



April 2015

SEC Family

Connecting Lives for Eternal Living

A Publication of the South England Conference Family Ministry Department

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The Gift of Affirmation

Willie Oliver, General Conference Director for Family Ministry

A dictionary definition of affirmation is the act of affirming or a positive assertion made about someone (Merriam-Webster 1996). In general, relationship experts suggest that affirming a person one is in relationship with is wonderful for the person being affirmed, for the person doing the affirming, as well as for the relationship between these individuals.

When parents choose to affirm their children, such an undertaking helps create a strong and positive self-esteem in those children. A positive self-esteem, of course, produces feelings of belonging, of being capable and of being loved.

Affirmation between spouses—also a choice—is truly the stuff that makes for stronger and healthier marriages and for a happier and more peaceful home environment. If it is true that trying to develop a relationship without communicating is like trying to make orange juice without oranges (Olson and Olson p. 23); it is also true that happy couples experience five times as many positive interactions than negative interactions (Gottman pp. 56-57), and this we call affirmation.

Galatians 5:22-23 declares: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

An inventory of contrasting virtues to the ones presented in Galatians 5:22-23, Galatians 5:19-21 states: “Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

While the works of the flesh are naturally exhibited in the lives of human beings, the lifestyle illustrated in Galatians 5:22-23 is not produced by one who simply professes to be a believer, but by the Spirit of God working through a person who has chosen Christ every day.

To practice a life of affirmation—which represents the Spirit of Jesus—we will need to make the choice each day to live as Jesus lived. For this kind of existence to be operationalised in our relationships with our spouse, children and others we come in contact with, we will need to do as Paul declares in Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Is it your custom every day to affirm the people in your household and those with whom you come into contact? These individuals may be your spouse, your

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

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children, your parents and siblings, your in-laws, your neighbours, your co-workers, your employees, the shopkeeper, the rickshaw driver, and anyone else. If this is not your custom at this time, you can choose to make this your way of life.

The more you choose to affirm people, the more you will feel and be like Jesus. The more you choose to rely on Jesus, the more likely you will be to produce the fruit of the Spirit. The more often you choose to live your life in this way, the more you will bless those around you and help create an atmosphere of love, peace and grace in your home, in the church, and in your community.

Even in moments of difficulty and shame, Jesus found ways to affirm people toward wholeness. Jesus did so with the woman caught in adultery (John 8); with Zacchaeus who climbed up the sycamore tree in Jericho (Luke 19); with the 10 lepers He found as He entered a certain village (Luke 17); and with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in a city called Sychar (John 4).

If we stay close to Jesus and choose Him every day, we too will receive power to live in positive and healthier relationships, and make our homes, our churches and our world a better place. What's more, we will bless people and be effective witnesses for Jesus.

Affirmation is a sign of healthy family relationships. It is true that: "He who lives Christianity in the home will be a bright and shining light everywhere" (White p. 39).

We pray you will bless someone today!

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All Biblical references are from the New King James Version



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Families That Play Together, Stay Together

Pr Les Ackie

It has been said that, 'having fun is serious business'. Play is a critically important component of a happy family life. Recreation and laughter are not only essential to our emotional health, they are also vital for our physical health. Solomon stated, "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Proverbs 17:22). In this passage the Bible was way ahead of its time, for modern science confirms that laughter lowers blood pressure; reduces stress hormones;

boosts immune function by raising levels of infection-fighting cells; aids the production of disease-destroying antibodies, increases muscle function and triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. According to Dr Stuart Brown founder of the National Institute for Play, "play shapes our brain, helps us foster empathy, helps us navigate complex social groups, and is at the core of creativity and innovation". In his book *Playful Parenting*, Dr Lawrence Cohen, states that "Play is children's main way of communicating . . . Playing is connection." At a basic level, play fosters the desire to 'be with' one another. Relationship analyst John Gottman states that even the way we play teaches our children valuable life skills. He comments that in play mothers tend to adopt the role of teacher, engaging in constructive play. However, fathers tend to assume the role of playmate often engaging in rough and tumble play which teaches the child lessons in emotional regulation and impulse control.

Unfortunately, attending to the cares of this life can often lead us to downplay the vital role of connecting with one another through play. Sadly, there are too many parents for whom fun is a bad word. There are unfortunately many Christians who seem to believe that laughing is sinful and that we are living in far too serious a day and time to waste on what they consider frivolous activities and amusements. However, 19th century revivalist Charles Spurgeon once said of miserable Christians, "Sad tones may fit an undertaker but not someone who is called to preach Good News! They might as well bury the dead, they'll never influence the living. If you would lead men to heaven, wear heaven on your face." By the same token, why would our children be attracted to a religion that elicits no joy in us and brings them no happiness?

Too many erroneously believe that Jesus' description as a man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3), means that He must have been miserable most of the time. I recall as a child watching Robert Powell's ethereal and often dour portrayal of Jesus in the TV series *Jesus of Nazareth*. I also recall finding Bruce Marchiano's more cheerful and affable portrayal of Jesus in *The Visual Bible*, much more appealing. Yet some recoil from the idea of a Jesus who joked with His disciples and rolled around on the ground in celebration with a beneficiary of His healing grace. While we can engage in much speculation about the demeanour of Jesus, it seems incongruent to common sense that He who is the fountain of life would not exude an effervescent personality of joy and happiness. Jesus said to His disciples, on one occasion, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full (John 15:11). The fact that Jesus was like a magnet for children speaks volumes as children seem to have a built in radar for infectious joy. We are informed that, "We should be cheerful; for there is nothing gloomy in the religion of Jesus" (*Gospel Workers*, 417).



Let's never take the experience of fun and laughter for granted. As families we benefit from creating the space for the things which cultivate joy and meaning. We need to cast aside the restraints of mistaken piety and at times exercise the freedom to be downright silly in order to experience the blessing of godly play. Mark Twain once advised, "Dance like no one is watching. Sing like no one is listening. Love like you've never been hurt and live like it's heaven on Earth". Let's purposely carve out time as families to do the things that make our hearts sing.

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



Cohabitation: What's the Problem?

Pr Les Ackie

The practice of cohabitation is becoming more and more common in the Western world as a substitute for Christian marriage in our secular society. The term “cohabitation” is usually defined as a short or long-term relationship in which an unmarried heterosexual couple shares common residence and sexual intimacy. According to the Office for National Statistics, cohabitation is the fastest growing family type in the UK. Between 1996 and 2012, the number of cohabiting couples has doubled. Disturbingly, an increasing number of misguided Christian couples are choosing to cohabit as a prelude or alternative to traditional marriage in the belief that their personal commitment to each other is the moral

equivalent of a biblical marriage.

While not explicitly stated, it is clear that God's gift of Eve to Adam constituted the first Christian marriage (see Genesis 2:18-25). This passage plainly pictures marriage as a divine institution, which was to form the basis for future unions between husbands and wives. The Bible states, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (v 24)” The term “one flesh” does not simply refer to their physical state, but embraces spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical union. When the Pharisees sought to trap Jesus by asking about grounds for divorce, He quoted this verse emphasising the legally binding nature of marriage. He states, “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:5). Whatever format it takes, a Christian marriage involves a man and woman entering a covenant relationship with one another, sanctioned by God and most often in the presence of a community of believers (see John 2:1-2).

Every covenant that God establishes with man is sealed with a covenant sign. The sign of the marriage covenant is sexual union. Therefore, any sexual activity outside of marriage claims covenant privileges without covenant commitment and cannot fulfil the purpose for which God created it. Both the Old and the New Testament clearly forbid sexual relations outside marriage, which is another reason why cohabiting relationships cannot be compatible with biblical marriage. In addition to the spiritual and moral prohibitions on cohabitation, there are many practical reasons why marriage is the better option. Numerous research studies report significant differences between marriage and cohabitation. Cohabiting couples are less likely to stay together; more likely to have extra affairs; offer less stability for children; and experience higher levels of domestic violence. On the other hand, married people tend to live longer; experience better health; enjoy greater sexual satisfaction; have better incomes; and provide a more stable environment for children.

By definition cohabitation involves a lesser degree of commitment to the relationship than marriage because the ‘get out’ is easier. The less couples have invested in their relationship, the less they will be inclined to persevere if conflicts lead to crisis. Biblical marriage establishes a permanent relationship and is not an experiment. The idea that marriage can be road tested is fundamentally flawed. The evidence reveals that those who cohabit before marriage, actually experience a higher divorce rate than those who do not. This ‘try before you buy’ mindset is founded on the erroneous belief that the only way you can get to know someone is to live with them. On the contrary, bearing in mind that even the best marriages are still the union of two imperfect people, it is necessary that couples learn at the pre-marital stage which flaws in their partner they can accommodate and which they cannot. The reality is that compatibility is not something that you either have or don't have. Couples grow into compatibility as they live out the principles of agape love, which places the good of their spouse before themselves.

Cohabitation dishonours God, threatens the institution of marriage, the stability of children and therefore attacks the family, which is the fundamental building block for a healthy society.

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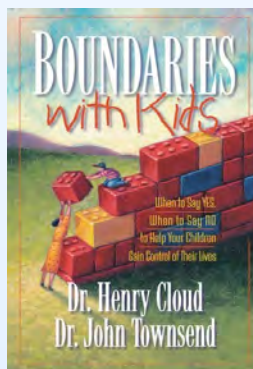
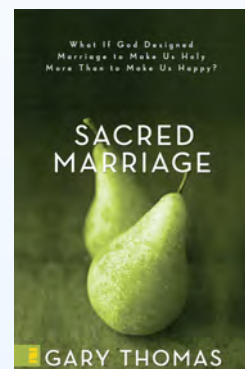
Hope Channel - www.hopetv.org

Recommended Reading



In *Could It Be This Simple? A Biblical Model for Healing the Mind* you'll learn about God's original ideal for the mind and His beautiful plan to restore His children back into His image. Dr Timothy R. Jennings also exposes many of Satan's subtle tactics that interfere with God's plan to heal the mind. This book is an excellent tool to help achieve emotional and mental well-being and gain real spiritual victory.

Sacred Marriage. Starting with the discovery that the goal of marriage goes beyond personal happiness, writer and speaker Gary Thomas invites readers to see how God can use marriage as a discipline and a motivation to love him more and reflect more of the character of his Son. God's purpose is not just to make us happy but to make us holy.



According to the authors, Cloud & Townsend, **Boundaries with Kids** will help you to recognize the boundary issues underlying child behaviour problems; set boundaries and establish consequences with your kids; get out of the "nagging" trap; stop controlling your kids—and instead help them develop self-control by applying the ten laws of boundaries to parenting.

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REAL Family Talk

with Willie & Elaine Oliver



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