

D Y N A M I C

Steward

the power to live to submit to abide to give to serve

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Volume 7 Number 1

Open the Doors

*Gary Krause, Director for Communication
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Green Valley in Nevada, just south of Las Vegas, isn't green. And it isn't a valley. It's brown and flat. Eight and a half thousand acres of it. Green Valley is a carefully planned housing initiative that has attracted thousands of people into fifty housing developments aimed at different socio-economic levels.

What's the attraction? Well, the promoters claimed Green Valley was "all that a community can be." They promised that if you lived there you could enjoy life "more than you ever did before." And they promoted it as a secure environment to raise a family, a place where people have returned to basic values.

Green Valley is carefully planned and lined with high walls and security gates. It has rules and regulations for everything—the number of dogs and cats you can own, the plants in your garden, the color of your house, and where you can put your trash can. It's regulated, gated, safe, but totally isolated from the rest of the community.

Is our church in danger of becoming like Green Valley? Where we close our doors on the rest of the world, have rules and regulations to keep us all safe and happy, but never look outward? Where we shut our door on a world in need? Where we don't have to look at the suffering, the poverty, the pain? Where we form a club and sing happy songs about how Jesus has saved us, pray nice prayers, chat to our friends—and just wait for Jesus to come? Where we shut our doors of fellowship to people who don't meet certain criteria?

Good stewards don't keep God's gifts to themselves. Ellen White writes: "... if those whom the Lord has made stewards regard their treasures as his gifts, and seek to manifest compassion, sympathy, and love for their fellow men, they are in harmony with the character of God, who gave his only begotten Son to die for their salvation" (*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 286). God has given us wonderful gifts for a world that desperately needs them.

Jesus could have remained in the pearly-gated community of heaven, ignoring our rebel, sin-racked world. But He came to this earth, valuing His relationship with us far above His glorious surroundings. And hanging on a cross, He showed the full extent of His love. When that grabs my heart, I have to open the doors. I can't bury His gifts of grace in some sort of Adventist "Green Valley."

6 Ways to Face Reality in Marriage

Introduction

In the book, *Boundaries in Marriage*, Drs. Cloud and Townsend speak of six kinds of conflict in marriage. The second conflict they note is entitled: “Immaturity or Brokenness of One Person,” and it is the theme of this study. None of us comes to marriage as a “complete” person—for we all “fall short of the glory of God” (Rm 3:23).

“In every relationship, reality eventually surfaces. When it does, it is very important to face it in the following helpful ways” (p. 176). Here is a summary of some ways to face reality that Cloud and Townsend list:

1. Accept reality

“Accept reality about yourself and your spouse.” At times you won’t have the emotional ability or the skill to face some situations as you would like. “When this happens, don’t be surprised.”

Discuss Ephesians 5:22-33 and Romans 3:23. In what ways can these passages help you to accept one another as you really are?

2. Communicate your support to your spouse

“We do not grow when we are judged, nagged, condemned, resented, or subjected to some other lack of grace. We all need to feel that someone is on our side and supporting us. Let your partner know that you are her [his] biggest supporter ...” (p. 177).

Read and discuss 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Contribute other Scriptures that encourage us to encourage one another.

3. Face issues as real problems

We need to be supportive, but we also need to be honest about our problems. “Part of love, remember, is honesty and requiring holiness and growth from each other. So when your spouse is not mature let her [him] know. Be direct. Tell her what you see as a problem” (p. 178).

Read Romans 2:4b. How can this text help you to relate honestly to one another? As couples, how can we be honest and still demonstrate the grace that each other needs?

4. Own your problems

“If you are the one confronted with your immaturity, own it” (Ibid.) Wise men and women want to get feedback and heed it, the doctors say.

It has been said that we can learn much about ourselves from our enemies! Share examples of confrontations that may have hurt but that led you to a growth experience.

5. Get a plan

Design a plan to deal with your immature issues and get help from others. “We need help, mentoring, support, and teaching” (Ibid.).

The guidelines in this study are from the book, “Boundaries in Marriage,” by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend. See our review of this important book on page 14.



Suggest types of support that we might give and receive as members of the body of Christ. For instance, if you are having trouble with organization, a friend who has matured in this area could help to hold you accountable and suggest ideas to aid you.

6. Make it mutual

“Guard against labeling one spouse ‘the problem person.’ This is never true.... [And] Guard against the one who is the most functional being seen as ‘the OK one.’ God says that you are equal in his eyes, and you should be equal in each other’s as well” (p 179).

Read Philippians 2:3-5. Discuss how this passage encourages the reality of mutuality and equality in your marriage relationship.

Raising Great Kids

*Reviewed by Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
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This book’s subtitle is, “A Comprehensive Guide to Parenting with Grace and Truth.” In regard to grace and truth, the authors say, “The problem is that the very ingredients we need for growth—grace and truth—are divided against one another. Choosing between the two is not the problem. Getting them together is” (p. 40).

The real goal of parenting? Mature character. Cloud and Townsend define character as: “*the sum of our abilities to deal with life as God designed us to*” (p. 29). Three study guides are also available: Guides for the preschooler (0-5), the school-age child (6-12), and the teenager (13-19).

The six character traits, parents, that you can help your child cultivate from the very beginning, are: Connectedness, Responsibility, Reality, Competence, Morality, and Worship/Spiritual Life. I wish there were space to share more about this invaluable gift for parents. Insightfully, the authors stress the importance of not just raising “good kids” but children who will handle life with maturity and wisdom.

Relationships . . .

The people I have been able to help most are those I trust.—Anonymous

Hardness of heart, much more than failure, is the true relationship killer.—Cloud and Townsend

Whatever you would that men should do to you, do so to them.—Jesus Christ

The unity that binds us together, that makes this earth a family and all men brothers and sons of God, is love.—Thomas Wolfe

*Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being.—
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Today’s problem is not atomic energy but man’s heart. Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding.—Albert Einstein

The glory of Friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him with his friendship. My friends have come unsought. The great God gave them to me.—Ralph Waldo Emerson

We must widen the circle of our love until it embraces the whole village; the village in turn must take into its fold the district; the district the province, and so on till the scope of our love encompasses the whole world.—Gandhi

Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends, for it is one of God’s best gifts. It involves many things, but above all, the power of going out of one’s self, and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another.—Thomas Hughes

quotes

God's Dream

*Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
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*Instead of calling others
to come to us, we need to
move toward them. We
need to build friendships
with those God has
placed around us.*



The vision He creates

God has a dream. It is a dream full of power and vision! It is a vision of what He wants to create in His Church—His people. And it all focuses on relationships. We find God's dream in three key passages: Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12.

God's dream is a picture of a church that works together as one united body. Each member has a ministry. And members work together in love, rejoicing and weeping together. It is a picture of a church that reaches out to the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and, because of its ministry, it becomes mature, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). Paul states: "Now you are the body of Christ and individual members of it" (1 Cor 12:27, ESV). "So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rm 12:5). This dynamic vision is not something we can create. Christ is the only one who can produce the relational transformation described in these chapters. Let's explore how we can be part of this exciting reality.

An accomplished fact

This vision of God's church is not a wish. It is a reality! It is what God has already brought about in Jesus Christ. When Paul presents this picture, he does not describe a process of *becoming*. Instead, he presents it as an accomplished fact. The Church is what it is because we are in Christ. Our connection to Him transforms our relationships with everyone else. Most of what He expresses in each of these epistles, following these key chapters, is practical counsel on how to live as God's Church. God establishes the relationships, and then He teaches us how to live within them. Christ changes our identity, and this change in identity changes our relationships. Our challenge is to integrate our new identity into our relationships—to see ourselves and others in the context of Christ. Our vertical relationship with God spills over into our horizontal relationships with those around us.

Three arenas to consider

There are three relational arenas that are affected by our relationship with Christ: the home, the church, and the world around us. Each is transformed by the reality of who we are in Christ. We need to learn to live out this reality. We do not have room to explore all the counsel Scripture provides about how we should relate in these three arenas. So we will focus on the core substance of how relationships are transformed.

1 The first step in our stewardship of relationships is recognizing who we are, because we are in Christ. We do not choose to become His Church. We choose Christ and He makes us part of what Scripture calls the "body of Christ." It is a package deal. We cannot accept Him without being part of His Church. And being part of His Church connects us with others. We cannot live in isolation. So the question is, now that we are part of this Church, how does this impact on the way we live?

2 The second step in transforming the way we relate to others is to value those around us as Christ does—He died for them! For value is determined not by what we think, but rather by what Jesus has already done. This view denies our natural tendency to compare ourselves with others and pretend we are better. It also

*God designed His Church to be a light on a hill,
not a collection of candles in a candle shop.*

denies the desire to value human position or status. Terms of importance and standing become irrelevant in the context of God's kingdom. In fact, we need each other. Alone, we are incomplete.

3 The rest of the "relationship journey" is the process of applying and integrating these two steps. But this is not something we can do naturally or by human effort. Our sinful human nature is foreign to Kingdom relationships. This relational journey starts at one place alone—a hill called Calvary. We have to die to self, and that is the divine miracle of being crucified with Christ. Until this happens, we cannot see ourselves or others as God does. We cannot love others as ourselves except in the context of a passionate love for God. This brings us to a core relational truth—a love sequence. God loves us. We experience His love, and love for Him awakens in our hearts. Out of this experience of love, we can love those around us. As others experience our love, they begin to experience God's love. And the cycle continues. God has trusted us to be the expression of His love on Earth; His primary way for restoring our relationship with Him.

Moving toward others

We must change the way we look at others in the world. Far too often we retreat into our "Christian ghettos," afraid to interact with those who do not think or act the way we do. Threatened by these differences, we build relational walls for protection. But instead of finding protection, the walls we build destroy us and our service for Him. God designed His Church to be a light on a hill, not a collection of candles in a candle shop.

Instead of calling others to come to us, we need to move toward them. We need to build friendships with those God has placed around us. The church of His day condemned Jesus for His relationships with the common people of the world. Isolated in their "hallowed halls," God's people had lost touch with the world and with their mission. Could it be that the same has happened to us today?

Conclusion

God has a dream! *We* are that dream. And we will only discover the fullness of our life in Christ in restored relationships—relationships that are transformed by the reality of His presence. We can choose to live in isolation, or we can choose to build relationships. God's way for changing the universe is through relationships. We may choose to be part of that transformation. We can revel in His dream for us!

stewardship

window more from
the director's desk ...



EUD Conducts Stewardship Summit

The Euro-African Division is the first division to conduct a division stewardship summit. Union and division leaders gathered in Jongny, Switzerland, for the year-end meetings, and the EUD Stewardship Summit followed on November 5-7. The group studied the principles of biblical stewardship and the issues and trends of stewardship in their division and the world.

Recommendations were made for shaping the direction of stewardship ministry in that division. We look forward to ongoing progress as administrators and department leaders work together to implement a renewed focus on biblical stewardship.

New Combined Offering Voted

The 2002 Annual Council established another "mile marker" on the journey toward a simplified offering system. Recognizing the need to emphasize systematic giving, the Council voted the implementation steps for the new Combined Offering System. The key outline and guidelines for this new program were established and policies will be voted at the 2003 Annual Council. Those fields desiring to move to this new offering system should work closely with division leadership in making this step. Please contact us for more information about what was voted, and for the recommended steps in the process.

Stewardship of a Family

Loren Seibold, Senior Pastor
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Within the family, we find ourselves engaged in life's most delicate relationships. How we manage our families is the single most important task of stewardship.

Delicate relationships

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord.... Love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.... Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 5:21-22, 25, 6:1, 4).

It is a pity that we often don't let stewardship extend its influence and embrace all of the gifts God has given us. Take our families, for example. Our people are undoubtedly more valuable than our money. And in many ways, money is easier to manage. Within the family, we find ourselves engaged in life's most delicate relationships. How we manage our families is the single most important task of stewardship. And this task has been given to us as a trust.

Principles for family stewardship

In a business, a boss can fire uncooperative employees, but the management of a family operates on different principles. Paul addresses these principles as he instructs families in Ephesians 5 and 6:

1. Stewards of family love

Family members must be good stewards of family love. "Husbands, love your wives," says Paul, "as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her" (Eph 5:25). We live in a world that has greatly cheapened the word "love." It has come to mean anything from a mild preference to raging lust. Yet real love—the kind that is "patient and kind ... not jealous or boastful ... not arrogant or rude ... that does not insist on its own way ... is not irritable or resentful ... does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right," the kind of love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"—this kind of love is the bond that holds families together (1 Cor 13). But—like money—*love can be lost.*

I once met a couple whose whole conversation revolved around the new things they were going to buy. I never heard them speak of each other's feelings or concerns. They only spoke about the new car, the new stereo, the new house, the new clothing. All of the love they might have invested in one another, they spent on things. I wasn't surprised when their marriage ended. They'd spent love, not on one another, but on things that were merely temporary.

2. Stewards of authority

Paul tells us there is a stewardship of authority. "Wives," he says, "be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord." And again, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." While in Paul's culture, patterns of family authority were composed along somewhat different lines than they would be today, still the principle of authority remains. Whether that authority comes from the husband, the wife, or ideally from the two working in cooperation, families that have no central authority may deteriorate into anarchy.

A mother I know recently complained of her grown children's chaotic lives. "And we tried to be such good parents," she said. "My husband and I never interfered with our children's desire to do anything they chose to do, nor forced them to do anything they didn't want to do." Theirs was a tragic abdication of authority. Too

SCRIPTURE:
Ephesians 5 and 6

much freedom left their family without guidance. They had abandoned their responsibility to “bring up [their children] in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4).

3. Stewards of trust

Paul implies a stewardship of trust. One of my friends tells me that in his childhood his father frequently came home drunk, angry, and cursing. But the next morning the father would awaken with horrible regret. With tears and embraces, he would promise his wife and children that he would never drink again.

“And each time,” says my friend, “I would believe him.” Inevitably, though, it would happen again the next week. And the next. My friend grew up feeling that the people you love can not be trusted. Though this is an extreme example, there are many families that have not been careful to steward the trust they have between one another. Unfaithfulness to trust comes in many guises—from sexual infidelity, to the misuse of family finances, to uncontrolled anger. And, once it is squandered, trust is difficult to get back.

4. Stewards of respect

Paul tells us to be stewards of respect. Children are to respectfully obey their parents, and husbands and wives are to respect one another. Occasionally I have met a father and husband who sees himself as family “dictator.” He feels that his family can only function well if he directs their every action, word, and thought. And woe unto anyone whose ideas don’t agree with his own! Though he demands respect for himself, he is a poor steward of respect. Invariably his children come to resent him.

While too little authority can create a spiritually “rootless” family, in Paul’s words, too much authority can provoke children to anger. They may even come to hate their parents, and to equally hate those sources of authority, such as religious faith or law, that their parents abused in order to place them in spiritual bondage.

All of Paul’s counsel to family members is governed by this one principle: “Be subject to one another.” The relational economy of a family doesn’t depend on who is at the “top” of the family hierarchy, but upon mutual respect.

A husband who loves his wife will relate to her with respect and humility. A wife who loves her husband will not belittle or ignore him. A child who respects his parents is more likely to obey than a child who is resentful. And a parent who respects the full humanness of her offspring is much more likely to hold them to her heart by love, than by anger, guilt, and punishment. In reality, can any person hold anyone by anger or guilt?

More or less?

When I talk to families in deep financial straights, I sometimes ask, “Where did the money go?” Too often, no one seems to know. A little here, a little there. It was spent through poor choices, on things of little value, and with little thought to the needs of the future. While it is possible for such a family to pull itself out of debt, it is difficult; and the money they’ve wasted is gone forever.

Unlike money—love, authority, trust, and respect are not diminished by use. Yet, as with money, they can be lost. These virtues disappear as we indulge in

A husband who loves his wife will relate to her with respect and humility. A wife who loves her husband will not belittle or ignore him. A child who respects his parents is more likely to obey than a child who is resentful.

negative words and actions. And they are consumed—sometimes forever—in the indulgence of anger, selfishness, self-gratification, or simple laziness.

It is much harder to restore these qualities in a family than it would have been to keep them in the first place. The unkind words that burn up love, the carelessness that wastes authority, the dishonesty that destroys trust, the resentment that squanders respect—these can be forgiven, but they will never be forgotten. Once the damage is done, the scars last and sometimes cripple those we love for a lifetime.

But all of this can be prevented by the discipline of mutual subjection! Isn’t that really all Jesus asks of us when he says, “Do unto others, as you would have them do unto you” (Mt 7:12)?

Remember: Just as we are stewards of God’s material world, we are stewards of His people—“care” givers together, with Him.



Caring for One Another

*Steve Willsey, Associate Pastor
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Staying on tune

When I attended boarding school as a teenager, the really popular students belonged to music organizations. Unhappily, I had no musical ability. But I knew that I must somehow rise to the occasion. Band was too difficult; so I chose to join the choir.

Miss Chamberlain, our choir director, was not easily swayed by my desire to boost my social status. She was rightfully concerned about the quality of her choir's performances. So this was the deal: I could join, but I must take voice lessons. That was all right, but I did not bargain for the solo performances I had to give in public.

I was scared to death at my first solo—which made matters much worse. I couldn't carry a tune! You would think my teacher would take pity on me, but she was a determined woman. I remember when I stood before a thousand plus people at a statewide youth rally and tried to sing. With my first note, my family ducked low in their seats, hoping not to be noticed.

But singing in the choral group was not so disastrous. With others' support, I could maintain my notes fairly well. And I can sing with this same help from the congregation today. Do you know that the support I feel when singing with the congregation is what the church is all about? I can't sing alone. But with all of you, it is a magical moment, and I'm suddenly transformed.

SCRIPTURE:
1 Corinthians 12:12

Spiritual survival

The Apostle Paul often wrote to the churches describing this very phenomenon—the effect we have on one another. He admonished members to support one another as they built up the church. In Greek, the words “one another” represented a mutual process that was to take place among the believers. Paul uses the term forty times. And this phrase properly identifies the point I want to make—we are all very dependent on one another for spiritual survival.

1 Corinthians 12 is one of several passages that refers to this phrase. There is also Colossians 3:12, where Paul calls the members of that congregation “God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved,” and then uses the phrase “one another” in the next verse.

It is almost scandalous to think that God considers the church I know to be His “chosen people, holy and dearly loved;” but that lofty description is consistent with other inspired spokesmen. Peter says we are “a chosen people, a royal priesthood ... belonging to God” (1P 2:9). And John says, “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God” (1J 3:3).

God knows exactly who we are; and in spite of it, we are His “beloved.” He sees us as blood-bought children, covered in the holiness of His Son. The Church of Christ is a very special community. Ellen White says the church “is the only object on earth on which the Lord bestows His supreme regard” (TM, p. 15). And the most conspicuous bestowal of all is God's gift of the Holy Spirit.

The apostles waited in Jerusalem till the Spirit empowered them to minister. Paul says that the Spirit's work is to distribute special gifts to believers for the building up of the “body” (1 Cor 12).

Because He loves us

When I think of what God has to work with, I recall His experience with Israel. Why did He choose a nation of slaves to represent Him among the nations of antiquity? Why did He tolerate their fickleness? Moses said, “The Lord did not choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples.... But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath He swore to your forefathers....” (Dt 7:7). And for us today, it is because of His mercy that we have been chosen. That is why we are dearly loved.

In the church at Corinth the worship was being disrupted by members who insisted on using the more dramatic gifts of the Spirit—prophecy and speaking in tongues—even when these gifts did not contribute to the worship service. Inspired by the Spirit, Paul employed the metaphor of the human body to describe the proper function of each gifted member of the church. “The body is a unit,” he writes. “Though it is made up of many parts ... they form one body” (1Cor 12:12). The church is just like this. For all kinds of people from many different cultures have been baptized by the Spirit into the “one body.”

Chaos erupted in Corinth when these groups came together to worship. And needing to draw them together, Paul demonstrated that their many differences were like various parts of the body—parts that don't look alike or have the same function, but that are interrelated and dependent on one another. Each member is a part of Christ's body, unique, yet contributing to the success of the whole. This was Jesus' burden as He said: I pray “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you” (Jn 17:21).

The place of healing

While traveling in Europe a while back, I spent the Sabbath with friends in old Yugoslavia. It was just a small city I visited, but I was thrilled to find a beautiful little Adventist church with a warm and faithful congregation. Though we had difficulty communicating, we knew we belonged to each other.

Paul says: “Just as each of us has one body with many members and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others” (Rm 12: 4-5, NASB). This is the pivotal point of this sermon. “You are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor 12:27). We need one another for spiritual survival.

The Holy Spirit nurtures us as we walk with Christ, but it is rare that the process is accomplished apart from interaction with other members of the body. The church is not only a place of worship and outreach, but a center for personal growth and healing. In the book by Larry Crabb, *Connecting: A Radical New Vision*, Crabb proposes that the church, rather than the therapist’s couch, is the most logical setting for most emotional healing to occur. He says we may depend on the Spirit to “search our hearts for hidden matters that interfere with trust. But the absolute center of what he does to help us change is to reveal himself to us, to give us a taste of what he is really like, and to pour his life into us” (p. 9).

Crabb adds another sentence that may be controversial, at least among professionals. A critical element in the Spirit’s process of revealing Himself, knowing what He is really like and then pouring His life into us, “is to place us in a community of people who are enough like him to give us that taste firsthand.” In other words, a powerful experience sufficient for healing comes through connecting with other members of the Christian family. “It’s time for the church to enter the real battle going on in our souls,” says Crabb (p. 150). It is time for us to take seriously the “one another” role of the church. It is the caring ministry of each church member that can make the greatest impression on our community.

Paul described what this spiritual ministry is all about. “As God’s chosen people ... clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (Col 3:12-14). Christianity is best shared with others when they see Christ revealed in the lives of His disciples. And that is also how healing takes place: Jesus pours His own life into those who are hurting through the loving ministry of fellow travelers.

One small gesture

As Scott walked home from school, he saw a group of boys attacking Kyle. Kyle, they taunted, was a nerd or misfit. They knocked Kyle’s large stack of books from his arms and tripped him. He landed in the dirt, glasses flying! Scott jogged over, helped Kyle pick up his things, and invited him home. Over the next few years, they became good friends.

When the two young men went to separate colleges, they lost touch with each other. But soon after, Kyle wrote to Scott and told him the unfinished story of the day

they met. He told Scott that he had cleaned out his locker so that his mother wouldn’t have to do it later. He was taking all of his belongings home, because he had planned to commit suicide. “Thankfully,” he said, “when you invited me home, you saved me from taking my life.”

Upon relating this story, Scott said, “Never, until that moment, did I realize the power of my actions—how one small gesture can change a person’s life for better or for worse.”

Do you know that the support I feel when singing with the congregation is what the church is all about? I can’t sing alone. But with all of you, it is a magical moment, and I’m suddenly transformed.

And then the Apostle Paul said, “And now I will show you the most excellent way....” (1 Cor 13:1). Caring ministry to one another is formed in a heart of love, planted there and nourished by Jesus Himself. People said of early Christians, “How they love one another!”

We need more “one anothering.” I need it. You need it. One anothering can help liberate you from the wounds of your past. It can encourage us in our spiritual journey as Christ expresses His own love through you to me. One anothering in our congregation can effectively demonstrate to our community the gospel we preach. It is “the more excellent way,” for it comes directly to us from the heart of God.



When Daybreak Comes

*Karen and Ron Flowers, Co-Directors
General Conference Family Ministries*

*The quality of our
human relationships
reflects the quality
of our relationship
with God.*

Introduction

A Rabbi once asked his students, “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?”

One student suggested, “Is it when you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep in the distance?”

“No,” the Rabbi answered.

“Is it when you can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?” asked a second student.

“No,” the Rabbi responded again.

“Please tell us the answer, then,” urged the students.

Said the wise teacher, “It is when you have enough light to look human beings in the face and recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Until then the darkness is still with us.”

Vertical and horizontal relationships

Our Lord recognized that we form relationships in two directions—with God and with humankind. The *vertical*, if you will, and the *horizontal*. More importantly, He gave spiritual significance to human relationships. He elevated them to a moral plane parallel to our relationship with God.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summed up the law in two commands: “Love the Lord your God...” and “Love your neighbor...” Like two sides of one coin, love for God and love for others are bound together. Christianity holds on to these two relationships at the same time. When one is emphasized to the exclusion or minimization of the other, religion is warped.

1 *Overemphasis on the vertical.* In my experience, if I overemphasize my vertical relationship with God without allowing my spirituality to permeate the world around me in my relationships with fellow human beings, I have an unbalanced, mystical religion. Throughout history such a view has led to the formation of so-called “spiritual centers,” where “the religious” have sought deeper spirituality in isolation from the world.

One such center is the Shrine of La Verna in Italy. There today, through self-imposed exclusion from human contact, monks endeavor to reach a state of perfect holiness. It is their quest to achieve such a high spiritual state that God will honor them by placing in their bodies the stigmata of Jesus—the wound marks in His hands, feet, and side—as church tradition records they were bestowed on their beloved patron saint, Francis of Assisi. In order to achieve such holiness, they believe they must be totally separated from the world around them. In some cases monks have imposed radical isolation upon themselves for over seven years, coming down from their monastic cells twice a day—once for prayers and once to eat. At no time do they exchange even a word with another human being.

We are compelled to admire the resolve and determination of these monks, the singular, intense focus they exhibit. But if we hear what Jesus is saying, we must question whether or not—in their great desire to be attuned to God—they have missed something equally important, specifically their spiritual responsibility to fellow human beings.

SCRIPTURE :
1 John 4: 7-11

2 *Overemphasis on the horizontal.* On the other hand, if my life is only focused in the here and now, even if I am involved with people—doing for people, but loving the “Lord’s work” more than the *Lord* of the work, neglecting to give attention to deepening my personal relationship with God—I run the risk of slipping into a kind of “social” religion. It is a religion that operates from a shallow pool of platitudes. It ebbs and flows with the waves of popular concern. But it lacks the depths of understanding and experience with God that undergirds warm, loving relationships and compassionate, caring ministry over the long haul. This also is an unbalanced experience.

3 *Avoiding the ditches.* Without a doubt, there is the ditch on either side. In the New Testament Paul and Peter call Gentiles from their preoccupation with life here, with the human side of the equation, to a relationship with God that will infuse relationships in the here and now with new meaning. For example, the book of Romans dedicates eleven chapters to plainly presenting the good news of the gospel. Then, and only then, beginning in chapter 12, does the apostle turn to describe the transformation that belief in Jesus and a commitment to the principles of His kingdom will work in the human realm. At the same time Matthew records his windows on the ministry of Christ for a generation whose preoccupation with the *vertical* has led to legalistic hypocrisy. In his gospel the events and words of Christ impress the people with the importance of the human side of the equation (cf. Mt 5:23-24; 25:35-45). Perhaps the Jewish audience Matthew was writing to was like many religious people today.

Something was missing

The story of Frank* comes to mind. Frank was a thin, little man who kept dried seaweed in his pockets instead of jelly beans. He had a widespread reputation for his piety and sacrifice. When the congregation refinished the church basement, he gave a lot of money and worked scores of dawn-to-dusk Sundays until it was finished. He personally paid for and serviced the literature rack in the town laundromat. And when an evangelist set up his tent during off-season on the carnival grounds, Frank passed out more handbills than anyone. He was always present at prayer meeting, and he always knew his memory verse. Surely, if a man could love God, he did.

You have to wonder though, about some other things. Frank didn’t seem to have much of a relationship with his wife and children. He seldom brought the family into public view. His wife was always busy taking care of the house and rearing the children, and their house needed a lot of repair. Fellow church members can’t remember ever seeing Frank’s wife in a new dress. One spring a friend in the church gave her a flat of pansies. She cried.

Beloved, we need the vertical relationship, but we also need the horizontal. Hearts are starving for warmth and kindness! And often those starving hearts are those closest to us. They are starving while we are pursuing our relationship with the Lord. Hence there is much in the New Testament which details how true religion will live life in human clothes.

Jesus. Jesus spoke in both general and specific terms about His plan for human relationships under the principles of His new kingdom—a truly magnificent plan!

**Both Frank and Dan are pseudonyms*

God is profoundly interested in how we do relationships with each other.

- John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

- John 15:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Apostles. Like Jesus, the apostles recognized the significance of human relationships.

- 1 John 4:21 “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

- Gal. 5:14 (A most amazing verse) “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

There is something very important here that we cannot miss. God is profoundly interested in how we do relationships with each other.



Why is human love so important?

1 “Human beings need to know human love in order to comprehend God’s love (1J 4:11-12). Agape love is our greatest witness (Jn 13:35).

Dan told his pastor his story. But first, you should know that Dan was the head elder of his church. He was also the treasurer. And the personal ministries leader, and the Sabbath School teacher, and the caretaker of the property. When the pastor and his family arrived, Dan’s wife informed the new pastor’s wife that it would be all right to have them around for a while, but that her husband really was the shepherd of that congregation. He had a saying of his own that conveyed the same sentiment: “Pastors come, and pastors go, but I stay on forever!”

...He wiped away his tears and began to tell a story of a little boy. A little boy who wanted so very much to please his father but who never seemed to be able to do anything right.

It wasn’t long into his ministry in that place that the pastor began to receive reports from members about the hardness of Dan’s preaching and teaching in their midst. “It’s like he has the church in the palm of his hand and he’s squeezing out all of its life juices,” one woman confided. “He says we aren’t faithful with our tithes and offerings. We don’t study our Bibles enough. We don’t eat the right things or wear the right clothes. We never do anything right!”

Finally the pastor knew he had to confront Dan. With trepidation he made an appointment with the now old man.

The young pastor expected a mighty defense as he confronted Dan. But he was totally taken by surprise when great sobs rose from deep within Dan while he listened to the concerns of the pastor and the church members about his ministry.

Then, without fanfare, he wiped away his tears and began to tell a story of a little boy. A little boy who wanted so very much to please his father but who never seemed to be able to do anything right. At first the pastor was puzzled, then the connection broke over him. The old man was the little boy. And now, in his dealings with the church, his own experience had come full circle. He was the hard father, and the congregation were his children. “I know they say God is a loving Father,” he concluded. “I preach about it, but I don’t know what it means.”

Our experience with human love either sets us up to understand and respond to Scripture’s familial metaphors of God as loving parent and marriage partner, or our human experience makes it virtually impossible, but for a miracle of grace, for us to understand God as Love.

The love of Christians for people. The love of Christian parents for their children. The love of Christian spouses for each other. The love of Christians extended freely into a needy world. This “agape” love is our most powerful testimony and evangelistic witness. We have priceless opportunities in our human relationships. Hear Paul’s plea for the radical transformation of the gospel to be worked in our lives so that our witness can be heard:

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.... Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:17-20).

God’s love revealed

2 Our love for God is manifested by our love for each other (Mt 25:40). This is the second reason why God elevates human relationships to a spiritual plane. Our love for others is a tangible expression of our faith. Loving others is not our salvation, for that salvation was prepared for us long before we ever did anything good. *But it is the evidence* that we have laid hold of the salvation God has worked out for us in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:14 makes this very point: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” Our love for others is the surest evidence that we have understood the gospel. The quality of our human relationships is the best litmus test for the quality of our relationship with God.

A young theology student tried to deepen his spirituality by spending a great deal of time in prayer and Bible study. He spent long days in class and at work and was absent from his home late into the night, praying and studying with his classmates.

One day he came home for supper and his little boy begged him to stay home for the evening. Seeing the father brush his son aside, his wife attempted to intervene. “He only wants to be with you,” she said. “He loves you so much.” But the young theologian countered with an angry rebuff, showing how little he understood the connection between his relationship with God and his relationship with his family. “That’s the trouble with you women,” he said with disgust. “You don’t understand the things of God.”

This love for one another, of which the Bible writers speak, is not a love we generate in ourselves. 1 John 4:12 says, "If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

A strong bond in weakness

Some time ago a remarkable story by Henri Nouwen entitled "Adam's Peace" appeared in the magazine, *Signs of the Times* (May 1989):

"I live in a house with six handicapped people and four assistants. We live together as a family. We eat together, play together, pray together, and go out together. We all have our own preferences, and we all have our problems getting along with someone in the house, whether handicapped or not. We laugh a lot. We cry a lot too. Sometimes both at the same time.

Adam is the weakest person in our family. He is a 25-year-old man who cannot speak, cannot dress or undress himself, cannot walk alone, cannot eat without much help. He does not cry or laugh. Only occasionally does he make eye contact. His back is distorted. His arm and leg movements are twisted. He suffers from severe epilepsy and, despite heavy medication, sees few days without grand-mal seizures. Sometimes, as he grows suddenly rigid, he utters a howling groan. On a few occasions I've seen one big tear roll down his cheek.

It takes me about an hour and a half to wake Adam up, give him his medication, carry him into his bath, wash him, shave him, clean his teeth, dress him, walk him to the kitchen, give him his breakfast, put him in his wheelchair and bring him to the place where he spends most of the day with the therapeutic exercises.

My dearest companion

After a month of working this way with Adam, something happened to me. This deeply handicapped young man, who is considered by many outsiders a vegetable, a distortion of humanity, a useless animal-like creature who shouldn't have been born, started to become my dearest companion.

As my fears gradually lessened, a love emerged in me so full of tender affection that most of my other tasks seemed boring and superficial compared with the hours spent with Adam. Out of his broken body and broken mind emerged a most beautiful human being, offering me a greater gift that I would ever offer him: Somehow Adam revealed to me who he is, and who I am, and how we can love each other.

Adam in his total vulnerability calls us together as a family. Adam. The most broken of us all is, without any doubt, the strongest bond among us. Because of Adam there is always someone home. Because of Adam there is a quiet rhythm in the house. Because of Adam there are words of affection, gentleness, and tenderness. Because of Adam there is always space for mutual forgiveness and healing. Adam, the weakest among us, is our true peacemaker. How mysterious are God's ways!"

(First published as "The Peace That Is Not of This World", *Weavings*, March/April 1988. Copied with permission of the Estate of Henri J. M. Nouwen.)

Conclusion

It's hard to know whether the wise old Rabbi who talked about the darkness and the dawn ever read the New Testament. Perhaps he did. In the first letter of John we find these words: "I am writing you a new command.... Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light" (2:8-10).

"As my fears gradually lessened, a love emerged in me so full of tender affection that most of my other tasks seemed boring and superficial compared with the hours spent with Adam."



How People Grow

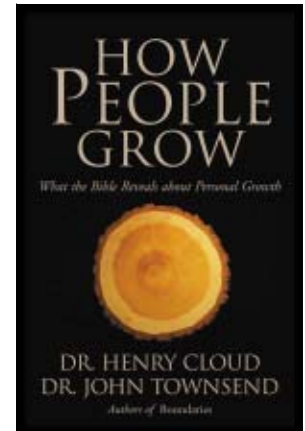
Reviewed by Benjamin C. Maxson, Director
General Conference Stewardship Department

This book is a must read for every individual working with people or seeking to grow personally. Cloud and Townsend present, “All personal growth is spiritual growth” as their foundational principle. The book is theologically sound and psychologically professional. Among other works, Cloud and Townsend have written a series of books on “Boundaries,” but this volume shares their undergirding philosophy. It is the result of their own personal and professional journey—discovering biblical principles and their application in working with people.

The authors begin with a clear theology of man and sin and move into a biblical understanding of God and grace. They make it clear that growth can only come in the context of a life surrendered to the lordship of Jesus Christ. They also explore the reality of God and what He offers to the one seeking to grow, as well as the role and power of faith in this growth process.

Key principles and processes that effect growth in the lives of people are examined. Each chapter concludes with “Tips for Growers,” and “Tips for Facilitators,” and these tips summarize the main points of each chapter. The book is well-organized and well-illustrated, with countless personal experiences from the lives of the authors as well as people with whom they have worked.

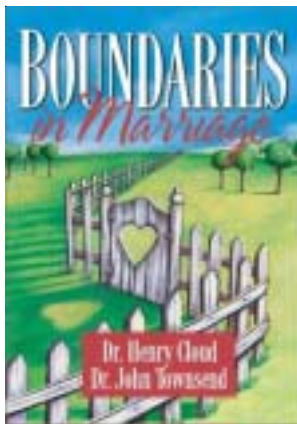
This work should not only be read, but should be digested, and the principles integrated into how we grow and how we do ministry.



By Dr. Henry Cloud and
Dr. John Townsend
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001
US \$ 19.99

Boundaries in Marriage

Reviewed by the Staff of Dynamic Steward



By Dr. Henry Cloud and
Dr. John Townsend
Zondervan Publishing
Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999
US \$ 19.99

In this issue, you’ve no doubt seen that we have featured Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend several times. They are an excellent resource for an issue on “Relationships.”

Boundaries in Marriage begins by defining boundary as “a property line.” And, say the doctors, “If you know where the property lines are, you can look up who *owns* the land.... A relationship like marriage requires each partner to have a sense of ownership of himself or herself” (pp. 17, 18).

In Part 2, Cloud and Townsend talk about “Building Boundaries in Marriage.” They apply ten laws of boundaries to marriage and unpack and carefully examine six core values: 1) Love of God, 2) Love of Your Spouse, 3) Honesty, 4) Faithfulness, 5) Compassion and Forgiveness, and 6) Holiness.

Part 3 of the book is dedicated to “Resolving Conflict in Marriage”—protecting marriage from intruders (not just people!), taking a close look at six types of conflict within marriages, and resolving conflict with boundary-loving and boundary resisting spouses.

Not only will you find their philosophical foundation sound, but you will discover fresh new insights in the Scriptures they share. Their examples and stories are invaluable.

Single, Again

Reviewed by *Fabiola Vatel*, Editorial Assistant
General Conference Stewardship Department

Divorce is painful. Most Christians do not march to the marriage altar with a backup plan. When a union is broken it often leaves individuals feeling angry, empty, hurt, and embarrassed. Some feel ostracized by their friends, family, church, and even God. The Lord has promised to heal the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit (Psalms 34:18). God hates divorce, but He still loves the divorced person!

In *Single Again and Secure in God's Love*, author Jim Smoke acknowledges that divorce is traumatic, "it's a foreign country with different rules, regulations, and road signs. It's a place where your heart is broken and your spirit is crushed. But *there is hope!*" Through a series of brief inspirational meditations, Smoke offers practical biblical applications to soothe the hurting soul.

This short book is easy to read and beautifully illustrated. The reader will also find inspiring quotes on every page.

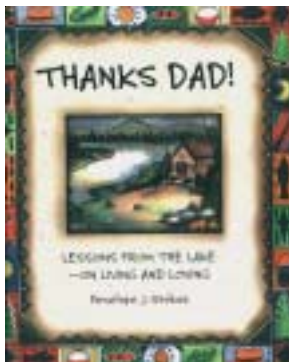
I enthusiastically recommend the book to anyone who has experienced the trauma of a broken marriage and who longs to find healing and wholeness through Christ.



By Jim Smoke
J. Countryman, a division of
Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Nashville, Tennessee, 2001
US \$ 13.99

Thanks, Dad

Reviewed by *Claire L. Eva*, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department



By Penelope J. Stokes
J. Countryman, a division of
Thomas Nelson, Inc.
Nashville, Tennessee, 2000
US \$ 12.99

One day I slipped into a familiar card shop and glanced at the cover of a devotional book that appealed to me, *Beside a Quiet Stream: Words of Hope for Weary Hearts* by Penelope J. Stokes. As I read I was inspired and renewed by the short, meaningful devotionals. I have since read her *Simple Words of Wisdom: 52 Virtues for Every Woman*. Now I'm a fan.

Thanks Dad! Lessons from the Lake on Living and Loving, is a brief but insightful account of lessons that the young Penelope gleaned from her father over the years during their weekly fishing excursions from their lakeside property.

Some of the virtues described in this colorfully illustrated text are: Responsibility, Skill, Risk, Self-Awareness, Priorities, Courage, Independence, Acceptance, Regret, Patience, Inner Peace, Contentment, and Optimism. The author remembers phrases her father shared with her and applies them to the qualities listed above. For instance, in the chapter on Responsibility, her father's admonition was, "Bait your own hook; clean your own catch." The section on Skill—"Finesse, not force." And on Courage—"To find the fish, you have to get out of the cove."

I joyfully recommend this small volume to you, for you, along with the two previous volumes mentioned. They make lovely gifts!

resources

Resources for Preaching and Worship—Year B

Westminster John Knox Press \$ 29.95

This work, compiled by Hannah Ward and Jennifer Wild, is the first volume of a three-volume set that provides ministers and worship leaders of all denominations invaluable resources. “It weaves together a rich tapestry of quotations, meditations, poems, and prayers by classic and contemporary writers....” Some of the materials can be linked to special events such as Christmas and Easter.

The organization of the book is not in a style utilized by Adventists, but the volume contains a wealth of meaningful writings. Its most significant feature is that, when studying the readings, one finds depth and new modes of expression that are refreshing and insightful. The heart and mind experience Christian harmony with the messages of the writers.

The quotations, meditations, poems, and prayers come from a plethora of writers—across time and experience. Just to name a few, you’ll find Augustine, Moody, Bonhoeffer, Thielicke, C. S. Lewis, Nouwen, Billy Graham, and many others.

editorial

*Claire L. Eva, Assistant Director
General Conference Stewardship Department*

It is written: “It [is] not good that the man should be alone....”(Gn 2:18). In the beginning was God. And from the beginning God was in relationship—the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We were created for unbroken relationship, created to relate freely to Him and to one another.

While growing up, my five sisters were also my friends. And we had a lot to relate over. There were squabbles—territorial battles, battles over responsibilities, battles over clothing and other “things”—but there was always love.

Relationships are “soil” for growth. It is in relationship that we learn to know and accept ourselves and others, warts and all; precious sinners saved by the grace of our Abba, Father.

An intimate love relationship with God opens the heart for a growing trust in others and, thus, growing relationships. We all know that relationships are “give and take.” That’s why one-sided relationships don’t last. True friendships are two-way, lifelong dialogues.

As God’s stewards we need to keep our hearts open to potential relationships we may encounter. Author, Ravi Zacharias tells the story of a lonely man his wife invited home for Christmas dinner. He was displeased, to say the least, because the man dominated what he thought would be an intimate family time. As the evening wore on, Ravi was “stuck” with this man, listening to him and answering his questions. But when the gentleman stood to leave he extended his hand and said, “I want to thank you for the best Christmas I’ve ever had in my entire life!”

It took so little to bring such joy! And, of course, Ravi will never forget the lesson of that evening. Relationship is for everyone. Who will be your next friend?

DYNAMIC Steward

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Exploring partnership with God

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