



November 2015

# SEC Family

Connecting Lives for Eternal Living

A Publication of the South England Conference Family Ministry Department

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## Children of Divorce - Helping Them Help Themselves

Pr Jacques Venter

I have noticed that the Church is now openly grappling with certain issues that, as young Theology students, we never really got to discuss. Sometimes the Church has initiated the exploration of these challenging issues, while at other times it has been compelled to join the conversation by the demands of the ever-changing society in which we find ourselves. One such important issue that has long gone undiscussed is the need to care for and nurture children whose parents have divorced.

In my opinion, society has generally been very helpful in its support of divorcing parents - something we as a denomination are, hopefully, also getting better at. But who cares for the children of divorce?

### Long-term studies

Besides the physical losses that accompany divorce, studies show that the long-term impact of divorce on children is so damaging that it is better for children to grow up in an intact family environment with hostility and tension (even though this is obviously far from ideal) than in a happy, divorced, single-parent home.\*

Modern research shows that young adults are strongly affected by divorce. It affects their belief in God and in religious teachings, and their affiliation with religious institutions. All of which indicates that, as a Church, we have a responsibility to try to make a difference. We need to understand the damage that divorce can do to their experience of God, and help them find good models for relationships, faith, forgiveness and Christ-like living.

We often praise our children's resilience in the face of adversity, and more so when they are faced with separating parents. At such times you often hear parents say, 'They [the children] will get through it, as they are coping very well with it.' Yet more than two decades of careful research tells us they are not coping nearly as well as their parents think they are.

### Some of the problems

Children of divorce often experience a much lower level of well-being than children from intact families. After their parents' divorce, children often find relationships unreliable, have feelings of loneliness, and suffer a strong fear of abandonment. Some even believe that their childhood ended the day their parents got divorced.

Children of divorce are often expected to care for their parents during this time, thus reversing the parent-child roles and forcing the burden of maturity on them before they are emotionally ready.

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35



# SEC FAMILY

## Mirroring family as community

While lovingly accepting people into the fellowship of the church, the church has the responsibility to remain strong in its moral support for Christian marriage. This can be achieved through a marriage counselling service and being open with our church children in an age-appropriate way regarding premarital relationships, cohabiting and marriage. This should be done without condemning the current familial situations within the church.

Also, by accepting that the church is a 'family at large', we give our children the opportunity to find themselves in relation to God. We discover who we are as revealed in others, and although the families in church cannot replace the most fundamental mirror for children in any family - a mother and father - they can collectively let the children see who they really are (loved, precious and wanted) and where they belong.



As a community of families the church can accompany each child through the storm of divorce without condemnation: not trying to turn them away from the confusion, but standing with them in the midst of it all, sharing their hurt and confusion.

## Openness and honesty

Children of divorce can be greatly helped in finding healing and wholeness if the people around them - their families, friends, teachers, pastors, and social leaders - understand their true experience. Sadly, however, the voice of the child is seldom heard. More often than not the messages we receive of the child's experience are articulated and interpreted by their parents.

I would like to suggest that the church should also be on this list of those who need to understand their true experience. The church can open itself to be a continual space where the children of divorce can develop and find new meanings for life, as they grow older. The church can support the children of divorce by 'seeing' them and 'being seen' by them, which can only happen when we allow each other's stories to be heard. Thus, the church should be a place in which open and honest dialogue can take place. In order to achieve this, the church should intentionally create opportunities for supportive intergenerational conversations to occur.



## Security and stability

It is not enough just to love our children. The church needs to support parents in loving and forgiving each other every day. If we can support parents in this we can offer the children of today and tomorrow the chance of stable, loving homes, each with a mother and a father.

While the church should actively support families to create such homes, it also needs to create a sense of stability and security at church. This provides a place for children of divorce to form an image of a God that will meet their deep-seated needs. Some children recall that during their experience of divorce God became their Confidant, their Stability, their Source of comfort and hope. He gave them the strength they needed not to give up on life.

It is possible that one of the reasons the church becomes this vital, strengthening place is because of the way children try to cope with divorce. One of the strategies they use is that of 'detachment'.

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# SEC FAMILY

It is possible that the church offers them a space in time where they can just detach themselves from the harsh realities of life and feel free from the pressures of duty and expectation.

Striving for personal growth is another strategy children use to cope with divorce. I find that in churches where children of divorce are valued for who they are (not what they can do); engaged in discipleship; and affirmed as lovable and valuable human beings, they seem to feel freer from the oppression of divorce. To sustain this liberating environment the church needs to offer children of divorce a dependable routine, which gives them the stability they require to reshape and organise their lives. In some churches such routines are found in the weekly Saturday morning Sabbath School and Family Worship times, as well as the relaxed Friday evening youth club with its 'juice and biscuits'.

While the church practices its mission in these four key areas it should also deal with another larger question, namely: 'What can we do to ensure that there are fewer children of divorce, and if we can work towards these goals, while serving our children of divorce with love, we more loving and secure homes?' If we can work towards these goals, while serving our children of divorce, we will hopefully be able to reach a point where we sustain unbroken families and, bit by bit, change the world.

\* The following studies confirm this assertion:

Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce*, reprint (Three Rivers Press [CA], 2006): This is a 10-year longitudinal study following children of divorce into adulthood; Christien Brinkgreve, 'Changing Childhood: A Retrospective Study of Post-Divorce Family Life in the Netherlands', *The Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences*, 39 (2003), 69-82; Judith S. Wallerstein, Sandra Blakeslee and Julia M. Lewis, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: A 25 Year Landmark Study*, first edition (Hyperion Books, 2000), chap. 21; Judith Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, *What About the Kids? Raising Your Children Before, During, and After Divorce*, edited by Mary Ellen O'Neill, reprint (Hyperion Books, 2004), chap. 33

These are the other references used in the above study:

Baker, Amy J. L., 'The Long-Term Effects of Parental Alienation on Adult Children: A Qualitative Research Study', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 33 (2005), 289-302

Cartwright, Claire, 'You Want to Know How It Affected Me? Young Adults' Perceptions of the Impact of Parental Divorce', *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 44 (2006), 125-143

Knabb, Joshua J., David W. Brokaw, Kevin S. Reimer, and Robert K. Welsh, 'Retrospective Meaning-Making in Adulthood: A Qualitative Study of Conservative Protestant Adults Who Experienced Parental Divorce as Adolescents', *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 28 (2009), 44-56

Root, Andrew, *The Children of Divorce: The Loss of Family as the Loss of Being* (Baker Academic, Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010)

Shulman, PhD, Shmuel, Miri Scharf, PhD, Daniel Lumer, MA, and Offer Maurer, MA, 'Parental Divorce and Young Adult Children's Romantic Relationships: Resolution of the Divorce Experience', *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 71 (2001), 473-478



## SEC Couples “Keep Love Alive”

S J Pascall

Enriching, awakening, encouraging, respectful and inviting are just a few words to summarise the powerful experience I had at the Denham Grove, October 2015, Blended Hearts Marriage Retreat.

Our room was clean, cosy and very comfortable. The conference centre itself was very well serviced with biscuits, drinking chocolate, teas and coffee available

throughout the day. The breakfast, lunch and dinner were varied and catered for many dietary needs. There was also swimming pool, gym and Jacuzzi for our use.

Being our first marriage retreat, I didn't have any preconceived ideas or expectations, I was just excited about the opportunity to spend some one-to-one-time with my husband away from the busyness of everyday life. As I entered Denham Grove, the atmosphere upon arrival reinforced and heightened my excitement. We were each met with personalised information packs and our room key ready and waiting. I was immediately swept over with a sense of value, appreciation and importance; nice touch Pastor Les and Irma.

My husband and I had arrived late; we were heartily welcomed and attended to with a summary of the session and a task to complete. The topics for the duration of the retreat were broken down into 5 sessions. The Heart of the Matter, Safe Haven Marriage, Nurturing Emotional Connection, Healing Hurts, and Keeping Your Love Alive. Every session was engaging, lively and evoking, not at all arduous and very well structured. I didn't even find myself drifting off into unrelated thoughts; something many can relate to. As a group there was a variety of marital durations, some as fresh as 6 months to those a little more refined with 29 years of valuable experience. Every couple had something rich and meaningful to offer. There was a wealth of ideas and contributions at every session. Some relayed their points of view through strong opinions others used humour or colourful metaphors and similes.

I experienced a range of emotional responses in every session; from bolts of stomach rumbling laughter to entering into the depths of my inner most thoughts in response to what was being shared. At the close of each session I was filled with a burning desire inside of me, full of passion and determination to become a better wife. Like the bud of a flower I was being nurtured, fed, watered and ready to open my petals in growth. I left the retreat confident that my husband and I understood the delicacy of the budding flower; our marriage and we were better informed about how much love, tenderness and appreciation was needed to allow it to flourish. My only disappointment was that time flowed by so quickly, it felt that the sessions were just not long enough.



I particularly enjoyed the tasks, sitting face to face with my husband, exploring elements of our marriage that were up to that point uncharted; was just amazing. I discovered that our marriage is actually a lot stronger than I had previously conceived, this awakening was definitely encouraging. No matter where we were in our marital journeys we were all pressed with the need to reflect and commit to new beginnings. To reinstate marital rituals, such as kissing when greeting and departing from one another. Each couple also took a private and intimate moment to recommit through a

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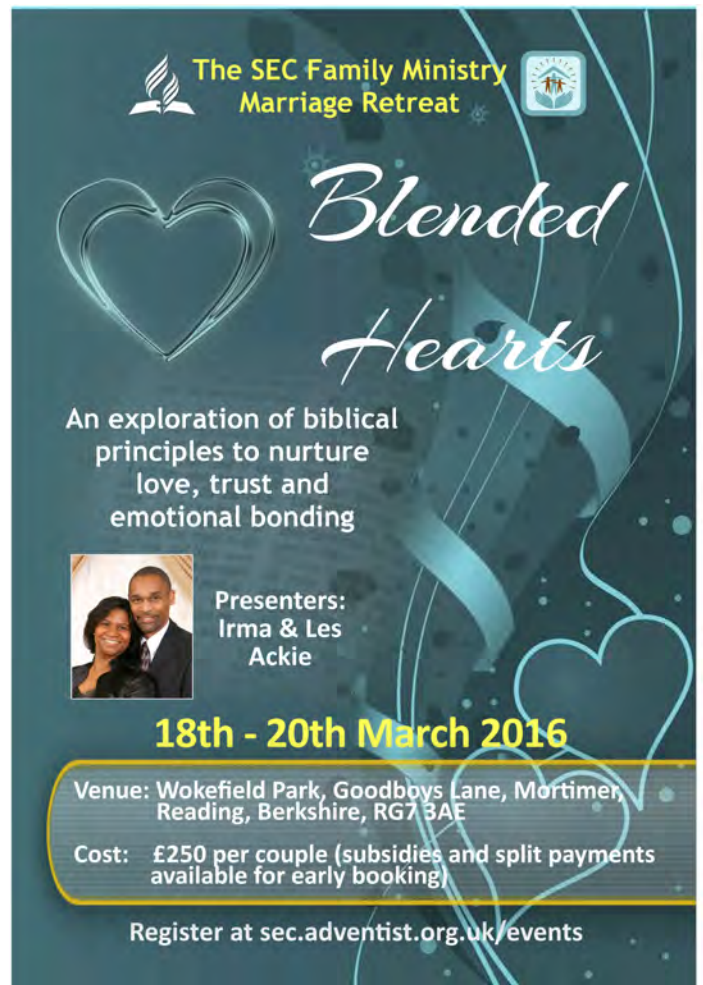
By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

# SEC FAMILY

'From this Day Forward' pledge.

One of my highlights was the banquet, an eye stopping, jaw dropping array of beautiful people gathered together to the soulful and symphonic sounds of Quintessential. The tables were beautifully decorated, the top class waiting service flowed with the opulence and grandeur of the evening. The band captured the essence of the moment and added hues and tones to couple's stories about how they met and proposed to their significant other. Poetry by Jermaine Wong added flavour and spice. Couples were also privileged to have a snap shot of their evening captured through the professional photography of Mark Grey of Carmel Greystone. I am definitely looking forward to attending another retreat in the near future and would encourage all couples to do so. I am very thankful to Pastor Les and Irma Ackie for this marriage changing experience, their wisdom, charisma, honesty and their togetherness was a gulp of fresh air.

**“. . . and the two shall be one flesh”  
Genesis 2:24**



The SEC Family Ministry  
Marriage Retreat

*Blended  
Hearts*

An exploration of biblical principles to nurture love, trust and emotional bonding

Presenters:  
Irma & Les  
Ackie

**18th - 20th March 2016**

Venue: Wokefield Park, Goodboys Lane, Mortimer, Reading, Berkshire, RG7 3AE

Cost: £250 per couple (subsidies and split payments available for early booking)

Register at [sec.adventist.org.uk/events](http://sec.adventist.org.uk/events)



**For Single and Shared-Parenting  
Mums and Dads**



free workshops  
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learn new things  
kids play

 The Loop Young Families Club

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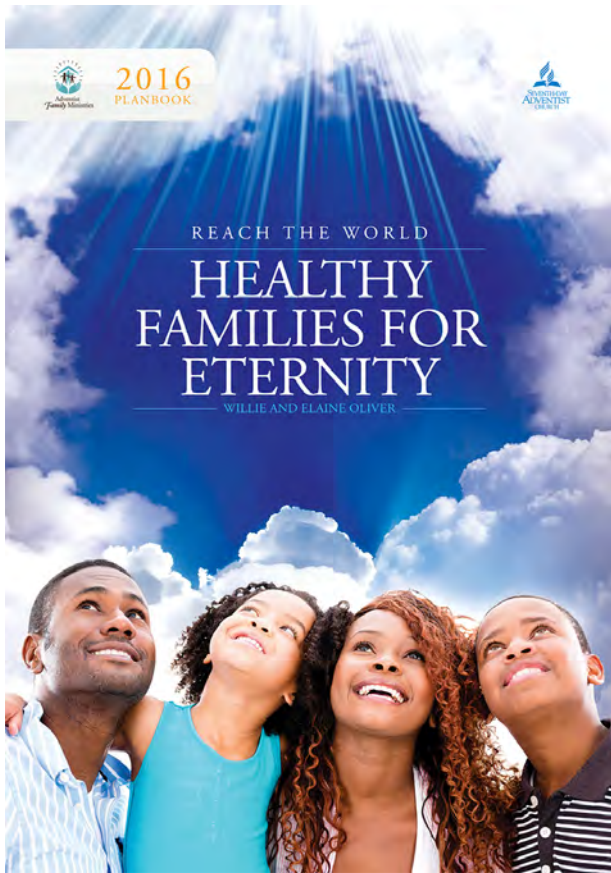
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Click on the link to download the Family Ministry Planbook at <http://family.adventist.org/family-ministry-planbook.html>

## SINGLES RETREAT 2016

15th-17th July 2016

### Cultivate Purpose & Let God

Finding peace, happiness and spiritual fulfilment with yourself & how to create space for another person

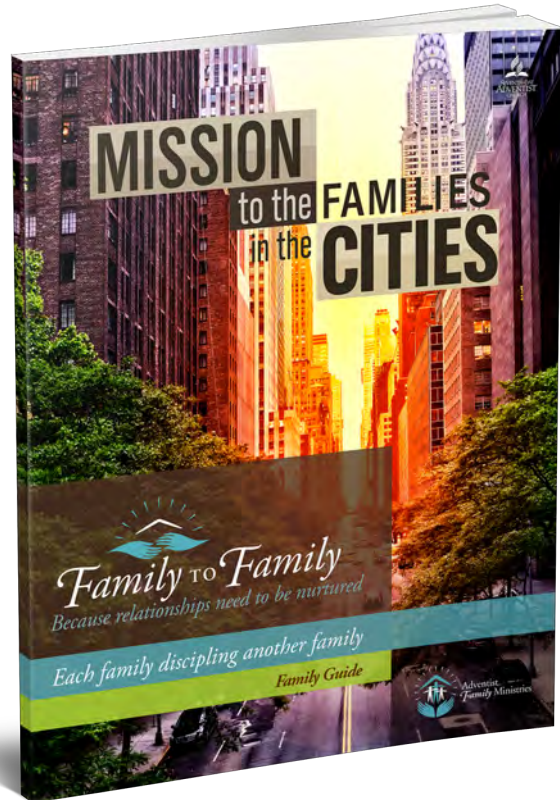
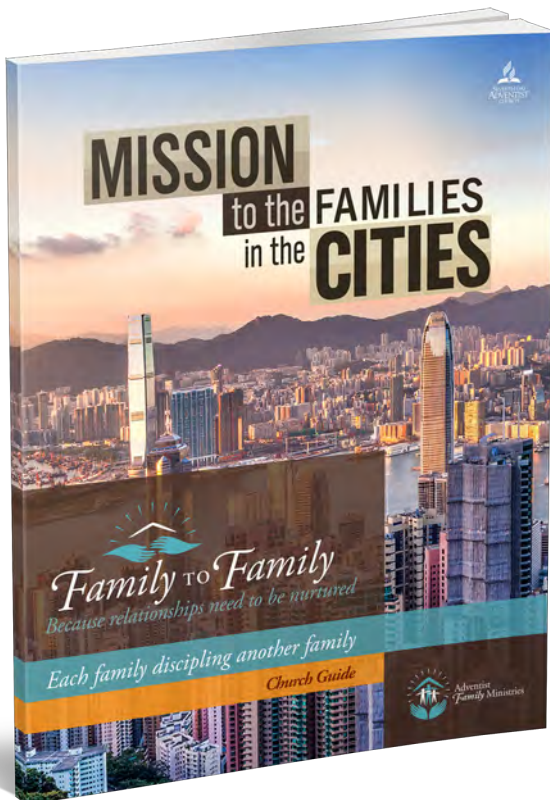


Guest Speaker:  
Pastor  
Dewayne Frazer

Venue: De Vere Venues | Wokefield Park | Goodboys Lane | Reading | RG7 3AH  
Price: £149/person (double occupancy) & £159 (single occupancy)  
Limited spaces.....book your space now for this empowering event, you will surely be blessed and uplifted.

A non refundable deposit of £50 is required to secure your place by 30 January 2016 and the full amount should be paid in by 31 March 2016.  
We accept payment in instalments.  
Bank Details: Lloyds Bank Sort Code: 308676. Account no: 60146660  
Please put: TSR as reference

For enquiries, please contact:  
Christina Mthombeni: 07926 102 187 or Sister Patience: 07908 713 561



Click on the link to download the Mission to the Families guides at <http://family.adventist.org/mission-to-the-families-in-the-cities-family-to-family.html>

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35

## Useful Links

AdventSource  
[www.adventsource.org/](http://www.adventsource.org/)

NAD Adventist Singles Ministry  
[www.adventistsingleadultministries.org/](http://www.adventistsingleadultministries.org/)

Official SDA Church Statements  
<http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/>

End It Now - Adventists Say No to Violence Against Women  
<http://www.enditnow.org/>

F.O.C.U.S. Singles Ministries  
<http://www.focusnyc.org/default.aspx?ad=0>

Mankind Initiative - Support for Male Victims of Domestic Abuse  
[www.mankind.org.uk/](http://www.mankind.org.uk/)

Raising Voices - Preventing Violence Against Women & Children  
<http://raisingvoices.org/>

Refuge - For Women & Children Against Domestic Violence  
<http://refuge.org.uk/>

Respect - For Perpetrators of Domestic Violence  
<http://respect.uk.net/>

Real Family Talk  
[realfamilytalk.hopetv.org/](http://realfamilytalk.hopetv.org/)

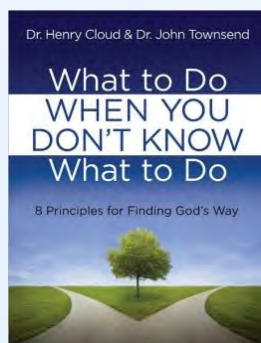
Sounds of Encouragement  
[www.soencouragement.org/](http://www.soencouragement.org/)

## Recommended Reading



**Heart Connection.** Cell phones, iPods, and texting, just aren't cutting it - and we live in an age when people are desperate to find intimate connection. What we need is intimacy (in-to-me-see) - human moments when hearts connect, creating the splendour that we wish for. Ron & Nancy Rockey present a powerful combination of gripping true-life stories, fascinating cutting-edge research that explains why we feel and act the way we do.

**Helping Children Survive Divorce.** Approximately half of all marriages which take place end in divorce. Children are most deeply affected. How can children successfully survive the trauma of divorce? In friendly, heart-to-heart language, Dr Archibald Hart offers divorced parents specific ways to help children cope with the psychological and social damage that comes with divorce.



**What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do.** Life for every person on earth is a challenging journey - with or without God. Just exactly how does He go about the business of helping us when we don't know what to do? Henry Cloud and John Townsend believe God has given us instructions on how He makes a way for us when we call on Him. If you follow God's eight principles in this book, you can thrive relationally, emotionally, and spiritually.

**Cornerstone**  
Counselling Service

**0207 723 8050**  
or [ccs@secadventist.org.uk](mailto:ccs@secadventist.org.uk)

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



**REAL Family Talk**   
with Willie & Elaine Oliver

<http://realfamilytalk.hopetv.org>

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