge of human nature and a study of the human mind” (*Mind Character and Personality, p.4, 67*).

The Apostle Paul counselled, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2). Conversion not only gives us a new capacity to know God, it also changes the way we think. The proper application of biblical psychology enables individuals to identify and change the faulty core beliefs about themselves, others and even God, which frequently lay at the root of destructive behaviour and dysfunctional relationships.

The choice of a counsellor requires very careful consideration. We should exercise the utmost caution and discernment for we are warned in Colossians 2:8, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.” It is right that we take inspired counsel seriously in order to avoid counselling processes, which compound rather than provide solutions to people’s problems. But we should not tar all counselling with the same brush. The study of psychology is wholly appropriate for Christians as long as our presuppositions are biblical and not humanistic.

The Bible is replete with good psychology. The fact that the core beliefs we hold about ourselves and our environment profoundly affect our behaviour is a reflection of Solomon’s words, “For as he

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SEC FAMILY

thinks in his heart, so *is* he.” The fact that our mood is a significant factor in our physical health confirms the truth that, “A merry heart does good, *like* medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.” Jesus himself used good psychological principles to win the confidence of the woman at the well (John 4:7-30) and avert the execution of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11) and gently rebuke Simon the Leper (Luke 7:39-48).

Our fundamental belief teaches that, “the Bible is our only rule for faith and practice”, but what does this actually mean? For example, the Bible contains excellent counsel on healthy eating, but we would hardly seek to use the Bible only, as a recipe book to cook a three course meal. The Bible promotes excellent principles for physical health but it would be ridiculous to try to use it as a text book for performing open-heart surgery. Why then do some try to apply this logic when it comes to counselling? Our fundamental belief simply means that whatever we choose to believe and do, must be founded on biblical principle.

As in all things, we must exercise good spiritual judgement and a humble heart in order to receive the help we need. Solomon states, “A wise *man* will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel” (Proverbs 1:5.)

Tips for Choosing a Professional Christian Counsellor

- Pray for God’s wisdom to guide your choice
- If possible, get a recommendation from someone you trust
- Make sure you are comfortable with the counsellor - if not, change
- How does the counselor’s Christian belief influence their counselling practice?
- Is the counsellor a member of a recognised counselling organisation?
- What method/s of counselling does the counsellor use? Ensure that the method is in line with your personal values
- How much experience does the counsellor have in dealing with your particular situation?
- How does the counsellor define successful therapy?
- Do you require a counsellor of a particular gender?
- How much does the counsellor charge?
- How often & how long might you be expected to meet?
- Do not become overly reliant on the counsellor. Effective counselling should empower personal responsibility



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The Couple's Retreat

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Surrey KT24 6DU



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Loop Open Day

30 May 2015

4-6pm at New Life Centre
8-10 Lennox Road, N4 3NW

Meet other parents and hear what we've done so far

Hear about what we have planned for 2015

Join for free



The Loop is a club specifically for single and shared-parenting Mums and Dads
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FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Useful Links

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www.adventsource.org/

Adventist Parenting -
www.adventistparenting.com

Adventist Special Needs
Association - www.asna.info/

BUC Family Ministry-
[adventist.org.uk/who-we-are/
departments/family-ministries](http://adventist.org.uk/who-we-are/departments/family-ministries)

The Ellen G. White Estate -
www.whiteestate.org/

GC Family Ministry -
family.adventist.org

Hope Channel - www.hopetv.org

Kids in Discipleship -
www.kidsindiscipleship.org/

North American Division Family
Ministry - family.nadadventist.org

SEC Family Ministries
[secadventist.org.uk/who-we-are/
departments/family-
ministries](http://secadventist.org.uk/who-we-are/departments/family-ministries)

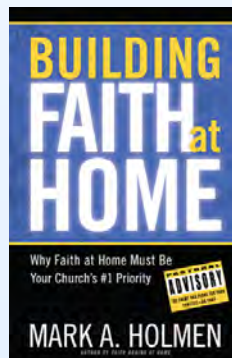
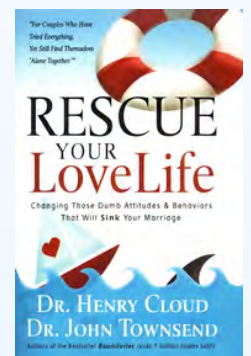
South Pacific Division Family
Ministry - [www.adventist.org.au/
family-ministries](http://www.adventist.org.au/family-ministries)

Recommended Reading



Ellen White's classic work *The Adventist Home*, offers counsel on many facets of home life including, choosing a mate; child discipline; grandparents; holidays; hospitality; moral standards; divorce; and living with an unbelieving spouse. Mrs White points out pitfalls to be avoided and shows how to have a happy marriage by injecting the grace of God and the principles of Christian courtesy into every aspect of family life.

In *Rescue Your Love Life* Drs Cloud & Townsend identify the various ways marriages can disconnect. The authors come to the aid of readers who are drowning in a sea of good intentions and misplaced priorities. Tackling self-examination, realistic explanations, healthy communication, and dealing with conflict and temptation, *Rescue Your Love Life* will show you how to build trust and intimacy in your marriage.



Studies show that faith lived out in the home is more influential than the Church. Unfortunately studies also show that prayer, Bible reading and faith talk are almost non-existent in most Christian families. In *Building Faith at Home* Mark Holman offers a vision and a practical model for how to weave family ministry into the DNA of churches. This work offers an integrated approach that can revolutionize churches' approach to this vital ministry.

Cornerstone Counselling Service

0207 723 8050
or ccs@secadventist.org.uk

Contact us to speak with a counsellor about issues that trouble you, or to make an appointment.



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