

THE ARDUOUS ODYSSEY

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PREFACE

This book is a series of essays on the struggles of life. It is not for those who feel always victorious and triumphant; it is for those who are well aware of the struggles of life, and seek to maintain their equilibrium in the midst of them. It is not for those who seek to make it through life grandly; it is for those who simply want to make it through. If you think this is a negative attitude, this book is not for you; put it down instantly. Sometimes those who admit to struggling are discouraged by those who are not willing to admit it. It is quite possible that those who claim not to be struggling are afraid to admit it lest it compromise their cries of victory.

Furthermore, the book will be in an informal, conversational style. We will use the personal pronouns generously and not worry about “literary excellence.” Our purpose is to help people and not to impress them. I have been compelled, as I hope by the Holy Spirit, to write this series as a result of fifty years of intensive training and experience. With ten years of concentrated formal education and many thousands of personal interviews, plus a wide range of experience, I have felt that I might have something to contribute to the overall understanding of the implications of our relationship to Christ and to others, as well as to life in general.

I have seen myself as something of a “wilderness shepherd,” reaching out to those whose way has led them through the rugged terrain. To such ones this book is warmly dedicated.

INTRODUCTION

This book is for those who are willing to admit that life is often a struggle, it is not for those who dare not admit this and, thus, tarnish the image of their religious euphoria. For the majority of people on earth, life is a constant process of scaling the cliffs, rather than treading the pathways.

Catching its title from the mythological struggles and adventures of Odysseus or Ulysses, the famed Trojan warrior, this book will address the areas of greatest struggle on the earthly pilgrimage. It will deal with the relationship to Christ and to people and to circumstances. It will provide, hopefully, something of a handbook for handling life's hardships. It will deal with these problems on a spiritual, physical, and psychological level. In this respect, it will be pragmatic and not spiritualistic. It will not assume that every problem is readily handled by a prayer, although, it will assume that prayer is an essential daily link with God. While the idea of the inner spirit is an important one, the book will not be seen as sectarian in any way, but covering the broad spectrum of the personal identity with God and Christ.

The term, "Odyssey," is from the Greek mythological character Odysseus (Ulysses), one of the heroes of the famed Trojan War. When the war was over, Odysseus began a long and perilous trek homeward - a long and arduous journey, which took him ten years, and was filled with much hardship and adventure. The term "odyssey" is used to depict such long and strenuous journeys as might be illustrated by our own early pioneers. If this seems a harsh way to depict life, it would only seem so to those who are characteristically insensitive to the struggle of others.

In a sense this is a book of relationships. It has to do with the relationship to God and to persons and to things. In terms of the relationship to God, it will seek to bring it to the simplest common denominator. What is the essential reality of that relationship? In this respect we will learn the difference between reality and truth. When Jesus said "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," the Greek text uses the word *aletheia*, which means "reality." Jesus says that He is reality. The difference between truth and reality is that truth is merely the verbalizing of reality. Christ is the ultimate reality within us.

The ability to articulate or verbalize that is totally related to the ability of the human mind to accurately define that reality. It is a matter of words. The problem is that the human mind is greatly limited in its capacity to depict the Divine. As long as we understand this, we realize that our discussion of Christ is limited by the human problem, and thus, the flexibility that says, "I know there is a reality beyond my ability or the ability of others to express." Ultimately, we must transcend human words and reach for the real.

And so, with human relationships, as well as circumstances, we must learn to look beyond the outward expressions of others, to the spirit and intent behind them. And we must learn to look beyond the facade of circumstances and catch the deeper meaning of them, which is what God intended in the first place.

And thus, we will make our odyssey together, finding ways to cope with one another and with circumstances, and learning to "reach for the real."

The Challenge

THE MOUNTAIN

**The Substance of the Struggle
The Elements of the Mountain
Essential Requirements
The Challenge**

THE CLIMB

Coming to Terms with the Self

THE OTHER CLIMBERS

The Uneasy Course of Human Relationships

THE MOUNTAIN

The Substance of the Struggle

Climbing Everest is not an overnight hike. Sometimes we liken life's process to a sea, with its storms and calms; its winds and breezes. But it is also instructive to think of it in terms of a mountain. Each one has a personal mountain to climb. It has its steep paths; it has its refreshing glens; it has also its precipices and rocky cliffs to scale. How much of each seems completely inequitable. Some have constant hardships; some have easier paths; some have refreshing glens along the way. To seek an answer to the dilemma — Why? — is not only frustrating but also futile. We must leave that to God. There is much peace to be had in simply accepting the realities of our own life and facing the challenge of it in the name of Christ. The question, then, is what is our own individual mountain and, more specifically, what is it now? There is no way to tell what the face of it is really like. We will not know until we get there and we must be prepared for any exigency. But how do we prepare ourselves?

And thus, we will make our odyssey together, finding ways to cope with one another, and with circumstances, and learning to “reach for the real.”

The Elements of the Mountain

Relationship to God

The relationship to God is not always easy. Anyone who claims that it is easy may either be in a state of religious euphoria or too superficial. It is important to say this for the people who struggle, because they need to know that struggling with one's relationship to God is quite understandable and quite common. While it is true that the Spirit of God in us prevails throughout our lives, we do run into difficulty in the flesh. Paul admitted to this when he said, “*Though our outward man perish, yet is our inner man renewed day by day*” (II Corinthians 4:16). Paul was referring, of course, to the struggles that he had continuously with his own flesh. Most of these struggles have to do with personality factors, which vary extremely from individual to individual. For example, there are those who struggle with fear and anxiety. Such ones will often be chided for their lack of trust, when, in fact, it may be actually a genetic characteristic. Or, on the other hand, it may have to do with some physical condition. Anxiety and depression, for example, are often related to problems in the nervous system which can be treated medically. The encouraging and comforting thing for the believer is that, whatever the nature of the problem, these human inadequacies in the flesh do not affect the constancy of the work of the Spirit of God within us. Feelings can vacillate considerably from day to day, but the Spirit of Christ within us is ever constant. And so, while we are held by the Spirit of God, we do experience many struggles in the flesh on our earthly odyssey.

Relationship to Others

What is the mountain made of that we all have to contend with in our lives? The specific application is that it is as varied as the individuals. However, there are certain factors that everyone must deal with. Probably the most crucial and difficult would be the element of human relationships. Human relationships are not easy. They can be very troublesome at times. Over a period of time, most human relationships will run into some difficulty. Anyone who thinks these relationships are easy may be too superficial in their interactions. Over one's lifetime, the pathway to rewarding relationships with others can be quite rugged. There are principles to follow which can make the trek easier. We will come to these.

Relationship to Circumstances

A good part of the mountain has to do with circumstances. How do we cope with them and remain at peace? Sometimes the circumstances are very hard and we do not know how we can get through them. And then again, they may be easy for awhile. Change is one of the fundamental facts of life. Again, it is quite important to realize that struggling with one's circumstances is a commonality of life, even for believers. Unfortunately, many of the Lord's people assume that when they are in difficult circumstances there must be something they have done wrong. Or they may think that they do not have enough faith to keep God's attention focused on their particular circumstances. People often feel guilty about worry, assuming that "it is a sin to worry." But there is nothing in the Bible that ever suggests that it is a sin to worry. There is much that encourages believers to rest in the Lord and not to be anxious, but never that the inability to avoid anxiety is cause for guilt. If you are struggling with your circumstances, do not assume that you are any different from the large numbers of believers around you. Sometimes people are afraid to admit that they're struggling, because they do not want to affect their "spiritual image." Often people are afraid to admit to themselves that they are anxious or worried or distressed.

There is a faulty teaching in many circles that Christians must always feel uplifted and victorious, no matter what the circumstances. This is not a biblical concept. Even Paul admitted to the Corinthians that he had periods of great distress — *"For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears"* (II Corinthians 7:5). Again, to the Corinthians, he confessed — *"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, in so much that we despaired even of life..."* (II Corinthians 1:8). But contrast that with a statement in the same letter, and also relative to Macedonia — *"Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place"* (II Corinthians 2:14). If we make the distinction between continual triumph in the Spirit, and yet, often have distress in the flesh, we can balance these attitudes.

So, being keenly aware of our circumstances, even to the point of distress, is not contrary to the experience of believers everywhere, and certainly not a matter of guilt. In fact, if you are hanging on the side of a cliff, you had better be quite aware of exactly what your position is, even though it may be distressing. It is more to the glory of God that we remain steadfast in our relationship to Him, in spite of the circumstances, as a result of the work of the Spirit in us, than that we learn how to cover up our true feelings in the circumstances.

But what are the guarantees in regard to our circumstances?

There are none. Many believers through the centuries have been plagued with their circumstances all during their lives, but that did not mean that the Lord was any the less with them. In Hebrews 11, along with the "heroes" who did great exploits and overcame circumstances, there are those who are listed as triumphant, who did not receive the promise. *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"* (Hebrews 11:13).

The ultimate intention of God for His creatures is that they be fulfilled in the Spirit, and prepared to be with Him forever. His exact purposes for each individual are not that easily determined. We can speculate and dedicate and set our own course on the basis of what we think God intends for us, but in the final analysis, He only knows just what part we each play in His kingdom. Our confidence is not in what we accomplish on the earth, according to human standards, but what He accomplished in us, according to divine standards.

Relationship to Things

As much as we humans try to spiritualize everything, we do, in fact, live on the earth and are subject to its space/time requirements. Things do have an important place.

The variables are individual, and lie more in the issues of what kind of things; how much; how important. Once again, we are caught in the whims of the flesh. It may be nice to emulate Jesus in “no place to lay His head,” but we are not Jesus. It would be an unfair comparison, since Jesus took upon Him the nature of man before the Fall, and was here for a different purpose than to be an example of self-denial. We must have some place to “lay our heads.” Some might prefer a bed of pine needles in the forest, and others, on the other hand, may not feel called to do that. That is probably the key thought — What does Christ want of us? If He chooses, for His own purposes, to allow one to live in wealth, then that is the proper place. But if He chooses on the other hand to give one a place in the wilderness, then that is His choice. He will give grace in either case. I have experienced both ends of the scale and must report that there are problems in either place. But you must understand that depriving oneself merely for the sake of religious exercise is futile. It is true that Jesus said, “*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Matthew 16:24). However, Jesus was not talking about self-denial, but denying self — quite a different thing. Denying self was the occasion for taking up the cross, in the sense that they could not save themselves, but must rely on Christ. If one were to make a unilateral decision to give up one’s normal place in society in terms of either wealth or poverty, one might fail to occupy the assignment in the Body as Christ intended.

The crucial question is not what one has in the way of things, but one’s attitude toward them. Here we are dealing again with the flesh. It is as much of the flesh to despise things, as it is to care about them too much. Once again, we are dealing with the flesh. The Holy Spirit within does not come with feelings. Rather feelings are a natural reaction to earthly circumstances. Once again, we must go back to the roots. How one reacts to things may depend a good deal on hereditary and environmental circumstances. But the work of the Spirit within continues in terms of the perfecting process, however we may feel about things in the flesh. But this is all part of the mountain. The struggle over things and one’s attitude toward them can be very keen for some, and less of a struggle for others. The struggle to overcome caring too much about things may be as much as the struggle to overcome the concerns of poverty. For some, as in the case of St. Francis of Assisi, grinding poverty is a way of verifying one’s spiritual quality. So the struggle rages. But it is important to note that this struggle is part of the mountain.

Essential Requirements

God

The most basic requirement is God. If that sounds too religious, I do not mean the human forms that surround the pursuit of God. Often the reality of God is obscured by the forms with which humans seek to define Him and experience Him. The truth of the matter is, that God cannot be ultimately defined in human terms. So then how do we discuss Him or relate to Him? We discuss Him with the recognition that our words are limited. We allow latitude for ourselves and others in their efforts to articulate their experience. But there is a reality that goes beyond our words and forms. Jesus made this quite clear when He said to the woman of Samaria, “*The true worshiper will worship the Father in spirit and in truth [reality]*”... (John 4:23). The meaning is quite clear. The Jews were hung up on Jerusalem and the trappings of worship, while the Samaritians were hung up on Mt. Gerazim as the proper place. Jesus said that the proper place is in the Spirit. This is where the ultimate reality is. To the Romans, Paul speaks of an inner-line of communication between our spirits and the Spirit of God. “*So also the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with unuttered sighs...*” (Romans 8:26). There

is, then, a direct communion between our spirits and the Spirit of God — communicating in a reality that goes beyond our own ability to experience it or articulate it. Religious observances are satisfying to the fleshly mind with its intellect and feelings, but we must reach for the real in recognizing that our identity with Christ goes quite beyond our capacity to enter into it at that level.

One thing is certain — without the Spirit of God within, the human person is unable to handle adequately the mountain that he must climb. However one defines God and one's experience with Him in human terms, reaching for the real means consciously identifying with Him, and requesting His help and presence. The human psyche is always subject to negative feelings and doubts and fears, but the glorious reality is that the Spirit of God within takes us through, in spite of our human feelings and distresses. Think what you like, fuss and fume if you will, but the Spirit of Christ within will hold you steadfast in spite of yourself, if you have given your life into His hands.

It is most important to understand that this care that God exercises over us is not dependent upon our own human goodness. When one is scaling a cliff tied to the lead hiker with a rope, it is absurd to think that the lead hiker would cut the rope if he didn't like some mistake that was made by another hiker. It is equally absurd to think that God would cut us off because of some indiscretion, when we are clinging to Him for life. Whatever your inadequacies may be, you can go in peace, knowing that God is with you in spite of all, and will see you through. Paul tells the Philippians that he is "*confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:6).

Faith

Of course, identifying with God requires faith, but it is important to understand the nature of faith. We are not talking about the generally accepted usage of the word as a human attitude. The most accepted idea of faith is "trust" or "confidence." This, of course, has to do with the emotions. In this sense it is a fleshly effort to control the feelings. Unfortunately, the mind is not reliable and the feelings of trust vacillate continually. The effort to trust God in spite of the surrounding circumstances is limited by the encroaching rationale of reality. It is hard for the emotions to overcome the intellect. And, of course, emotional stability is itself a matter of personality and of one's genetic background as well as the data of experience. In other words, it is futile to urge people to reach out with feelings of confidence when the circumstances are contrary to that. Thus, a continual battle ensues and one finds oneself on shaky ground.

The kind of faith the Bible talks about is not dependent on human capacities. It is a gift of the Spirit. Hebrews 11 describes this faith as being the substance of things rather than feelings about them. "*Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen*" (11:1). The original Greek word, as well as the Latin and the English, all mean essentially the same thing — that which "stands under." It would be the concrete and steel that makes up the substance of a building, rather than the exterior facade. Perhaps a more specific analogy would be the electric energy that flows through conduit. The energy is, itself, the substance rather than the vehicle which carries it. Faith is, in reality, an energy process, or flow, from God. The evidence of it is the effect of it and not the feelings that one has about it. This flow of divine energy continues in all those who possess His Spirit, in spite of surrounding circumstances or emotional responses to them. God continues His work in us in spite of our own personal vacillations. This faith is a gift of the Spirit and not something one develops within one's fleshly mind. "*By grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). When we are aware of this energy of God within us, we can traverse the rugged climb with the realization that God is with us in it, in spite of our own attitudes or feelings. The path is rugged; we become weary; we get discouraged and have our doubts; but reaching for the real,

we rely on the faithfulness of the process of God within us. That process does not waver or alter, in spite of our own human inadequacies.

Peace

Paul speaks to the Ephesians about the armor needed in the struggle against Satan. One of the pieces of armor that he mentions is the Gospel of Peace, as shoes for the feet. He was not there addressing the issue of evangelism, but rather surefootedness in the battle. The whole of mankind had been at odds with God since the tragic episode of Eden. The angels on the night of the Nativity brought the message to mankind that God was ready to make peace with them through this Savior that was born. In the battle against Satan, it is essential to know that one is at peace with God. In going into battle, it is important for the soldier to know that he has the backing of his government. Going into battle with Satan, it is essential to know that one has the peace of God within. By analogy, it is also important for the hiker, scaling the cliffs, to know that he is at peace with his guide.

But how can we be sure we have peace with God?

Paul tells the Romans, “*Having been justified then by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Romans 5:1).

But how do we know we are justified?

Because we want to be. Christ has come to dwell within us because we asked Him to. At this point, His Spirit came to dwell with us and, because of the Holy Spirit, we desire to have Him with us. So whatever the struggles and problems of our journey, we can be confident that Christ is with us, because we want Him to be. The struggle of the journey is quite intensified if we do not have the confidence that Christ is with us.

Guidance

It is obvious that we need a guide for the rugged climb. But we need more than a “feeling” that God has spoken. We can rely neither on our own capacity to hear God, nor on our capacity to determine what it is that He has said to us. In the rocky wildness of this world’s wilderness, we must be absolutely certain of His guidance.

But how do I know He has spoken?

You don’t really know, in the fleshly mind. Many tragic mistakes have been caused by those who “know that God has spoken to them.” It is very difficult to determine whether one has been deceiving oneself, or one has the mind of Christ.

So what is the answer — how can we know?

We can know because we rely on the Spirit to see to it that we do what He wants. The key to being sure that we are in the Lord’s will, in spite of our own human desires and inclinations, is to simply ask Him to see to it that we do what is right. We cannot trust our own thinking or feelings. Even if it “feels right” we could be certainly deluded. But when we pray that He will see to it that we have His will, He will so handle the circumstances, so as to bring us to the place He wants us to be. If He could not do that, neither could He blame us for not following Him. That is the great difficulty in following those who claim to lead by “revelation.” There is no way to really verify the revelation. So in the last analysis, our confidence is not in our own ability to do His will, but His ability to show us, in spite of ourselves. In many respects, this is like the rope by which the hiker is attached to the guide. Ultimately, he follows the guide, in spite of his own inadequacy.

Prayer

This would seem obvious, but for many believers it is something of an “iffy” thing. The reason that is so, is because so many conditions have been placed on prayer by the leadership, and the books that are written, that one does not feel any certainty that one’s prayer is being

heard. The truth of the matter is, there are no conditions to our prayers being heard. The texts that speak of this are all related to the Old Testament. The one text in John 9 in the New Testament is merely a statement by the blind man, gleaned from his Rabbinic teachings, that God does not hear sinners. There may be some question as to how God responds to our prayers, based upon what He wants to accomplish in our lives, but He does hear us. On the other hand, requests for help are quite a different thing than requests for special favors. That God would not hear us and help us is tantamount to the guide on the mountain ignoring the cries for help from the hiker. God is quoted in the book of Hebrews as saying, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). The original Greek text would read “*I will never let go of you or leave you behind.*” God’s responses to our requests are often based upon His own work within us, and purposes for us, but never feel that your cries for help are unheeded by Him. So be at peace, He will never let you go.

But what if I just get tired and lose my grip?

He has His rope around you — never fear.

But sometimes my pain and distress is such I can’t seem to pray.

He will pray for you. There is a continual communion between your spirit and God’s, as Paul tells the Romans, “*The Spirit Himself helps us in our weaknesses; for we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with unuttered sighs...*” (8:26). So there is a constant stream of communication between ourselves and God. Prayer takes many forms, but essentially it is a communion initiated by the Spirit of God and does not depend upon our own human weakness.

The Word of God

It is as important to interact with the Word of God as it is to have contact with the guide. The Scripture gives us instruction and encouragement and comfort for the journey. There are many ways which one might take to have exposure to the Word, but the important thing is that one has touch with it on a regular basis in one way or another. It will certainly make the climb easier.

There are many things that might be said in terms of the cultivation and refinement of our connection with God, but these items above are quite crucial for the climb.

The scaling of cliffs requires certain attitudes. And so the handling of the struggles in our own lives.

The Challenge

As surely as we believe that the Spirit of Christ has charge of our lives (whether or not we have made vocal dedications) we must realize that the things that come into our lives are allowed by Him, or brought by Him for His own purposes.

But what if we insist on having our own way?

The Lord knows how to handle the wayward. We may suffer some for missteps, but in the end, He overcomes our human failings. Job said, “*He knows the way that I take: when He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold*” (Job 23:10). God has a way with wanderers. He had 1500 years of it with the Children of Israel. If our survival is based upon our own human capacities, we are in trouble indeed.

So, in spite of our own human failures, we can be confident in the Lord’s care of us. Nor need we feel guilt, as considering that our afflictions are based upon some sin or some failure. These can be instantly forgiven by Christ as He has so specifically indicated. “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all*

unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). There is no need to carry a burden of guilt, to add to our afflictions. Christ surely understands the human frailty and has promised through Jude, “*Unto Him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24). So go in peace and let your focus be on the climb, rather than on guilt.

Expectations

Expectation is the handmaiden of disappointment. We often get into trouble because we expect too much out of life, or out of God or out of ourselves or out of others. We would like to be able to walk along the wooded pathways and avoid the rocks and crags, but that is simply not the way life is. We expect God to make our pathway clear and easy but that is not the way it is. We expect others to understand, to comfort, to behave themselves in proper ways, but that is not the way it is. We expect ourselves to be able to rise to the occasion and not faint along the way or be discouraged or be anxious; but that is not the way it is. We expect our human relationships to run smoothly, especially if we are all Christians; but that is not the way it is. It is not a matter of lowering our sights; it is a matter of being realistic. Life is not fair; life is not easy; life rarely goes the way we want it to.

And so our attitude in our afflictions ought to be, not, “Lord, why me?” But rather “Lord, thank You for the challenge, and give me the grace to handle it.”

THE CLIMBER

Coming to Terms with the Self

Who am I? What am I all about? How do I find myself?

The human self is a great enigma. It is a most unruly vehicle for the Spirit of God. The presence of the Spirit of God within us does not seem to bring an automatic revamping of the ego or the personality. Nevertheless God has ordained to use the unruly vehicle.

But doesn't Jesus say that we should "deny ourselves?"

You are referring of course to Matthew 16:24 — *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* Jesus was not referring to self-denial, but denying the self as being able to save one. That is why He said to take up the cross. Self-denial, quite a different thing, refers to ignoring the self and its desires. Many seek to come to salvation by these means, assuming that, if they show contempt for the self, it will bring them favor from Christ. The message of the New Testament is salvation, in spite of the self. Paul tells the Ephesians — *"By grace you are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves"* (Ephesians 2:8).

So what is the self?

The word is used in different ways, sometimes in terms of a quality of "selfness," but generally speaking, the term refers to a composite of the human person — comprising, as the Bible seems to indicate, the physical body, the psychical or mental person, and the spirit which was the element lost in the Fall and restored in the coming of salvation. The physical body has to do with the organs themselves — including the brain and nervous system, as well as all the bodily organs and functions.

The psyche or "soul" is the mental function, which is the application of the brain and nervous system. This, of course, is the seat of our personality. The brain is the instrument through which we acquire and express knowledge, emotions, and motivations. It is where we store up all the accumulated data of knowledge and experience from which we express ourselves in the world around us. This accumulated data provides something of a "grid" pattern with which we function. That is to say, it forms the basis of all of our thoughts and attitudes and actions. We cannot function outside of this grid pattern, unless we introduce new data. Thus, we have attitudes and actions that are based on hereditary factors, such as extrovertive or introvertive tendencies, which govern the way we relate to others. Added to this, are the elements of accumulated data through knowledge and experience. Together they form a pattern which determines our mental attitude and our behavior. Sometimes these patterns can be altered and sometimes they will be with us all of our lives. So the self as psyche, out of which we function and relate to others, evolves in ways that we do not always have control over. It is not that we are not responsible for our actions, but rather that we must understand the basis of our actions. But, the important thing is that the psyche is totally unreliable as an instrument through which we can govern our relationship to Christ.

Salvation comes to us exclusive of our own human personality. If that were not so, we would be in constant upheaval as to our relationship to Christ. It is one thing to understand the way we think and act and quite another thing to control it. It is not that we should not attempt to control ourselves, but rather that we must recognize the difficulty of the task.

God, of course, understands all of this and has elected to save us and to work with us in spite of all. It is well to recognize the limits of our mental capacity, as well as our human propensities. In many respects, we are all children playing in a "cosmic sandbox." God is aware of this human weakness and had a special message for the apostle Paul at a time of discouragement — *"My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in*

weakness.” And Paul writes, “*most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may rest upon me*” (II Corinthians 12:9). This does not excuse misbehavior, but rather helps us to recognize our dependence upon Christ.

Behavior modification, as it is called in the circles of psychology, is the effort to redirect the grid pattern of the brain and alter our habits and actions. This has been successful to a limited degree, and is useful in some elements of personality that can be altered. However, there are certain factors that will always remain the same, insofar as they are hereditary. And so the debate rages. How much can we alter and how much can we not. Actually this whole issue has more to do with how we get along with the world we live in rather than the nature of our salvation. Salvation does not necessarily or automatically bring behavioral changes. It is a very complex subject and has to do with motivations and physiological factors, such as the function of endocrine glands.

But does that excuse us from changing our attitudes and actions?

No indeed. But getting along in this world often requires changes of behavior. For example, if our personality is prone toward anger, we will have to curb it to get along with others. It may mean our job or our home or even our physical well being. This does not affect our salvation, nor is the control of anger an automatic result of salvation, but it may be extremely important for our life on the earth. We will deal with the specifics of our relationship to God and to others and to the world around us, which will involve personality traits a good deal, and so we will defer to later chapters. However, a cardinal point relative to this subject is that when we put too much weight on human personality traits as indicators of our level of “spirituality,” it leaves us in a position of never really feeling at peace with Christ, because we assume that there is always so much He is dissatisfied within us. Some groups of believers feel that we cannot really be at peace with Christ until we reach a certain degree of perfection on the earth. Since this is, in their thinking, a vacillating thing, one is always on something of a spiritual roller coaster.

It is not that Christ is indifferent to the way we behave, but rather that He understands our human weakness and accepts us in spite of it. For us it is important to understand human weakness in order to modify our tendency to judge others. Jesus said, “*Judge not that ye be not judged*” (Matthew 7:1). And Paul carries the theme forward in his letter to the Corinthians where he asks, “*Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou doest not receive [as a gift]? Now if thou didst receive it, why doest thou glory as if thou has not received it?*” (I Corinthians 4:7). Whatever we are, we are by the grace of Christ, and whatever we are not, we are simply expressing human frailty, common to us all. In the same chapter, Paul says, “*I do not even judge myself.*” It is important to understand that we do not ever get a fair judgment about ourselves from ourselves. We are as biased about ourselves as we are about others. Part of accepting others is learning to accept ourselves. It is not that we cannot improve, but rather that we are all struggling against odds to make the improvements that we feel we must make.

So part of the preparation for climbing the mountain is learning to accept God’s grace toward us as faulty human beings and learning to accept ourselves as functioning within the limited framework of our own native capacities and personality traits. It is not that we give up trying to improve, but rather that we accept ourselves in the process of improvement and accept also the fact that God, Himself, understands us and accepts us in the process. You can’t climb the mountain if you think that the guide is, himself, dissatisfied with you or against you.

So then what is the self?

It is valid to see the self as a composite being — made up of physiological and psychological features — body and soul — with the added element of spirit which is revitalized at the

coming of Christ. The issues that we have dealt with in the previous discussion have to do with the flesh which, according to the Scriptures, is made up of the natural body and the mind or soul, or psyche. The mind, or psyche, is the seat of our emotions. Here we get confused, because we sometimes attribute to the spirit, things that are really part of the emotional being.

The Holy Spirit comes to us without emotion. What many people feel in the way of elevated emotions is not thus an expression of the Spirit, but rather a response to the Spirit in terms of one's individual personality. Thus, for example, some become quite emotionally elated upon salvation, while others remain rather calm and unemotional. Both, of course, have a right to their response. The problem comes when those who tend to be more emotional, consider that to be the test of true spirituality. That is all part of the natural psyche. Some people are excitable and some are not. Some may be quite placid in the receipt of very exciting news. Others may be quite elated.

And this, of course, accounts for a great many variations in the process of worship, which is an expression of the human soul, or psyche. Jesus told the woman of Samaria that the true worshiper, "*must worship in spirit and in truth*" (John 4:23). The great emphasis on external celebrations and rituals and observances was in the Old Testament before the Holy Spirit came to dwell within. In the New Testament era it is not as pronounced, but is certainly not undesirable. However, the externalizing of our inner worship is a matter of personal choice. And that, of course, accounts for great varieties of religious groups. Some have believed that the believers must always meet together and, in the same way, an attitude that has led to much confusion and much division. The unity of the New Testament believers is a matter of spirit. Paul speaks to the Ephesians of "*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit...*" (4:3). Given the variables of human personality and expression, it is necessary for there to be varieties of worship in terms of the human personalities in order that there may be the unity at the spirit level.

So, then, what are we really all about? What is our purpose?

The Bible makes this quite clear. We are a vehicle for the Spirit of God. The entire race of mankind was created, not because He needed us (as some maintain), for if He needed something, He was less God. He made the race of mankind, first of all, because it was in Him to replicate a being like Himself, without which creation, He would not have fully expressed Himself. Secondly, He created us to multiply His being. If the greatest glory in the world would be Himself, then, He must create beings that would glorify Him.

In a certain sense, this is speculative, and yet, there are statements in Scripture that represent important clues. For example, Jesus told the multitudes in the Sermon on the Mount — "*Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect*" (Matthew 5:48). This is hardly a statement that anyone less than God could have made. But it is important to understand the word "perfect." It does not mean flawless. It is the Greek word *teleo* which means "fulfilled" or "consummated." We are fulfilled only as we bear within us the Spirit of God which was His original intention in creation. A good analogy is the automobile. The automobile fulfills its purpose when it transports passengers. It may be very faulty; it may have dents and scratches; it may have a faulty engine but it still fulfills its purpose if it transports passengers. I had a friend who restored an old Model-T Ford with a center door. It was beautiful to look at but he put it up on blocks and used it for a library. It may have been flawless in one respect but it was not serving its original purpose. We have another clue in Peter's second epistle, "*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature...*" (1:4). It is God's ultimate purpose that we should possess again His nature as He intended in the original creation. Everything in our lives is secondary to that purpose. We are bearers of the "Image of God." None of our own human ambitions or purposes or activities supercede that purpose.

So then what is our purpose on the earth? Why does He not just take us immediately to be with Him and enjoy Him forever?

There is much speculation about this matter. Some say that it is to save souls. Others say that it is to perfect us for our place in Heaven. Still others say that we must learn to suffer. These are all guesses. Purposes as noble as God's can only really be known by Him. Therefore, as each of us belongs to Him and is possessed by His Spirit, we can only leave it in His hands to see to it that we do whatever it is that fits in with whatever His purpose is. We humans simply cannot outguess God. Furthermore, He has not even shared it with us through the Bible, although we have illustrations of the ways in which He used His servants. But the fact that He used His servants in certain ways, does not indicate the way He will use us as individuals. We do have an important clue in John's Gospel. Jesus had just told Peter that by His death He would glorify God. When Peter asked Him about another disciple "*And what shall this man do?*" Jesus said unto him, "*If I will that he tarry until I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me*" (John 21:20-22). Peter's death would be his way of glorifying God. Perhaps it was the crowning point of his purpose on the earth. Until that time, Peter would not have known what that purpose was.

If we are possessed by the Spirit of Christ and energized by Him to fulfill His purpose on the earth for us, we must not try to outguess that purpose. To make promises and dedications and commitments about what we are going to do for God is really getting ahead of Him. We may chart our own course and miss what His purpose is. We can only leave it to Him to see to it that we do what He wants us to do. If we ask Him for this He will respect it. Nor can we let others tell us what they think we ought to do. Nor can we get excited in the flesh about some earthly challenge. If we put it in the Lord's hands, He will see to the steps we must take that will lead us to the place He wants us to be. When we are doing what He wants, we will know it. Until that time we may not know it. Remember, scaling the mountain is hand over hand and piton over piton.

But what if He wants us to do something special, like go to college? Don't we have to prepare for that?

He will see to it that you do each day what you need to do to prepare you. When the time comes He will see that you get to the right college. Many of the things that the Lord does in our lives do not give a clear picture as to what He wants ultimately from us. We simply do not have enough data in our brains to make the right decision.

But shouldn't we plan?

Leave the planning to Him. We would not know how to plan. The Lord has led this author, who lost his father at the age of seventeen, through many intricate pathways to bring him to the place that he is at this day. I could not have planned it myself. He saw to it that I did what He wanted me to do, even though I was not always aware of what that purpose was. Nor was I being "obedient" in a spiritual sense, but merely taking each step as it came. Looking back, I marvel at the way the Lord led this poor, ignorant, and sometimes recalcitrant youth. On the other hand, if the Lord's purpose should be fulfilled in you in suffering — and if in suffering that seems to prevent any further service to the Lord - then that is what His purpose is at the moment. The key here is acceptance.

But what if I make a misstep?

Even the missteps have their special purpose. Your prayer must be everyday — "Lord see to it that I do today what You want me to do." Jesus said, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (John 15:5). You must simply be open to what He does with you and ask Him to see to it that you do what He wants. Anything beyond this is presumptuous.

But what about feelings? Doesn't the Lord guide us by giving us strong feelings about a matter?

You can't trust them. Human feelings have to come through that maze under our skull cap that is so fraught with misinformation, misunderstanding, habit patterns, etc., that we really can't tell where the feelings have come from. Feelings may be all right but there is no way to verify them. The compelling of the Spirit goes deeper than feelings. It often, in fact, runs counter to feelings. The only way you can know is to leave it to the Lord to see to it that you do what He wants.

But what about tokens?

You can't trust them either. Unfortunately, asking for tokens can put God in a box where He can't really guide you in the way He wants to. Often tokens are confusing, coming many times with contradictions. Tokens will keep you in a quandary because they're often hard to read. Consider the case of Gideon in the Old Testament. It is the event out of which the noted "fleece" caper came. Gideon had asked the Lord for a specific token if he should go to battle. *"I will put a fleece of wool on the floor and if the dew be on the fleece only and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou will save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so."* Still dissatisfied Gideon asked for the opposite token — *"If the fleece is dry and the ground is soaked. And it was so again"* (Judges 6:37,39). But there would be other tokens and other requests by Gideon for assurance. "The fleece" has always been an uncertain kind of system for getting the will of God.

But what if I make mistakes?

The Guide is always there to hold you steadfast and bring you to the place that He wants you to be. Sometimes what seem to be mistakes turn out to be important steps along the way.

And so, it is important to take the measure of ourselves, as well as the measure of the mountain. We must understand what our human frailties are, what our problems are, and what our needs are. We must be open and honest before God in these matters for He knows who we are and what we are. The only way we will make it over the mountain is by the energy of Christ in us, and the only way we can engage that energy is by putting it all in His hands and waiting on Him. There is a beautiful passage in Psalm 37 that puts it all in perspective, *"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass. And He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him..."* (37:5-7). And, of course, the classic words from Solomon (who also ought to know), *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths"* (Proverbs 3:5,6).

What you are is not as important as what Christ is in you.

The very fact that you struggle in your relationship to Christ is the indicator that His Spirit is in you.

THE OTHER CLIMBERS

The Uneasy Course of Human Relationships

Learning to live together on this planet has always been a perilous task for humans. No sooner had the fateful pair been expelled from the Garden of Eden than their progenies began killing each other. The missing element which would have kept the balance among the creatures of God was His own Spirit which had been forfeited in the Fall. Throughout the ensuing millennia, humans have proved their inability to handle themselves apart from the Spirit of God. The only thing that has preserved mankind from total genocide has been the remnant of God's image, yet within the human spirit to a limited degree. Human nature has, in fact often been unruly, even in those who have recovered the Spirit of Christ within. Hence Paul's lament — *"In me, that is in my, flesh, there dwells no good thing"* (Romans 7:18).

So, how do we reconcile these factors in the believer? On the one hand, we have received the Holy Spirit within and, hence, recovered what was lost in the Fall. But, on the other hand, the flesh is not always under control. If we say that the coming of the Holy Spirit changes our human nature automatically, then we have to say that a very large portion of believers have either not received the Holy Spirit at all or have found Him ineffective in their lives. But if one has not received the Spirit, then how can one care about Christ, and how does one struggle with this problem? The Scripture makes it quite plain that this paradox will exist as long as we are on the Earth. Jesus Himself said in the Garden of Gethsemane — *"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak"* (Matthew 26:41). This is a constantly recurring theme throughout the New Testament. In the epistles of Paul you have many admonitions and concerns as to conduct, and yet, an equal number of expressions of confidence that the ones to whom he is writing are, indeed, part of the Kingdom and possessed by the Spirit of God. To the Romans, Paul said, *"And I myself am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another"* (Romans 15:14).

So, the solution to the problem is that our spirits are filled with the Spirit of Christ and all of His virtues, while the flesh retains yet many flaws resident within mankind since the Fall. And thus, whereas we struggle with the flesh and seek to overcome it, we are still one with Christ in our spirits and are able to be at peace with Him and have the assurance that He is with us. If we try to link the flesh and the spirit together, then we are always in an uneasy relationship, since the flesh is difficult to manage. The important thing here is to realize that the very fact that we struggle is an indication that we do have Him in our spirits or else we would not struggle to maintain our relationship with Him.

Assuming, then, that Christ gets along with us, how do we get along with others on the earth?

In the first place, it is important to recognize that getting along with others is not a given for all who are filled with the Spirit. So if you are struggling in your relationship with others, you are in good company because that is the common condition of all believers.

But if I have the Holy Spirit in me, shouldn't I get along with my parents, for example?

Not necessarily. That depends on who your parents are and who you are. Sometimes family members are too much alike to get along easily together. And, of course, there is again, the issue of expectations — how much can we expect of others? But there are some guidelines that are important in handling human relationships of all kinds.

Love versus Affection

The most basic issue is understanding the meaning of love. Love is one of those words in the English language that means everything, and nothing. It is loosely applied to everything, from the love of hamburgers to the love of God. The general notion of love has to do with warm affection. People assume that if they have the Spirit in them they will just feel great

about everybody. That is contrary to the New Testament concept of love as expressed in the Greek text. There are two words in the Greek Testament that are both, unfortunately, translated as love. The most important one is *agape*. Its basic meaning has to do with “caring,” “consideration,” and “concern.” It does not necessarily involve the feelings at all. When Jesus commands us to “love our enemies,” He uses the word *agape*. We do not have to approve of our enemies or like them or feel good about them. We are only asked to “care” about them. Thus, if your enemy were out in the desert without water and you happened along, it would be proper for you to give him drink, or if he were starving, to give him food. That is the extent of Jesus’ intention in regard to one’s enemies.

Again, He illustrates love in the incident of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan found a victim of robbers beside the road. He dressed his wounds and took him to a nearby inn. He left him with some money to be cared for by the innkeeper. There is no indication whatsoever that any kind of a feeling passed between them. It was simply an act of charity. Jesus identified this as love. The Spirit is the reservoir of true *agape* love. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit and comes to us as we come to Christ. It reaches out to others around us in spite of ourselves. If it passes through the human mind, it usually gets tarnished by it. The question “why am I doing this?” starts a chain reaction of human thinking that will muddy the reality of the act of pure love. Paul said to the Corinthians, “*The love of Christ constraineth us [compels us]...*” (II Corinthians 5:14). Paul was not, here, referring to his love FOR Christ, but the very love OF Christ within him reaching out to others. Paul was not going out because of his love for Christ, rather because of an inner-compunction of his spirit. Genuine service does not have a “because” in it. Genuine service arises from the well-springs of one’s spirit and does not need a “because.” This is true *agape* love, not depending on any external factors, but expressing itself spontaneously. Where we get confused is in the mixture of fleshly feelings with that inner-compunction of the spirit. And that brings us to the other word common in the New Testament which is *phile*. *Phile* is a word primarily involving the flesh. It is a word of affection of human feelings. These feelings are as unreliable as the flesh. They are dependent, for the most part, on a reciprocal response. We generally tend to like the people who like us, or who behave in ways that we approve. Compatibility is the key word. We like the people with whom we feel comfortable. But these feelings come and go. Unfortunately many believers try to smuggle feelings into the whole issue of *agape* love. This has led to much distress. You don’t have to like the people you care for. We are often compelled by the Spirit to pray for certain ones for whom we have no personal affection. Understanding this distinction enables us to relate to people on a more relaxed basis, knowing that it is not necessary to be involved in any kind of affectionate response.

Forgiveness

But what about forgiving people? Aren’t we always supposed to forgive everybody?

This is another much misunderstood aspect of our relationship to others. Forgiveness is not a unilateral action; it is a two-way street. It depends, for completeness, on the offended and the offender. The offender asks for forgiveness and the offended one grants it. But if there is no effort to seek forgiveness, then there is no basis of forgiving. Jesus made this quite clear as recorded in Luke — “*Take heed to yourselves: if thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shall forgive him*” (17:3,4). Without repentance there is no forgiveness. This is the difference between forgiving and overlooking. If you choose to overlook an offense, that is your privilege, but you are not therefore exercising forgiveness.

But what if people keep saying “I’m sorry,” and they don’t really mean it, what then?

I’m sure that what Jesus was referring to was genuine repentance. When the Spirit is there to repent on the part of the offender, the Spirit is also there to forgive. People will say, “I could

never forgive him/her for that.” Perhaps the problem is that the person has never genuinely sought forgiveness.

But what about Jesus when He was being nailed to the cross? Didn't He say, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do?"

Jesus did offer forgiveness to the soldiers at the cross in the same sense that He offers forgiveness to the world. These men did not know what they were doing — they were merely puppets of the state. They had no understanding, whatsoever, of the issue of repentance and forgiveness.

But what about people who can't forgive themselves?

Who said they had the authority to forgive themselves? Only God can forgive one, in that sense you cannot forgive yourself, but God can forgive you.

So forgiveness is a very important part of any human relationship. But it is the Holy Spirit who makes this forgiveness possible among believers. Unbelievers will not understand this, so you may have to overlook things if you can.

But what if you don't know that you've offended someone?

Then it is up to the offended one to make that known to you. On the other hand if someone has offended you it is important for you to let the other person know. It is not fair to another believer to not let them know if they have offended you. Not letting another know when they have offended you deprives each of you of the experience of forgiveness. Remember that where there is genuine repentance, the Holy Spirit is there to inspire genuine forgiveness.

Expectation

We have said that expectation is the handmaiden of disappointment. This is a very important concept in dealing with human relationships. One of the problems of human relationships is that we expect too much out of people. As much as we hate to admit it, we are all more or less children in the cosmic sand box. We expect others to be mature, sensitive, considerate, understanding, patient, generous, etc. (In short, we want them to all be like we are.) That is simply not the way it is.

At least, it is not a consistent pattern of behavior. The problem is that people are products of a myriad of forces and influences from the external environment, plus the inevitable effects of genes and the input of accumulated knowledge. This is what personalities are made up of. The cortex of the brain stores up all of these myriads of elements and they become the pattern out of which behavior is produced. In a certain sense, the laws of nature are inexorable. It is hard for people to go contrary to this pattern that has been evolved.

Some factors are genetic and will probably not change; some factors are accumulated out of experience and knowledge and could possibly change. Ultimately, the problem with relating to other persons is the limit of our knowledge of what that other person is really all about. We do not know what is going on in their minds; what their genetic backgrounds are; what their accumulated data is; what the problems are that they must live with. For many people life is something of a perpetual roller coaster with continual mood swings of one kind or another. It isn't that people are not responsible for what they do, but rather that, knowing the potentials of the human problem, we need to be less judgmental. Getting along with people is usually a matter of accepting who they are and what they are without censure. It is not that we must accept their behavior patterns, but that we accept them as fellow human beings caught in the same earthly madness.

Remember that you do not have to associate with the people you disapprove of beyond what is necessary as members of the Body of Christ or members of the society of which we are a part.

We don't know what struggles or problems people are having or what burdens they carry. Given the problems of personality development and behavior modification, we might not fare any better than they, had we their personality make-up or the problems that they wrestle with. Remember, it is not a matter of approving of them but rather of accepting them as persons. The problem of family relationships is of a different nature and will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. It is an old adage that "nobody's perfect." However, the attitude of some is, "You jolly well better be perfect if you want to be my friend."

For the believer, it is important to extend grace to everyone, even as Paul said to the Ephesians — "*Be ye kind [useful] to one another, tenderhearted [compassionate], forgiving one another, even as also God in Christ has forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32). Christ cared for us, in our sinful state, to the extent that He was willing to die for us. We are all the objects of His care. On the other hand, we are all equally inadequate to handle life in this world, apart from His grace. Given the fact that we are all in the same boat, so to speak, filled with those human frailties that cause us to struggle, we ought to extend grace to one another. Remember, however, this is a matter of getting along on the earth. When we have taken Christ into our spirits, our salvation is secure, the love of Christ is in our spirits and we do reach out to others in that caring. But our human flesh needs control, if we want to get along in this world. Furthermore, when we extend grace to others, we frequently become recipients of grace ourselves.

It is vital to keep the distinction between the *agape* caring of the spirit and the *phile* of the flesh. In Ephesians 4, Paul speaks of being kind to one another. He uses the Greek word *chrestos* which means useful. When we seek to serve others in the flesh, we often become discouraged and weary because of the disappointing responses. But when we serve in the Spirit, we do what the Spirit directs us without regard to the results or rewards. For the believer, possessed by the Spirit of Christ, getting along with others on the earth, and being of service to them is quite possible. Without the Spirit of Christ, however, human relationships are fraught with disappointment and heartache and sorrow. The *phile* affection of humans is constantly self-oriented and vacillating. If that is all we have, then getting along with others on the earth must be inadequate and frustrating. If we recognize this reality and know that there are limits to what we can expect of others in the flesh, then we can be at peace in the Spirit and trust Christ to express Himself through us to others.

***But what if others do not respond to us in kindness and grace?
I have often been hurt and disappointed in human relationships.***

That is because these relationships are based on human affection and not on the *agape* caring that evolves from the Spirit. We hear a good deal today about love, especially in the circles of the New Age Movement, but without any definition. What kind of love are we talking about? What are its parameters? What is the nature of its feelings? The word in the English language is really quite useless. It is left to the individual to decide what it means. Actually, only those who possess the Spirit of Christ can understand the distinctions. The *agape* love that is from God is quite beyond any human concept of love. *Phile* love, on the other hand, is subject to all the twists and turns of the human psyche. It is the prefix for many human interests and diversions — philosophy, love of wisdom; philology, love of words; philately, love of stamps. But, of course, human interests vary continually. We note, again, the problem of expectations. We expect too much out of others in the way of stable relationships. If we understand this, then we are not caught off guard and we are not, ourselves, disillusioned.

So, fundamentally, human relationships, in general, must be seen in the dual light of the *agape* love of God in our spirits reaching out to others beyond our own capacities, and the *phile* love of human affection which is always subject to the unreliable processes of human personality. There are ways that we can handle the problem of human affection if we

understand these principles. Fundamentally, dealing with human affection requires the recognition of the intricacies of human personality that put us all in the same place as citizens of the “cosmic sand box.” We can exercise grace and kindness toward others, realizing the potentials of problems that govern their behavior patterns. In this respect, we do not have to approve or like them, but we can accept them as fellow human beings, struggling with the same mountain that we struggle with.

The Conquest of Marriage

THE ESSENCE OF MARRIAGE

THE MEANING OF LOVE

REACHING FOR A GOOD MARRIAGE

**CRUCIAL ELEMENTS IN THE MARRIAGE
RELATIONSHIP**

**THE STRUGGLE FOR PHYSICAL
COMPATIBILITY**

THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOVERY

THE ESSENCE OF MARRIAGE

With so many failed and failing marriages, it is vital to go deeply into the source and substance of marriage to see if we can rescue some.

What Is Marriage?

There are, of course, as many perceptions of marriage as there are people to perceive it. Whereas one's own definition of marriage may be quite personal, it is vital that the marriage couple have a similar view of what it is. The most vital question to ask at this point is, how does God view marriage? After all, He established it. Perhaps the most lucid statement from God Himself was — *"It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helper, suitable for [corresponding to] him"* (Genesis 2:18). The Hebrew word translated "suitable" means a "counterpart." The woman was not made to be a servant, but to be a person who would be a counterpart to the male and complementary to him. Immediately we confront the concept of companionship. The events of the Fall seemed to warp the original intention and the idea of headship was born. Laws of the deeper spiritual motivation required regulation. But it is vital to point out that with the recovery of the spirit in the New Testament, whereas some regulation was needed, it was not God's intention that men should be liberated and women remain in bondage. And thus Paul says to the Galatians — *"There is neither male nor female, bond nor free."* This does not eliminate the need for orderly regulation, as far as society is concerned, as well as the home, but it does mean that the basis of marriage has once again recovered the focus of companionship.

Beyond companionship there was the obvious mandate from God that the couple should multiply and populate the earth. The most God-like capacity of His creatures is the ability to replicate—to reproduce after one's own kind. This is certainly an important purpose in marriage, but not by any means the primary purpose. There are many people who want very much to have children, but for one reason or another have not been able to. If reproduction was God's primary purpose in marriage, one would assume that God would grant children at least to those who wanted them.

And then there are those who believe that God has ordained their marriage for some particular purpose, especially in service. This may indeed be so, but only the couple is able to determine this. That everyone should have such a specific purpose does not seem to comport with some of Paul's statements. In writing to the Corinthians, he was quite emphatic about the wisdom of getting married at all. He admitted that this idea was not directly from the Lord, but rather by permission. On the other hand, he did allow for marriage "if one could not contain." This hardly sounds like a mandate from God for individual marriages. That brings us, of course, to the issue of the degree to which "marriages are made in heaven." That is not to say that the Lord would not give specific guidance to those who would ask him about a given marriage, but does preclude the idea that for everyone there is a "particular mate."

In the Old Testament, marriages and divorces were made rather easily. In the case of marriage, it was only necessary for a man to pick a woman and take her to his tent. His intention, of course, was to make it permanent, but the evidence is that Moses allowed for a "bill of divorcement," which would allow a man to decide to put the wife away for any cause. If the woman no longer pleased the man for any reason, he could go to Moses and Moses would give him a legal document separating them. Jesus verifies this with His disciples and said that such a situation was not at all God's original intention, but the condition of the human heart after the Fall made some legal regulation at least better than random promiscuity. In the New Testament, after the recovery of the spirit, there is an entirely different mood and attitude toward marriage, where it becomes the analogy to our becoming the Bride of Christ. At that point, permanence became an important quality of the marriage. Of course, in the Old

Testament there was also the cultural acceptability of multiple wives. In the New Testament this was not so, especially given the analogy of our relationship to Christ. The point of the whole discussion is to show that marriage has gone through many cultural phases so that it would be very difficult to determine what is very traditional and what is crucial in God's attitude toward marriage. Of course it goes without saying that Christ must be central to the marriage whatever the individual patterns might be.

In the myriad of textbooks that are written on the subject of marriage, much of what is said is merely traditional, rather than biblical per se. It is common to take "proof texts" and expand them into general principles that were not intended by them. The whole structure of male dominance has evolved on this basis. Whereas the basic intention of Scripture was that the male should function as an under-shepherd of Christ, providing spiritual guidance and stability to the family unit, the role has been expanded to include dominance in every area of life. This has been a very handy tool for the male, who then can do as he pleases and keep his wife in submission. A very important point that must be considered here, however, is that the role of the male is subservient to Christ, and failure on his part to function in submission to Christ negates the "contract."

We are dealing with the meaning of marriage — going back to God's original intention for it. It was not set up merely as a societal organization nor a process of procreation. Its original intention was companionship — *"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a help meet suitable for him."* (Genesis 2:18) Whereas a family-unit per se does need organizational facets, the relationship between the husband and the wife is fundamentally companionship. The husband who will maintain a close relationship to Christ will usually be appreciated for his wisdom and guidance rather than seeing him in a despotic role. But these are matters that must be considered by the couple itself. How do you see the roles of husband and wife? How do you see the meaning of your own marriage? These are matters that should have been considered prior to marriage, but rarely are. Now you are already married and you must seek to sort out your own attitudes toward it. Whatever the purpose and reason for your original marriage, it is now important to sit down together and come to terms with what you think your marriage is and what you think it ought to be. Expectation is the handmaiden of disappointment. You may now have found your marriage lacking in the elements that you were expecting from it. So what is the solution? You must go back and determine the original basis of marriage. What attracted you to each other? These are the things that must be recovered and capitalized on. Couples make many assumptions about the other person that are faulty. "I thought she would be a better housekeeper;" "I thought he would be more responsible about taking care of things around the house;" "I thought she would be more affectionate;" "I thought he would be more sensitive and understanding." These are samples of the kinds of things that bring about disappointment after the marriage. Many of them are trivial and can be rather easily worked out. Some are quite crucial.

This is the point at which you must reevaluate the meaning of your own particular marriage. How much of the disappointment is crucial? How much can be resolved? Actually we never really get to know a person until we've been married awhile. There is often a great deal of facade in the courtship days, designed to assure one of marriage. After the marriage, the facade begins to fall away and the real person is exposed. "I didn't know he had such a temper;" "I didn't know she could be such a nag;" "I didn't know he had such a jealous streak;" "I didn't know she was such a gadabout."

So, now, what are we going to do about it? Can these personality traits be modified? Will they? Some cannot, or probably won't. Some can, but whether they will or not, depends on the value of the marriage. How important is it to make the changes? That depends on the meaning of the marriage. Before you were married you enjoyed being together, without too much attention to details. After you were married you began a production — how can we

make this a great home? The “great home” syndrome is usually based on what others think a great home ought to be. The mother must do this and this and this, and the father must do that and that and that. If this has all been considered prior to the marriage, that is one thing, but if that was not part of the deal to begin with, it is difficult to smuggle it in now. In other words, you decide what you want in your marriage and work to accomplish it. But don’t expect qualities that were not there to begin with. If the husband wants a homemaker, he should marry a homemaker. If the wife wants a business dynamo, she should marry a business dynamo. But if you didn’t marry that person, don’t let the disappointment in qualities you did not expect in the first place erode the qualities you did expect. Why did you marry the person in the first place?

So what do we do now?

Recover those qualities that were there in the beginning and don’t expect the qualities that were not. Remember, again — “expectation is the handmaiden of disappointment.” Much of the early affection and the physical/emotional support is eroded by continual criticism, which is based on the disappointment in the other person.

What then shall we do? We are already married.

Sit down together and reevaluate your marriage. What was it that attracted you in the first place? What are the things that are disappointing to you? Which of those things can be corrected? Which of them probably won’t be? Remember there are personality factors that are deep-seated and genetic, and will probably not change. There are also personality factors that have been acquired over the years that could possibly be modified. You have to decide what is important in your marriage. What you are willing to work for. Remember that the guidelines should be in the direction of working together in camaraderie and companionship — not in having a perfect marriage. You might do well to throw away the books (not this one of course) because they often treat marriage as an institution that must follow certain guidelines that will produce a “perfect” marriage. Many marriages break up on the shoals of perfectionism. Forget about having a perfect marriage and enjoy, instead, the kind of marriage that you find meets your own personal needs. The same thing is true in books on child-raising. You should not be trying to raise perfect children, but establishing a vital relationship between you and your children that is based upon your own particular situation. Everyone is different. Every family is different. There is a genetic make-up in every given family that allows them to function with each other in ways that may not be in keeping with the authors of books. Parents often “run scared” trying to raise ideal children. The tension that is produced is conveyed to the situation and picked up on by the children. The same is true in marriages in the sense that, people who try too hard to have a perfect marriage may create tensions in that and spoil the basic feeling of companionship and camaraderie.

Take what you have discovered when you consider what brought the two of you together in the first place, and work for the marriage that suits your situation, instead of what follows the textbook. Accept the inadequacies of each other, modify what can be modified, make reasonable compromises, and enjoy the companionship that God intended for you in the first place.

Remember again, marriages often break up on the shoals of perfectionism. Just be glad that you have someone to share your life with — someone to come home to and keep you from a life of loneliness. If you have a marriage that is 75% good, don’t destroy it going for the other 25%.

Most marriages begin with the emotional/physical. There is no accounting for taste. One sees another person and is suddenly “smitten” by that one; something about the appearance or the bearing or the personality. And thus, begins a relationship of companionship and emotional/physical satisfaction. The physical is a very strong force, permeating the entire

animal kingdom from the lower species to humans. As the relationship proceeds, this becomes a dominant factor, overshadowing other qualities that emerge. Negative qualities of personality are overlooked or discounted, and the relationship moves into something of a “toboggan slide,” which is very difficult to stop. One assumes that things will work out because “we love each other.” After the marriage, qualities that should have been more carefully examined prior to the marriage begin to emerge as disquieting and disillusioning. We have said that criticisms begin which erode the original affection and satisfaction. It is very hard to overcome the eroding effects of criticism. Couples try to shape each other up; to make them into the person they had hoped that they would be. So the husband takes on the “father image” and the wife takes on the “mother image.” This is deadly to the vitality of the companionship of affection.

What often happens is something we call “narcissism.” We impose on the other person, during courtship, qualities that we admire in ourselves, not realizing that they may not be as we imagined. After the marriage, when we find our own personal image, which we have imposed on the other person wearing off, we assume that the other person is shallow. What we need to do is find out what the other person is really like and appreciate them for who they are, not for what we have imposed on them. If we would give-up the effort to change the other person and learn to appreciate them for who they are, we might well find the original emotional/physical satisfaction returning. If there are missing factors in the marriage, learn to accommodate them; to compromise with reality rather than destroy the marriage with fantasy. Don’t apply someone else’s standards to what a successful marriage “ought to be”; rather develop what your marriage truly is and be content with that. You must each decide what price you are willing to pay — for a lifetime of companionship and camaraderie.

THE MEANING OF LOVE

So what does the word love really mean? It is one of those English words which is so ambiguous as to be practically useless. We speak of loving hamburgers or pizza with the same word as loving God. We apply the same word to loving Christ and to the love of marriage. People go into marriage with a total misunderstanding of the meaning of the word. Such a misunderstanding often leads to tragedy. For most people, the word “love” conjures up surges of physical and emotional attraction. The young man who asks physical favors of his date because, “I love you so much,” is usually expressing the animal instinct. To him, “Miss Right” only means “Miss Right Now.” So what is the true meaning of love and how do we distinguish it from mere physical expression?

The Greek text of the New Testament helps us out a good deal. There are two words in the Greek Testament both of which are, unfortunately, translated by “love.” However, there is a considerable difference. *Agape* is the word used for the love of God for man and the love urged for the love of humans toward God, and of humans toward each other. This word refers to caring, or consideration. It does not carry with it, necessarily, emotional implications. For this reason Christ can urge agape love for one’s enemies because it only means to care for them as human beings. This kind of love is actually a gift of God that comes to our spirits when we take Christ into them. It is listed as one of the “fruits of the Spirit.” It enables us to reach beyond the petty considerations of human emotion and relate to others on the basis of God’s love for them. It is the word Paul used when he said “*The love of Christ constrains [compels] me*” (II Corinthians 5:14). It was not the love FOR Christ but the love OF Christ which meant Christ’s love expressed through Him. It superseded the inadequacies of human love and was an expression of the Holy Spirit within Him. This is what John conveyed when he said, “*Love is of God and he that loveth is born of God*” (I John 4:7). Humans are not really capable of this kind of love apart from God.

Human love is expressed by the word *phile* which really means “affection” as with family and friends. It has to do strictly with the emotions. As such, it suffers the inadequacies and unreliability of human emotions. Human affection is performance-oriented. We like the people who like us and treat us well. Jesus made a point of this in the Sermon on the Mount. If you love those who love you, you have not satisfied God’s requirement. His love reaches out to your enemies.

Agape love is the kind of love God requires in marriage — “*husbands love your wives,*” (Ephesians 5:25a). Moreover, He expects husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it. (Ephesians 5:25b). Such love is only possible for those who have the Spirit of Christ in them. Where love is based on the *phile* of human affection, it vacillates according to performance. When performance is not up to expectations, the affection wanes. The common statement “I don’t love you anymore” is born of this kind of affection. It really says, “I don’t like you, because you have not fulfilled my expectations for you.” The expression “falling in love” has a similar connotation. One doesn’t fall into an attitude of caring and consideration — a gift of the Spirit. One finds oneself attracted to another based upon superficial considerations. One likes what one sees and hopes that one’s expectations of that person will be fulfilled.

There is really no such thing as “falling in love” in the agape sense. And yet most marriages are based upon *phile* love — on superficial attractions of one kind or another. Appearances are the first level of attraction — we like what we see. And then there are personality factors, mannerisms, attitudes, preferences. But these things are still more or less superficial. These are the things that people are talking about when they say “we like the same things; we enjoy being together; we have the same preferences.” All of these things really belong in the category *phile* affection. They are the things that you like about the other person.

Unfortunately, likes and dislikes change. People change. Life changes. These are not things which, taken by themselves, build a strong marriage. They can be important adjuncts to the marriage. *Phile* affection really rests on how we treat each other. Careless words and careless actions can erode the affection. If you want your mate to like you, you have to be likeable. Kindness and courtesy are at least as important after the marriage as before. Things that people do to win the other person's affection are often ignored after the marriage. One takes the mate for granted, and forgets about the niceties that were endearing before the marriage. If you want to know "where love has gone," it has been eroded in the routine of life where the focus is on survival and one forgets to be gracious.

Agape love, on the other hand, is as stable as Christ. It is, of course, offered by Him in the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is a major reason for not marrying a non-Christian. The love will not be of the *agape* kind, but rather the human *phile*. Caring is a gift of Christ; affection is an earned response based upon performance. We like the people who like us and the people who satisfy our desires.

The recovery of love in a marriage, then, is a matter of recognizing the difference between the caring consciousness that is the gift of the Spirit, and the affection that is based upon human emotions and human performance. Focusing first on caring will go a long way toward building a foundation for the personal affection factor. In seeking to recover affection, it is important to go back to the things that first attracted you to each other and seek to eliminate those criticisms and negative attitudes that have eroded such affection. It is also crucial to remember that if you want the other person to like you, you must be likeable. You can put forth the same kind of effort to win, again, the favor of your mate as you do to win the favor of friends. It is strange how we feel we can let down at home and allow carelessness to prevail in our attitudes and actions, as well as our words. Criticism will erode affection. You have to determine what you are willing to overlook in order to recover the affection. Kindness and courtesy and sensitivity will go a long way in this direction. Don't treat your mate in a way that you would not treat a friend. You may think that your family has to put up with you, but that is not the case at all. Biting and nagging comments are death to a marriage, even though we may feel at times that the other person deserves them. You have to ask what you are willing to do to recover and retain the affection that first drew you to each other.

There is another Greek word that needs to be considered in the discussion of love and that is the word *eros*. *Eros* is the basis of our word "erotic" and all of its derivatives and has to do purely with the physical aspects of love. It is not used in the New Testament at all. But it must be considered. Unfortunately, the implications of the *phile* "affection" — and *eros* — "physical impulses" — are often confused. Unfortunately, love-making is often regarded as the indication of affection and yet it may have little to do with it. The body is possessed of many mechanisms that draw humans together in a process leading to procreation, just as the animals. It does not require affection for stimulation. This is especially true with males who need no psychological accompaniment to the sexual encounter. Females, on the other hand, are more likely to need the emotional pieces in place before the experience can be acceptable.

The tragedy is, that many marriages are built on the physical encounter as the indicator of love and do not find out until it is too late that there are many other factors involved in the interaction with another human being.

The physical interaction is the place where many marriages begin to go awry. The husband has not learned that he has no more right to his wife's body after marriage than before. This is true in the sense that if he insists upon his rights he actually kills the affection factor. On the other hand, if he is not aware of his wife's sensitivities in the matter he becomes to her something of a beast. He then assumes that she no longer loves him because she will not submit to his demands. Marriage is not one long experience of safe sex. Sex is only a very

important corollary to the marriage, but must be treated with sensitivity and understanding. We will deal with this at length in another chapter devoted to the subject.

It is vital then to understand the difference between these various terminologies if one is to build a strong and stable marriage. Remember, then, that *agape* is the abiding and God-given strength to the marriage. *Phile* is the important emotional accompaniment to the marriage, but is unreliable and often vacillating. It is very much performance-oriented and requires for its strength conduct that is appreciated and responded to with continuing affection. *Eros* is an important part of marriage but must be treated with great sensitivity and respect. A marriage can more readily survive without *eros* than it can without *phile* or *agape*.

REACHING FOR A GOOD MARRIAGE

What are the factors involved in an acceptable marriage? What can we do to recover and stabilize the marriage that is in trouble? It is not easy; it is part of the struggle. It often must be handled one day at a time. What are the factors to be considered?

Integrating the Personalities

Living together and sharing together for a long period of time is bound to focus on the myriad of personality traits that make up each individual. As we have said before, these traits are the result of a myriad of forces and influences in the life which create behavioral patterns on the cortex. These, of course, include genetics, experiences, accumulated knowledge, and the host of emotional responses as a result of this data. At the usual point of marriage, twenty years or so, the data that has been accumulated and the resultant patterns are extensive. Many of these patterns are very hard to change — some of them, perhaps, impossible.

The fundamental problem of marriage is integrating these personality traits so that two people can live together in relative harmony. However, to bring harmony into the situation requires a considerable amount of patience and tolerance and compromise. A rather crass, but accurate, analogy would be an organ transplant. The big problem in introducing a new organ to the system is the rejection of that organ by the immune system. The primary function of the immune system is to reject foreign elements that invade the system. Thus, a large mass of protein, such as an organ, is automatically rejected by the immune system. It is therefore necessary to depress the immune system to the point where it will accept the organ. Of course, at that point the problem is that the resistance is considerably lowered.

By analogy, how do we integrate personality traits that have been developing over a couple of decades? It is not a question of each one functioning independently and expecting the other person to accept whatever comes along. There has to be a point of compromise and acceptance, without depressing the individuality of the other person. These are things that are not commonly thought of prior to marriage, where the trick seems to be to obscure the negative aspects of one's personality, so as not to jeopardize the prospects of marriage. It is assumed that, "because we love each other," everything will automatically work out all right. As we indicated in the last chapter, the usual beginning of a relationship is superficial physical/emotional. By the time one gets around to examining the personality factors, the forces of the physical/emotional have already made it difficult to abandon the relationship.

The Roots of Personality

Personality is a vague term. We don't give too much thought to it until it begins to cut into our own well-being. Further, we assume that personality factors can be altered at will, and that marriages can be straightened out just by determination to change one's personality. So what do we mean by personality — what are its parameters and implications?

Basically, personality is related to the brain and nervous system. We begin with a genetic pattern which is indelibly traced on the cortex of the brain (the mass of tissue just under the skull cap). This is something we are all born with. And something which largely governs our behavior patterns. These are patterns that are not likely to change, although such changes can't be ruled out. The cortex is like a computer (although far more intricate) that records all the data that is fed into it — data of experience, accumulated knowledge, environmental and cultural forces. In addition to that we have the effects of the physiological factors of the body, especially the endocrine glands, which are the transmitters of the hormones that regulate bodily functions. The pituitary gland is the master gland of the body which regulates the other endocrine glands. Without becoming technically tedious, we merely indicate that the other endocrine glands are the thyroid, thymus, adrenal, and gonads. These have a great deal to do with behavior patterns, as well as temperament. Hormonal imbalances cause a great

deal of behavior problems. This statement is not intended to be a technical survey of these glands, but rather to indicate that there are many physiological factors that do affect behavior and temperament, quite decidedly. Some of these problems can be corrected by medication, but some of them are more genetically-oriented.

In other words, personality consists of a very extensive number of influences that govern the way we behave. Behavior patterns that are more or less overlooked during the days of courtship may come back to be a significant problem in the marriage. These are factors that need to be integrated, preferably before the marriage, but certainly afterward. This is why we said earlier that marriage can be like an organ transplant. There is no problem with knitting the tissue. The problem lies in getting the immune system to accept the foreign mass of protein. So the immune system has to be depressed in order that it will not reject the organ. When two people come together, they are bringing to the marriage all of the accumulated factors of their personality, which have to be accommodated. They cannot each go their own way and behave as they did before the marriage. Adjustments have to be made. The severity of these adjustments should be tested out prior to the marriage, to see if they can be made at all. A lot depends on the importance of the marriage. Is it important enough to give-up certain habits and practices? Is it important enough to demand the accommodation? Actually it is important to have pre-marital counseling sessions in which these matters can be sorted out. It is difficult to do it without a third party.

But we are already married — what should we do now?

It is, of course, a crucial consideration. The first step is to go back to the original things that attracted you to each other and seek to recapture those elements. Secondly, one must abandon the concept of the “perfect marriage.” Many marriages are broken up on the shoals of perfectionism. Furthermore, if one has a marriage that is 75% good, don’t destroy it going for the other 25%. It is well to sit down together and go over the things that are really troubling you about the other person and determine how much is negotiable and how much is non-negotiable. Behavior problems connected with the endocrine gland system can often be corrected by medication. Some behavior patterns can be modified for the sake of the marriage. Some patterns, on the other hand, need to be overlooked for the sake of the marriage. The question of course is how important is the marriage?

As we discussed previously on the subject of “the meaning of marriage,” we determined that a fundamental factor is companionship. It is not a matter of trying to have a perfect marriage, but to enjoy companionship. It’s nice to have someone to share one’s life with. Minor personality quirks are relatively unimportant in the light of that great benefit. It is possible to read too many “guide books” on marriage (except this one). If we try to pattern our marriage after someone else’s views, we merely end up putting ourselves in a box. Remember the chief thing is not being great, but being together. We may have gleaned from traditions, the idea that this is the way the husband ought to act or this is the way the wife ought to act, if we are to have a good marriage. These ideas are often fostered by the religious sector, where a good marriage is regarded as something we must have, if we are going to be pleasing to Christ. Such ideas are usually more traditional than biblical.

In reviewing your situation, it is well to determine what problems you know that, if they are not corrected can wreck the marriage? Sometimes these things are hard to bring up, but now is the time to do it. Some of these problems will erode the affection factor. Temper, for example, may be something one thinks one is getting away with, but the truth of the matter is that it is constantly eroding the affection. The family may put up with it, but piece by piece it is destroying the camaraderie and warmth of the family relationship. The tendency to nag can do the same thing. These are only examples of a host of different personality factors that damage the relationship. The couple must decide how much the relationship is worth — how much effort is one willing to put forth to make changes in their actions and attitudes? What

changes have taken place to cause one to be less likeable, or to dull the affection? What were the expectations and disillusionments? Sometimes pride and stubbornness prevent couples from honestly evaluating these things, or from being willing to make the kinds of changes one can make.

Often the physical relationship is affected by these things. Many times when the physical factor loses its luster, couples will turn to books on how to bring excitement into the relationship. This is usually a mistake. In the beginning of their relationship, the couple had little difficulty finding excitement with each other. They found ways to enjoy one another. However, when personality problems come in to diminish the affection, the physical relationship becomes routine and obligatory and loses its luster. No matter how many new methods one may use to stimulate the relationship, they will all ultimately become routine, unless the original affection is restored. Here again there is a need for honest and frank discussions of the situation. What has gone wrong with our affection? When one has explored these factors privately, it may be time to bring in a third party to help resolve the problems. Of course, if they are related to physiological problems, it is time to bring in the doctor. Perhaps some simple medication can take care of the problem.

Of course, there are a myriad of issues that may be raised in terms of personality, but remember that there was a time when you had enough affection to decide to get married. Go back and rediscover those roots and see where things have slipped away. Perhaps the things that have come in to rob you of that affection are not worth it. That is to say, you may find it well to compromise on some issues and let others go in the interest of the recovery of camaraderie and companionship, as well as the original affection that brought the two of you together. We have only touched the tip of the iceberg, but perseverance and patience will be well rewarded in rooting out the mischief makers in your relationship.

Remember only you can determine the meaning of your marriage. You must be very careful about trying to follow someone else's "formula" for successful marriage, no matter how spiritual or biblical the ideas might claim to be. Most of the instructions of the matter evolved as traditions from some very slight references in the Scripture. In the second place, it is well to remember that marriages can be shipwrecked on the shoals of perfectionism. Don't try to have a great marriage — just enjoy one another's companionship. Marriage is not an institution — it is a relationship between two people. When husbands and wives are enjoying camaraderie and companionship, it has a positive effect on the children. Remember, if you have a marriage that is 75% acceptable, don't destroy it going for the other 25%.

CRUCIAL ELEMENTS IN THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

We have been saying that marriages need to be tailored to the needs of the individual couple. We can't put it into a rigid framework. It is not an institution — it is a life. But there are some crucial elements that we must look at which, however they be tailored to the given relationship, are nevertheless important items.

God and Religion

Since God is, as we believe, the Creator of mankind, it is obviously crucial to integrate Him into our marriage, as well as all other human relationships. The problem is that religion, which is a common framework for identity with God, has also strong potential for destroying a marriage. This is especially true if the religion is constructed out of a large number of traditions. Faith in God has to do with an energy process whereby He gives life to our spirits and takes us into His "family," whereby we become "partakers of His divine nature." This, of course, is through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. This is the common denominator of the human involvement with God. And this is a vital part of the marriage. God is the cement that holds our individual lives together as well as our marriages.

Trouble comes when we get too specific about the rules and regulations of tradition that govern our relationship to God. As in marriage, it is well to remember that our relationship to God is not an institution, but a life. Christ should be a vital part of the home, not as a matter of religious practices, but in a familial relationship in which He functions as the Head. He should be a welcome Friend of the family and not a religious "guru." When the religious aspect is pressed too much, children begin to fear Christ rather than enjoy Him. It may seem like appropriate leverage to tell the children that "Jesus is watching you," but it does erode the open relationship which a child might otherwise have with Christ. Children as well as adults need to understand that, while Christ does not approve of all of our actions, He is very understanding about the human problem. Sometimes the temptations are just too much to resist and He understands that. That doesn't mean that our conduct is always acceptable to Him, but rather that we personally are acceptable to Him. Whatever is done in the way of religious instruction in the home must be done with this in mind. It must also be a time that children can appreciate and look forward to, and not something of an unwelcome chore. This can be done by drawing the children into it and allowing them to ask questions and discuss freely their own attitudes. But more about this later. The main thing is to recognize that limiting the rigidity of traditional forms is crucial, so that Christ be regarded in the home as a very welcome Member of the family and, in fact, as the Head of the family. The ways in which a couple relate to Christ are, again, quite personal. Forget the forms and enjoy the relationship. Mistakes are common in the human "sandbox," and Christ is aware of that. If we focus too much on perfection, we can destroy the vitality of the relationship. It is important to admit that we don't know what we're doing most of the time. We trust Christ to help us stay on the right track. We make many decisions where we are quite limited in the data. We must rely on Christ to see to it that we make the right move in spite of that fact. If we develop this intimate relatedness to Christ, seeing Him as the Friend and Guide rather than the religious "head master," we will be much more at peace, and much more inclined to trust Him with the process of our marriage.

Tolerance and Compromise

It is obvious that we can't know all there is to know about the person that we marry. Many habits and personality quirks emerge as we go along in the relationship. So what to do about these? The bottom line is how much is the relationship worth? How much do we want to retain the relationship with the other person? We have spoken of a phenomenon in human relationships known as "narcissism." That means that one tends to impose upon the other qualities one admires in one's self. The statement, "We both like the same things," may fall

into that category. We very much want the other person to be just like us. The problem is that the similarity may be fantasized. Or the other person may try very much to please the intended in order not to jeopardize the potential of marriage. It usually doesn't take long to get through the facade and get down to the real person. At that point, one may feel that the other person is shallow and not at all what we thought. But that is the time to settle in and get to know the real person that one has married. We may develop an appreciation of the true qualities of the other person. In any case what is needed is tolerance and compromise. What is companionship worth? What is it worth to have someone to share our lives with? What is it worth to avoid the loneliness? The reality is that we are never going to find anyone who is perfect (or at least as perfect as we are) and so we settle for the qualities that we can appreciate, or learn to appreciate. The problem is usually trying to fit someone into a preconceived mold of some kind. We must give each other space — opportunity to be one's self. Giving another the opportunity to be one's self enhances the feeling of camaraderie. And, the extending of freedom and space will often encourage the extending of such freedom to one's self. Hopefully you're going to be married for a long time. Take off the wraps and enjoy the freedom to grow in your own way. "That's just the way he is" or "that's just the way she is."

Kindness, Courtesy and Affection

We usually respond to people who show us affection. It is hard to dislike someone who likes us. Affection is usually enhanced by kindness and courtesy. Conversely, affection is usually eroded by unkindness and carelessness. Words are thrown out that hurt and they are hard to take back. Speaking unkindly or angrily toward another will inevitably take a chip out of the affection. Disagreements are not uncommon in any relationship, but the way one expresses that disagreement can make a lot of difference in the affection factor. Remember we said that marriages are often broken up on the shoals of perfectionism. So the other person is not "as smart or capable as we are" — not to worry, everyone's turn at mistakes comes around sooner or later. That, of course, is the key. We all make mistakes. Treating the mistakes of another with understanding will usually bring the same understanding to our mistakes.

And Courtesy. There's no call for discourtesy toward our mate. Once again, words can be cruel and not that easily erased. Showing courtesy says, "I care." Usually couples are quite courteous to one another in the courting process. (If that is not true, get rid of the beast.) But the same courtesy that is exhibited in the effort to win another's affections should be exhibited in the effort to keep that affection.

And remember, the display of affection is hard to resist. kindness begets kindness. How you exhibit these things is entirely personal but they are essential elements in a marriage.

Selflessness

Nothing will wreck affection quicker than selfishness. Those who often insist on their own way may be chagrined by the fact that, while they get it, they lose out in the respect of the other person. One may think one is getting away with it, but that is not the case. "What Lola wants Lola gets" is a disaster to a harmonious marriage. It is never really worth it. Of course that is true of the husband as well. A husband that insists on everything revolving around himself may find himself in a cocoon as far as the family's respect is concerned. There is no way to avoid disaster in a marriage that is heavily involved in selfishness. Give up the selfishness or give up the marriage. It is true, again, that selflessness has a way of breeding selflessness. Concerning one's self with the other's welfare is not only biblical, but certainly rewarding. Sometimes one is so busy getting one's way that one cannot see what is happening to the affection.

Responsibility

Marriage is for adults and not children. However, a very large number of couples have come into it as children, expecting it to be a long date without parental interference. Unrestrained physical enjoyment and unrestricted time together, not curtailed by various circumstances in the courtship days, seem to be the great benefits of marriage. The idea that responsibilities come with the freedoms, is often overlooked in the eagerness to marry. The roles of the husband and wife should be carefully decided prior to the marriage, but often they are not. It is, therefore, essential in getting a marriage on track to decide what these roles should be. Again, it is not a matter of what the social or religious society decrees as roles of husband and wife, but what the couple decide. But roles there must be, and faithfulness to assume and maintain these roles is an essential part of a strong marriage. It is certain that each one must pull their own weight if the marriage is to last. Distributing the responsibilities may seem difficult but the question is how important the marriage is. If it is worth preserving, it is certainly worth working at. On the other hand, trying out a new partner can be even more frustrating. People who have had multiple marriages have not learned this, as yet, and are chasing the fantasy that “this marriage will be different.” Respect is a vital part of marriage and the failure to carry one’s share of the responsibilities is a sure way to destroy the respect. You are not children playing house. You’re establishing a stable enclave, with or without children.

In the matter of responsibility, it is important to consider fiscal responsibility. Carelessness in money matters can sink a marriage. Some people seem not to be able to handle money. It is well to get an early start on money matters — to consider savings, if ever so minimal. A savings account is at least a start. Before one gets bogged down in mortgages and time payments, it is well to recognize that the enjoyment of something you can’t afford may be responsible for developing bad habits that ultimately will wreck the marriage. It would be well to seek out someone who is qualified in these areas and get some good common sense help. If one is more capable of handling the money than the other, then decide to give that one the ultimate responsibility.

There are many other things that are important in a good marriage. These are the things without which marriage can come to grief. They are far more important than rigid rules and regulations, which, in fact, can have a deadly affect on a marriage. Putting a marriage in someone else’s box can be stifling and sterile. These are not really guidelines, as such, but essential ingredients, however they may be expressed.

It is often true that religious leaders will try to dictate the guidelines of marriage on the faulty notion that these “traditions” are a sure way to success. Don’t let them do it. Establish your marriage in terms of your own personalities and learn to compromise; to tolerate; and to fashion a marriage with liberty and creative behavior patterns. Incidentally, a sense of humor is quite vital to maintaining a good atmosphere in the marriage. As Puck from Shakespeare’s “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” observed, “*What fools we mortals be.*” If we can learn to laugh at ourselves, we can remove a good deal of strain from difficult situations.

Such marriages as we have been describing, allow our personalities to breathe and to develop in their own way. What may be lost in structured regulation will be more than gained in vitality and tranquility.

What has been absent in this chapter are the arbitrary rules that define the roles and objectives and predefined practices which are ostensibly given to guarantee successful marriages, but which commonly result in giving the marriage a burdensome round of obligations.

Remember that it is not imperative to get married. It is not mandated, as some believe, nor is single life a more spiritual state, as some also believe. In the passage in I Corinthians 7,

where Paul seems to indicate that single persons care for the things of the Lord and married persons care for the things of marriage, “care” should be translated “anxious.” But Paul says, “*very soon, I would have you without anxiety.*” In that chapter, he says that if one wants to get married, that is all right, but he hardly gives anything of a mandate, nor is it evident that “marriages are made in heaven.” If one wants to get married, one can certainly ask Christ for direction, and will receive it. But there is no mandate. Some people are cut out for marriage and some are not. If one cannot handle the responsibilities of marriage, it is better to remain single. However, our problem here is that the marriage has already taken place. We are making the point that the rigid regulations that often accompany books on marriage, are simply not that biblical. The bottom line is, if you want to get married — get married, but pattern your marriage after your own individualities.

THE STRUGGLE FOR PHYSICAL COMPATIBILITY

Prior to marriage, couples seem to have little difficulty finding ways to express their affection. In fact, the biggest problem seems to be restraining themselves from excessive activity. But, soon after marriage, they are looking out for books on how to add excitement to their relationship. Unfortunately, no matter what things they try, the excitement will wear off. The residue from these expressions and experiences is the distortion that takes place, separating expressions of affection from the animal urges that so often accompany extra-marital sex. The fundamental problem is not boredom with sex; the fundamental problem is the erosion of the affection that drew one into the sexual expressions in the first place. You can't have an argument at the dinner table and a warm sexual experience in bed. It is patently true that men are less apt to be affected by psychological factors than women. The woman needs the psychological factors in place. Prostitutes learn to function in spite of emotional factors, but one's marriage partner is not likely to be able to do that. He may stifle the affection. If the wife is in a nagging or critical mood, physical affection is not likely to evolve. The sexual experience can arise out of expressions of warm affection, but not vice versa. One of the great fallacies that traps young people into the illicit sexual experience is the common assumption that sexual desire is an expression of love and affection. "If you really love me you'll have a sexual experience with me." Nothing could be further from the truth. Animal instinct has nothing to do with affection or love.

Getting the Sexual Relationship on Track

Perhaps the most important principal to remember is that a man has no more right to his wife's body after the marriage than before. Of course, that is also true in reverse, but not as usual. The importance of this, in spite of how some have distorted certain biblical passages, is that sex that is obligatory has a way of deteriorating and losing the vitality of the affection. In this respect, a husband should never ask his wife for sex. It is very important that she should have the confidence that his expressions of affection are not intended to lead into sex. She has got to feel that when he comes home at night and gives her an embrace, he is not going to insist on carrying it further. What the husband may interpret as rejection is really uneasiness, that at an inappropriate time, he is going to press for further physical favors. The same is true if the wife is getting dinner and the husband comes up to embrace her. She has got to know that he is not going to make further demands on her. As unfair as it may seem, a wife does have a certain amount of control in these areas, because, if she is not ready for the sexual experience, she can turn the husband off. And he does well to await her pleasure. The problem is that, from a physiological point of view, the male is almost always ready. The female must have the psychological pieces in place, and everything must be just right for her to enjoy the sexual relationship. But what if she doesn't seem ever to be ready? Then one must have patience and cultivate the affection factor to recover the original relationship. She must come to realize that his love and affection for her are the primary thing, and that sex is secondary. His embracing of her must not be seen as a signal for sex. On the other hand, a warm embrace can itself bring a certain measure of physical satisfaction. Waiting patiently for her response is a better option than pressing the issue and having her participate reluctantly (or worse still, faking it).

The Physical Encounter

It is well to remember that, generally speaking, the female is turned on by touch and the male by sight. That is why there is such a plethora of male magazines focusing on female photographs. This is only a generalization, because there are more female magazines focusing on the male body coming into production. But the female form is more attractive than the male. The importance of this for the physical encounter is that it is very important for the husband to spend time caressing and massaging with patience and sensitivity until the wife is ready. It is totally out of order to focus immediately on the primary sex organs. That can be

a considerable “turn off.” The wife must be encouraged to realize that her whole body is enjoyable to the husband and not just certain features of it. How long? As long as it takes.

The wife, on the other hand, must be sensitive to her husband’s needs. It might be easier to “let it go,” — to become indifferent. But that, of course, is disastrous to the marriage. The husband is out in the work place with many attractive women and it is very important that he receive some measure of satisfaction from his wife. As the husband is expressing the affection we have been talking about, it is well for the wife to be sensitive in letting him know how she feels and when she is ready. This can be done in many ways but a touch and a caress can be adequate.

Children can be a constant deterrent to physical satisfaction. There is always the uneasy sense that there might be interruptions. In fact, especially with very young children, the wife usually keeps one ear “cocked” for the potential cry of distress. And, of course, the older children are often in need of attention and are not too concerned about interrupting. If possible, it is well to work out some kind of situation where the husband and wife can be together without these interruptions. Ideally they should go off occasionally for a weekend together. But this is not always possible. Perhaps a relative or a friend can take the children off their hands for an afternoon and/or an evening. Of course, it may be the telephone which must be deactivated in some way.

Before marriage, couples find many different ways to get together, and find it difficult to restrain themselves. After marriage, the attitude changes. Partly, it is because being always available the experience loses its luster. Partly it is because the unfolding of personality problems tends to jeopardize the relationship. And partly it is easy to become lazy about it. Many new responsibilities and problems seem to crowd out the more romantic aspects. But it is very important to recover this. Perhaps a special time must be planned to get away and explore the issue.

Of course, in all these matters it is well to seek the Lord’s help. However, while prayer is an important aspect and not to be ignored, there are many pragmatic things that are often overlooked in Christian marriage manuals. Marriage compatibility, especially in the physical area, is not a matter of the spirit, but of the flesh. Of course, it is perfectly legitimate, but must often be handled in terms of the human psyche.

The process of courtship usually comes in several stages. The first stage is attraction. This is a matter of taste. It has to do with the grid pattern on the cortex — what people like and what they don’t like. There is much of the physical in this stage, since we have no way of knowing the person at first sight. I think there is no such thing as love at first sight — it may be sexual attraction at first sight. The second stage has to do with things that cause each other enjoyment, so that they like to be together. The third stage is a habit pattern. Being together becomes a natural part of one’s life. The fourth stage is the “belonging” stage which is tied in with various degrees of physical expression. This person’s body now becomes something of a possession. We enjoy each other’s physical expressions of affection. This is a stage at which marriage begins to come into view. We have enjoyed each other’s company; we have enjoyed the physical attention which now seems something of a right. But so far the issues of personality have not been seriously considered. What will the other person be like in the crises and routines of daily life? Do we find hints of selfishness? Carelessness? Irresponsibility? Whatever the problems, they seem unimportant in terms of the physical enjoyment. After marriage, the personality problems begin to emerge and the affection factor is eroded by the problems. The sexual experience diminishes along with the erosion of the affection.

Sexual Compatibility

It is vital to understand that there is a wide divergence of sexual preferences. It is crucial to determine, not only what gives the partner enjoyment, but also what is unacceptable. No matter how much one may think the partner is prudish or crude, if the sexual expressions are unacceptable, for whatever reason, they must not be pressed upon the other person. Sexual expressions are more or less unrestricted in marriage, but must never be imposed unilaterally. Doing things that the other person objects to is the sure way to destroy sexual compatibility.

In pressing a dominant role the husband often evokes a father-image. The freshness of the affection gives way to compliance and the wife has difficulty perceiving of the husband as a lover. She is reluctant to “go to bed with her father.” It is well for the husband to remember that all the things he does that are mean and overbearing keep eroding the affection. He may think he’s getting away with it, and that his male ego will prevail, but he is not getting away with it and he is losing out continually. Wives often become nagging and pushy, but husbands on the other hand become careless about doing things around the home that need to be done. The husband needs space, but the wife needs certain things taken care of by him in the home.

ALL OF THESE THINGS AFFECT PHYSICAL SATISFACTION. THE RECOVERY OF SEXUAL COMPATIBILITY LIES IN THE AREA OF THE RECOVERY OF AFFECTION.

Physical and Psychological Problems

In addition to the normal difficulties of learning physical compatibility and technique, there are sometimes serious physical or psychological problems that need to be addressed on a professional level. Child abuse, for example, is a major problem area in our society. This can be extremely detrimental to a normal physical relationship. In addition to that, there may be serious traumatic experiences that do not come out prior to the marriage. If there is any indication of it before the marriage, it should be ferreted out by professional help. But it may not come out until after the marriage. Here, the problem may be more complex, but must also be addressed with professional help. Environmental problems may have accrued, such as a mother, for example, who is extremely negative about sex and implants unwholesome thoughts in her daughter. Or, the issue of sex may be so “hush-hush” in the family that it carries over into the later marriage. Again, you may have a tragic experience of rape or molestation from an outsider. If the couple cannot seem to come to grips with the problem on their own, then it is time to seek professional help. There is nothing unchristian about that — things cannot always be corrected on a spiritual basis. The main thing is to get the help that is needed. It can save years of distress and heartache in a marriage.

Remember that the key to the recovery of sexual harmony and enjoyment is to focus on affection. Affection can lead to sex, but sex rarely leads to affection.

THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOVERY

The world can be a lonely place. When one finds someone to share it with, it is easy to pass over the negative aspects and “take a chance on love.” But once the commitments are made and one settles down to the realities of living together, personality factors begin to emerge as realities and are not so easily glossed over. Things that should have been ferreted out prior to marriage now loom as stumbling blocks to a happy and tranquil life together. But what do we do about it? Some of these problems are eroding the affection and leading to the potential of a lifetime of simply “putting up with each other.” If this sounds like a “worst case scenario,” it is distressing to know the number of marriages that are in this state. In the case of Christian couples, the *agape* love of Christ carries the marriage along, but the enjoyment factor and the *camaraderie* are steadily being eroded.

So what can we do now? How can we restore the marriage?

The Eroding of Affection

The first question is, what are the common problems that affect marriages? Perhaps the most common problem is the eroding of affection. The couple simply no longer feels the same toward one another. It has been classified by some as “falling out of love.” But how does one “fall out of love?” The question is, what was it that attracted you to each other in the first place? Where has that gone? How has it been lost? The main thing is that you have each quit behaving in ways that caused the other person to like you in the first place. You become angry over something, but instead of trying to work it out, you start shouting or speaking carelessly to each other. You assume that because you are married you have the right to do this. That is far from the truth. It is even more important after you are married to be careful about your discussions with each other, than before you were married. Of course, before you were married, you realized that the other person could simply walk out. It is vital to realize that, after you are married, the other person can “walk out” in other ways. The affection can “walk out.” The desire to be together can “walk out.” The willingness to communicate can “walk out.”

Arguments

Argumentation, which is the death knell to affection, can be replaced by discussion. There is nothing wrong in a marriage situation with differing with one another. It is the way we go about differing that is devastating. There are certain rules that govern discussions. 1) Never argue on the basis of “it’s the principle of the thing.” “I know it’s a very small matter, but it’s the principle of the thing.” Maybe your marriage is worth more than “the principle of the thing.” 2) Never argue “just to prove you’re right.” One who must always be right may find oneself “running out on a limb.” 3) Never get into character digs. Save “personality” discussions for another time. Stick with the issue at hand. “Shall we do this thing or not?” “Shall we go here or there?” And if you can’t reach an agreement, don’t shout at each other. Let it float. Agree to disagree and do it agreeably. If you are at an impasse, you may need a third opinion. Don’t hesitate to get some help. It wouldn’t even hurt to pray about it. But above all, don’t let your disagreement erode your affection. You are both trying to do what is right. The other party is certainly not out to “get you.” The best way to end a discussion is with an embrace. “We’ll find a way to work it out.” 4) Never let self-interest enter the discussion. One thing about self-interest — you may get your way and lose something of the affection factor. There’s nothing like selfishness to take chunks out of the affection. You must seek what is best for both of you. 5) Never bring in irrelevant issues. Don’t go back to previous discussions and previous matters. It only complicates the decision. 6) Never get side-tracked. If necessary, write out your point of view so that you can keep on track. Side-tracks are detrimental to the case one is presenting. 7) Never press an argument beyond its value. Hammering away on someone, just for the sake

of argument, can erode affection. 8) Try to find the time, if possible, when you can have the discussion without interruption. This, of course, depends on how important the discussion is. But interruptions can throw confusion into the situation. 9) Finally, don't shout at each other. Try not to let emotions rule the discussion. You each have a good heart, and you're trying to do the best you can. Recognize that, and try to be gracious to each other.

Personality Problems

We started with a more or less common category of argumentation because that is rather universal and not always as serious as some other problems. But the category of personality is by far the most difficult. It is difficult because many factors of personality are not that easily changed. We have had discussions on personality previously but we must take a deeper look at it at this point. It is commonly true that couples do not ferret out the personality issues prior to marriage. After marriage they are stuck with some factors that they find difficult to handle. Perhaps a key issue is that people are not trained to ferret out personality problems and are not alert to certain signs that might give an indication. That is why it is important to seek some kind of counseling prior to marriage. But even at that, people tend to put their "best foot forward" during the courtship days.

Personality must be classified in terms of traits that are not likely to change; traits that could change, but probably won't; traits that can change if there is adequate motivation and if the marriage is regarded as worthwhile. The traits that are not likely to change are largely genetic. Shyness is one of these traits. We call a shy person an introvert. There is also the extrovert — the outgoing or aggressive person. And between these points we have the mesovert who is fairly moderate in temperament. If one marries a shy type or an aggressive type, hoping to change that, it would be a mistake. But there are many other factors that are genetic in origin, like, for example, the tendency to loss of temper — the short fuse; the co-dependent type who is obsessively involved with others; the ego-centric who is unable to get beyond the self; the anxiety-prone who is the classic "worry-wart." These are just a few examples of the many possible traits that are not easily changed.

In addition to this there are traits that are acquired through the environmental process — the circumstances of one's childhood; the events of one's life; traumatic experiences; influences by others. These are more likely to change, depending on how deeply-rooted they are.

Remember that the cortex of the brain is like a "gridiron" — a football field. The game must be played within the lines. If one goes outside the lines, the play is disqualified. If, for example, the quarterback runs up the sideline, his touchdown is negated. If, however, the NFL establishes new rules and puts an alley up the sideline, giving two points for a touchdown, then the play is accepted. The point is, there must be additional input to change the situation.

The fundamental point here is that personality — the sum total of one's behavior patterns — is not easily changed. Any assumptions that after marriage, things will change, is a false assumption. There are really no reliable categories of personality, even though we try to organize them. But there are an infinite number of variables in the accumulation of the patterns on the cortex. There is no way to really simplify this complexity. However, it is essential to bring the whole matter into focus. Preferably these considerations should take place prior to marriage.

But we are already married? What should we do?

Several things are essential. In the first place, it is important to recognize this reality. There are an infinite number of personality variables. The key to survival with another person is tolerance and compromise. What are the things that can change, and what are the things that

probably won't. It is vital for the couple to sit down and confront the realities of the personality factors that are a problem. What are the things that are negotiable? And what are the things that are not? There are things that may be "bugging" each one; that have never been discussed. If there are things that seem to be non-negotiable — "I can't live with this/I can't give it up" — there needs to be an evaluation of how important the marriage is. What is one willing to do to maintain it? In the more serious cases, it is probably essential to have a third party in the discussion. It is often true, however, that there are things that each one has been unaware of as a disturbing factor.

Practices and Habit Patterns

In a certain sense, everything that has to do with the behavior patterns of an individual are part of the personality. However, there are certain things that are habits that have been developed, or practices, that can and should be considered. Again, we have to ask, what is the marriage worth? What advantage would there be in changing partners? The same concerns would have to be considered again. Many times these habits or practices have been "bugging" a partner but they have never said anything about it. On the other hand, there has been a constant nagging about the matter and never a serious discussion of the situation. If certain habits and practices are disrupting the marriage then it is important to do something about it. These things tend only to get worse. We do not do the other party a favor by ignoring them.

But what if we have discussed these things over and over again and nothing is done about it?

It may be time to draw the line. "Your habit is eroding the affection that I have for you. Unless you change, you will lose me." On the other hand, there may be an over-emphasis on a habit that is not of that much consequence. "I need some space." This is not something that is serious enough to say that we cannot have some spirit of tolerance or compromise. Or one might say, "I love you very much, but you're making too big an issue of this matter."

The bottom line is that there are personality traits and habit patterns that threaten the marriage and that need to be ferreted out. Perhaps there has never been a significant conversation about them. Nagging is not good enough. It is necessary to sit down and confront the issue head-on and deal with it. The penalty for not dealing with it is, at the least, an erosion of affection that will destroy the enjoyment of the marriage and, at the most, a complete break-up. Remember that each one looks at situations differently. What may be serious to one may be considered unimportant to the other. The main thing is that these matters must be brought forward and discussed on a serious level. If necessary, a third party should be consulted.

Communication

You must talk. Couples who do not talk may suddenly come to the point of breaking up, often in a shocking way. "I never knew you felt that way." "I thought our marriage was on solid ground." Failure to communicate is a common basis of unfaithfulness. It is justified in the feeling that, "my wife/husband will not talk to me — I need someone to talk to." People who won't communicate may feel that they are tolerating situations that they don't want to talk about. This is carrying tolerance to an unwholesome extreme. If there is something bugging you, you must talk about it. Or, on the other hand, communication may be a matter of letting the other person into your life. The old idea — "I don't want to talk about my work" — may merely be shutting the other person out. You must find a common ground of communication, whatever it is. It is important to show an interest in the other person's life — "what did you do today?" Without such sharing, there is no real basis of affection. Unfortunately, the failure to communicate can cover up the problem until it is too late.

The Erosion of Trust

Trust is certainly the fabric of a successful marriage. But what to do when it is lost? It is so valuable and so difficult to recover, that one must try to preserve it at all costs. No matter

what the enticement, the pains of loss of trust are too severe to be worth the gamble. The recovery of trust takes time and effort, but it must be faced squarely. Tolerance and new commitment are essential. One must realize the severe problems of the offended one and not expect too much. Trust can be rebuilt slowly but there must be a period of “bending over backwards” to rebuild the trust and respect. The question is. “is it worth giving up this marriage over this issue?” No matter whom you marry, this issue can conceivably come up in the future. Perhaps having gone through it, at this time there will actually be a strengthening of the marriage and less likelihood of further events.

Religious Compatibility

Usually couples marry within their own religious group. However, there are situations where either A) it is assumed that each can have an individual religious preference or; B) one adopts a religious connection that was not there prior to the marriage. In the former case, it is highly unlikely that such a situation can continue without bringing about a considerable rift. Since you are already married, you have no choice but to handle the situation with considerable tolerance and compromise. It is never sound to pressure one’s mate into accepting another religious identification. That can only lead to dissension and never a satisfactory result. Opting for another marriage is not usually sound for a number of reasons. Each one must be allowed the liberty of pursuing their own convictions, with grace and understanding. Prayer for the partner will do far more, in the last analysis, than pressure.

Indifference and Inconsiderateness

These can be either a matter of lack of training or self-centeredness. Often this temperament is marked by ignoring special occasions or ignoring the other person’s desires and needs or insensitivity to the other’s problems. It is akin to the problem of consummate self-centeredness. Once again, it is necessary to sit down and talk it out. Don’t just let it go and take the martyr’s role. Don’t consider it insignificant; it will get worse. There are countless ways in which a person can show the other one consideration and respect. If these are absent, take action. Indifferent attitudes and conduct can make a shambles out of any marriage. At the least, it erodes affection to the point of dislike or disrespect. There must be expressions of affection in any marriage. And don’t settle for the “I earn a living for you, isn’t that enough?” No, it is not enough. Affection is cultivated by expressions of affection. They must be there for a sound marriage.

If you want to keep a marriage strong, let the other person go. It is totally out of order for the husband to so dominate the wife as to make of her a possession or a servant. The net result of such an attitude will be the total destruction of affection and the replacing of it with something of an armed truce. Couples will stay together because of the children or because of having no place else to go, but it’s a shame to spend a lifetime hating each other. The husband who thinks he has the “right” to keep his wife under his thumb will pay a heavy price in terms of the loss of her respect and desire for him. It is absolutely wrong for one person to keep another in bondage. The idea that the husband should rule over the wife was in connection with the Fall. The wife was released from bondage in redemption — “*there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, but all are one in Christ*” (Galatians 3:28). Marriage is for companionship and sharing — not for servitude. Enjoy the fellowship and sharing; work out, as a secondary issue, the responsibilities and services.

Husbands often lose their wives by “overbearing” action. They make servants of them; they treat them carelessly; they manipulate them; they never show affection except when they want sex; and then they wonder why their wives don’t like them any more. On the other hand, wives nag their husbands; complain; speak harshly to them and demand all of their free time; then they wonder why their husbands don’t like to be with them any more. Obviously, not all husbands and wives are like this, but it is a fair sample of what goes on in the marriage. The bottom line, here, is that, if you want to maintain a satisfying marriage, it is essential to

behave yourselves in ways that are conducive to affection. Here, it is vital to sit down together and ask the hard questions — “What is it that I’m doing that has caused you to dislike me?” “What was I doing before that attracted you to me?”

The Problem of Abuse

This is the most difficult of the situations. Given the usual basis of abuse, it is deep-seated and difficult, if not impossible, to cure. It is well to consider separation. Chances are that there have been numbers of episodes and numbers of apologies and pleas for recovery, but the prospects are not at all bright. No matter how many penitent scenes, the wife (usually) finds herself a continual “patsy.” Usually, the abusive personality is a sickness that cannot be cured by ordinary means. It is certainly advisable for the wife to begin immediate preparations for sustaining herself and/or her children independently so that she is not trapped in the situation. Once again, help is definitely advisable. The matter must be dealt with at the first sign of an abusive personality. Nor should one be quick to restore the situation. The more times one relents, the more one becomes a victim. I’ve always advised one to consider “what is the new ingredient?”. Sometimes traumatic experiences or conversion experiences might change the situation. But words are cheap and a simple confession (with tears) is not enough. One must always ask “what is the new ingredient?”

We have discussed many aspects of problem marriages. These are only a tip of the iceberg in terms of potential problems. The big thing is communication — talk about it, deal with it, work it out. Ignoring it is not a solution nor is changing partners. If a third party is needed, get one. For the sake of the children and for the sake of yourselves, resolve it.

The Rocky Cliffs of Parenting

THE NATURE OF THE CLIMB

THE NATURE OF THE CHILD

PARENTING AND PERSONALITY

**THE FOOTHILLS OF PREADOLESCENCE AND
ADOLESCENCE**

THE TEEN TEMPEST

REACHING FOR THE SUMMIT

THE NATURE OF THE CLIMB

Of all the challenges in the world, probably raising children is the toughest. No matter how we fight for control, we constantly run into the slippery rocks and crags; the overhangs and the sheer faces. And it seems that the tighter we try to control them, the more we lose them.

It is well to understand, at the outset, that the task is a formidable one for every parent. Conscientious parents who try to do everything right can run into unexpected forces, such as genetics and negative influences, in spite of their efforts. Ultimately, the answer is that when they have sought the Lord's help and put the children in His hands, they can expect that He will hold onto them. Variables in the mind of both the parent and the child, in the last analysis, will inevitably alter the patterns with which the parent and child must work. Further, the genetic interaction between parents and children pre-determines the unique relationships which cannot be generalized. Given the intrinsic uncertainty of the relationship between parents and children, there is an over-riding fact that evolves out of this thinking for conscientious parents who try their best within the framework of their own inadequacy, there should be no guilt attached whatever.

A lot of mischief is done in the reading of books. Parents assume that, if they are not doing things according to the books, they are not being good parents. But the question is, who knows what is right for a given family unit? There are generalizations that may apply, but these must be very broad. For example, it is very important that parents maintain the respect of their children and vice versa, but how they do this is quite personal. It is also important that children learn the parents' set of values but how they teach them is, again, personal. The application of the mountain concept is that it must be done little by little and over a period of time, and it is not something that can be accomplished all at once. All that parents can do is to be certain that they have instilled in them their set of values, without any guarantees that they are going to ultimately follow them. When children go astray, it is assumed by the parents that it is their fault — that there is some place that they have failed. This is certainly not the case. I am not talking, of course, about parents who are negligent and careless. I'm talking about parents who very earnestly want to do the right thing and try their best, and still find children breaking out of the mold.

The most fundamental point is that it takes time and patience and perseverance. Like all human relationships, relating to another person is an intricate matter — not only with adults, but especially with children. The key is learning to relate to the children in terms of one's own personality traits, as well as the child's. It is not a matter of guilt, but integration — finding ways to break through the personality barriers and come to terms with each other. And this is a matter of daily perseverance. We think we know our children and that they all come with the simple "child" label on them. But given the genetic background, each child has its own set of traits that must be explored. To assume that "this is the way all children act" or "this is the way two-year-olds act" or "three-year-olds" or "teens" is a gross misapplication. The author comes to these conclusions after exposure to a great many courses in child psychology and developmental psychology, as well as adult psychology. Contrary to many books, you cannot make rigid classifications.

The effort to do so produces frustration and with it the gnawing guilt that one is somehow failing. So remember that exploring the personality and psyche of a given child, as well as exploring the relationship to that child, is like scaling a cliff. It is not an overnight hike. We must take it one day at a time — hand over hand and piton over piton. We find a toehold here and a handhold there; a ledge to stand on and occasional plateaus to rest on. In the end, the sure safeguard is that we have the rope around the child and the rope around ourselves and the rope around Christ. He has said, "*I will never leave you [let go of you]*" (Hebrews 13:5).

However they may stray, He will not let go of our children as surely as we commit them to His hand. They may go through many experiences that are negative and that cause great distress, but the Lord has ways of bringing them around, eventually. The thing is not to be in a hurry and not to force the issues. Your job is to teach them — not to force them into a mold. You want them to remember the value system principles long after they are out from under your roof. Part of this is accomplished by the establishing of a relationship with them as individuals, as well as setting a consistent example before them of the things that you believe in. Think of what Christ has put up with, with us, in bringing us to the place of adulthood and devotion to Him. So you are scaling the cliff together — you and your children. You are not simply dragging them up the cliff with a rope. The rope is for their safety and not as a “block and tackle” to drag them up with. The word “discipline” means “to teach” and not simply to administer pain and penalty. Any discipline that does not teach is misplaced discipline.

The essence of this chapter is that, in the first place, raising children is a struggle. Let no one tell you differently. People will try. The old pitch — “What I did with my child was...” is a great over-simplification. For one thing the child and the parent are different than yourself and your child. For another thing you don’t see what goes on behind the scenes to verify what is being said. You and your child, or children, are different than anyone else’s and you have a different relationship. Don’t ever feel like a failure because someone slips up to you to tell you how they raised a “model child.” And if they recommend a book and you decide you want to take a look at it, be very careful lest you wind up with more guilt complex than understanding. Remember, it’s all relative. You might find some good suggestions, but anything that leaves you discouraged or tense or confused, leave alone. I say these things out of long experience. I spent some twenty years teaching in high school, college and graduate school. I know the variables that exist from child to child and student to student and parent to parent. When a gang of forty kids comes into your classroom at eight o’clock in the morning — some of them haven’t eaten; some have had a fight with their parents or a fight on their way to school or a broken heart. They hate school; they hate the teacher; they hate the world and they don’t want to be there. Now, you take that bunch of kids and teach them something in the next hour. Tell me about individual differences. You’re not going to solve forty problems in one hour, but you can convey to each of them that somehow you understand and you care.

And this, of course, is the issue in raising children with individual differences. Making them mind is one thing. That can be done in an orphanage or in jail. But leading them through the treacherous course of this world in the spirit of caring and teaching and confidence is quite another thing. Sometimes a firm hand is needed, as when the old wagon masters had to lead the pioneers across the wilderness. Nor did the pioneers always understand what the wagon master was doing, but in the last analysis, they realized that they needed him. There must be the maintaining of respect. Discipline that is petty and irrelevant can damage that respect. The children must be made to realize that they are part of a family unit and not of an orphanage where rules are applied with indifference to the individual; where obedience becomes the main objective rather than the conveying of a value system fraught with care and sensitivity.

In this first section we have set forth certain principles that are vital in the rigorous struggle to raise children. We will discuss these things in detail as we go along, but we wanted, first, to establish solid basics for the task. In the first place we wanted to eliminate guilt on the part of parents who are conscientious, since there are no guarantees when they have a child that they are going to be capable of handling the situation. They simply do the best they can. Secondly, we wanted to eliminate the idea that every child is alike and must be pressed into a certain mold. Thirdly, we wanted to establish the principle that blind obedience without

learning merely turns to blindness in understanding. We will pick up other principles as we go along, but these should give us a start.

THE NATURE OF CHILDREN

In order to understand parenting, we must understand what is a child. It is so easy to see a child as an object of care and discipline — someone granted to us by God to raise, so that it is more like a matter of learning to grow a tree than interacting with the intricacies of the nature of a child. In fact, this is not a question most people would ask when first confronted with children — what is a child? So then, what is a child? In order to answer that we must first ask, what is a human being?

If we try to answer this question in terms of anthropology, we are immediately in trouble. Almost everything in these so-called, scientific disciplines is speculative. Even the age-dating processes, upon which they rely so heavily, are suspect. But if we rely on Scripture, it is all crystal clear. It is only as we identify ourselves with Christ that we find the true meaning of humans. The question is asked in Psalm 8 and picked up again in Hebrews 2 from where the answer is tied in with Christ. Apart from Christ, it is impossible to find a place for mankind in the vastness of the universe. Briefly, Christ was the Spirit of God sent forth to interact with the material universe. According to Colossians 1, He created it and sustains it.

He took upon Him the form of a human, and went through all the processes of the people of earth until He was crucified. After His crucifixion He was glorified, and returned to His place with God. Many passages in the New Testament suggest that Christ became like us so that He could lift us to become like Him. According to Hebrews 2, we share with Christ His glory and honor and are part of a family whom He calls His brothers and sisters. So to achieve fulfillment as a person, one must be filled with the Spirit of Christ and identified with Him in His glorification. This, of course, is the heritage of all believers. Apart from Christ a person is incomplete since God's original intention with humans was to imbue them with His Spirit, and Christ has been the effectual restorer of that Spirit. It is not a matter of being religious but of possessing the divine nature as Peter indicates in II Peter 1:4, "*We are partakers of the divine nature.*" It is thus that we can now regard ourselves as sharing in Christ's glory and honor, although we have not, as yet, come to the ultimate glorification. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "*Be perfect [complete] as your Father in heaven is perfect [complete]*" (Matthew 5:48). So then a true human, or completed human, is one who possesses the Spirit of Christ. Apart from that, humanness does not really make a whole lot of sense.

A child must be seen as a human, potentially sharing the glory and honor of Christ. But does a child possess the Spirit of Christ? According to Jesus, "*Permit the little children to come to me and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God*" (Luke 18:15, 16). They could not be part of the kingdom of God without being possessed by His Spirit. But when does that Spirit enter them and does it ever depart? This is a hard question and requires some speculation. A very important clue is in Jeremiah, "*Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified [set apart] thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations*" (1:5). Before God formed Jeremiah, he was obviously a spirit. Now, to what degree are there spirits abroad awaiting birth? Remember, this is very speculative, but it is possible that children born, at least to Christian parents, come already with a Christ-spirit. If the parents nurture this spirit by instruction and example, is it necessary that a child should ever be without the Spirit of Christ? We have become extremely technical in our discussions of salvation, but after all, the essential point is that one should be identified with Christ, and not that one should be apprised of all the implications of original sin. What does a little child really know about sin and what does an adult know about sin, for that matter, until they have received the Spirit of Christ?

Wherever these speculations may lead, the important thing is that the child be imbued with the Holy Spirit. Without the Spirit of Christ, the child has no real basis of behavior, since motivations, whether of ethics or parents or morality or patriotism, or any other such thing

are never really adequate motives. So the first step in the issue of parenting is to consider the necessity of the child possessing the Spirit of Christ. Assuming that the child already possesses the Spirit, it is then the responsibility of the parents to cultivate the implication of the presence of Christ within them. This they do by their own actions; by instruction in the Scripture, by creating an environment wherein Christ is always paramount. All of this can take place, even while the child is a babe in arms. In fact, even while the baby is in the womb, there is a good deal of prenatal influence in the attitudes and actions of the mother. A child born and raised in an environment where Christ is preeminent will certainly be much affected by that.

Now, all things considered, let us assume that the most important facet of the child is the presence of the Holy Spirit within. The parents will do all they can to maintain an environment that cultivates the situation with the child as possessing Christ within. In keeping with this principle, it is necessary to separate between the dimension of the Spirit of Christ within the child, and the expression of behavioral patterns in terms of the human personality which is part of the flesh. In other words, the child may possess Christ within and still not always behave properly. Behavior is a sometime thing. There are times when children behave very well and times when their behavior is totally frustrating. It is always a mistake to link problems of behavior with the Spirit of Christ within. For example, it is never valid to say to a child, "How can you do such a thing and be a Christian?" Nor is it wise to remind a child that "Jesus is watching you." We do our best to improve behavior and to help shape the child, but as humans we are not always successful. It is therefore crucial to separate between the elements that are strictly in terms of human behavior, and that which is purely of the spirit. As we have been pointing out, human behavior is based upon a host of elements over which neither we nor the child always have control. For example, it is impossible to expect normal progress in reading from a child who has dyslexia — a reading defect. Nor can normal restraints help an autistic child. These are extreme cases, but they serve to illustrate the point. It is essential for the parent to work with the child in coming to grips with problems, rather than make assumptions about the nature of the child's problem and apply standard disciplinary measures. It is not that standard discipline cannot be applied, but rather that it must be first determined that this is a problem. So at each stage of development, it is essential to find out the cause of behavior patterns, rather than to jump to conclusions about what is needed. Some children will respond to corporal punishment, for example, and some will not.

We will deal with this subject extensively in a later section, but we have only touched on the subject to illustrate the point that there are many problems in the issue of behavior that affect the success or failure of trying to handle the proper training of a child. Of course, there's always the response that, "My daddy just used the wood shed and didn't worry about these new-fangled ideas." Unfortunately, there are many scarred personalities as a result of the failure to take into consideration some of these "new-fangled" ideas. This is not to suggest that certain standard disciplinary procedures do not work, but rather that in the proper raising of a child, it is necessary to separate between the behavior problems of the flesh, and the presence of the Holy Spirit within — to recognize the child as an individual personality, possessed by the Spirit, rather than merely a chronological category of human persons.

I am recommending that it is important to determine what the real problem is before lashing out with standard coercive measures. It is also important to recognize that achieving success in controlling behavior is not an easy thing, nor is it always a sign of success or failure. The Spirit of Christ may be present in the child (of Christian parents) but behavior control is a sometime thing. It is also important to recognize that time is on the side of the parent, and that the child is not going to be spoiled by a few years of experimentation. Contrary to some opinions, it is not necessary to get a child "shaped up" by the time he/she is five years old.

Over the long haul it is the task of the parent to instill within the child the principles that they believe in and live by, and not merely to coerce certain behavior patterns. Sometimes the learning experience does not express itself until later years. Sometimes parents are surprised by what the child has learned, when they did not think that they were getting through to their son or daughter at all.

PARENTING AND PERSONALITY

It is commonly assumed that personality has a great deal to do with the way we get along with one another. It is not so commonly assumed that the infant placed in the mother's arms at the time of birth has also a personality. It comes already equipped through the process of genetics and perhaps, to a certain extent, prenatal influences. Sometimes one thinks of a child as an object of care. We nurture it and diaper it and provide a secure environment but we do not immediately see it as a unique personality with whom we are beginning to scale the cliff together. Several things ensue from this concept. In the first place, since it is a totally new experience and a totally uncharted climb, there can be no guilt attached, especially for those who are conscientiously trying to do the right thing, but must confess to a considerable amount of inexperience and ignorance. There is even a problem in consulting books, since who can determine who is giving the right information? Although it must be admitted that given the human equation, the best that we can do is not always regarded as satisfactory. But it is, nevertheless, the best we can do, all things considered.

Who can fathom personality either in adults or in children? So where do we get help? Primarily, it is essential to seek the help of Christ. If that seems an oversimplification, remember that the mysteries of the human mind are not that fathomable by human minds. The Lord, who is the essential Creator of the mind, is the only absolute resource. But in reality, how do we get help from Christ? Can we trust religious leaders to give us the mind of Christ? But does the Bible give us that much information? Do we know how to apply what it does give us? Of course, books written by the Church make claims to the truth, but how far can we trust those claims? So what shall we do? First of all, we must recognize that a child is our portion from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). I'm not sure that we can call the child a gift or a reward. The Hebrew text does not require that — merely a "portion." It is certainly not given to parents who are more deserving than others. However, on whatever basis, the child comes to us from the Lord. No one really knows what to do with it. As I indicated before, no matter how much training or preparation one has, each child is different. A certain young woman delivered a child and when that child was laid in her arms she cried and her husband cried. He cried because he was happy. She cried because she didn't know what she was going to do with it. But the fact that the child comes from the Lord gives us a very strong clue. If He gives us a child, He's going to have to help us take care of it. But how do we get this help?

The first thing is that we recognize it as coming from the Lord. The second thing is that we recognize the need of the work of the Holy Spirit. But how do we achieve this work of the Holy Spirit? It does not have to be achieved, merely accepted. We have said that the essence of humans is the Spirit of God within. This was God's original intention in the Garden of Eden; lost in the Fall; and restored through Christ. To recover the Holy Spirit within is merely to recognize the need and appeal to Christ for His presence. John makes it very simple in his Gospel — "*As many as received Him, to them gave He the power [authority] to become the sons of God, even unto them that believe on His name*" (John 1:11, 12). The very acknowledgement of the need of Christ is the key. The Spirit of God working within to engender the need also provides the energy to believe, as well as the sense of sin which accompanies the need. Thus, the child comes already touched by the Spirit of God and the parent has already been filled with the Spirit by the very acceptance of Christ in salvation. It is not possible for one to be saved apart from the Holy Spirit.

As far as personality is concerned, it must be recognized as part of the natural person. It cannot be linked to the presence of the Holy Spirit. If that were so, the Spirit would come and go with the twists and turns of the personality. It is quite possible for one to have an unsavory personality and still have Christ within the spirit. That is not to say that one should not seek to nurture one's personality, but rather that, in the final analysis, it cannot

be said that one does not have Christ — a matter of wanting Him within because of flaws in the personality.

This entire discussion of personality is important in the process of parenting because successful parenting depends on getting to know the personality of the child, as well as knowing and cultivating one's own personality to interact with the child. Moreover, given the nature of personality and how it is developed, it is crucial for the parents to be especially mindful of how they are helping the child develop his/her own personality. In our various discussions of personality, we have made it clear that personality is based upon patterns on the cortex of the brain that are the result of, not only genetics, but input in terms of information, as well as emotional expressions. We speak of traumas on the brain which are something like scars. These scars are the result of unsound input in terms of misinformation that is fear-mongering, as well as emotional expressions, such as extreme anger, which can have a warping effect on the personality. Sometimes children are used as something of a mental "punching bag" in which parents feel that they can treat the child any way they like and it will come out all right. Remember that discipline is from a word that means "to teach." Any discipline that does not teach is intrinsically unsuccessful. Vengefulness, which is a common part of discipline, can only result in a potential warping of the personality. Thus, the best kind of discipline is a matter of reinforcement. We speak of positive and negative reinforcement which means, only, that we do whatever is necessary to reinforce the negative aspects of unsound behavior, as well as the positive aspects of sound behavior. We will deal more at length with this later.

The sum of the things that we have been saying is that a child is a complex system of interacting physiological and neurological processes. It is quite beyond the capacity of the parents either to completely understand or cope with. It is, therefore, essential that one receive help from Christ at every stage and, above all, to be aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within the child. Thus, raising a child is not a matter of setting forth rules and enforcing them. It is a matter of interacting with the child in a teaching and sharing process with a view toward instilling in the child one's own principles, as well as making the child aware of the energy of faith that is the essence of one's own life. It is not a matter of teaching them faith, since faith is, in reality, an energy from God as a gift and not something one learns. The idea of "keeping the faith" actually refers more to the body of teachings that make up what we regard as faith, but true faith comes from God and not from us. What we do with the child is teaching the child what is really meant by faith — which is certainly not a matter of human confidence. This is something the child must learn as he/she continues to grow, so that the child does not fall prey to the misunderstanding that he/she must have particular feelings about God, or Christ, but rather that the child functions in the energy of Christ irrespective of his/her feelings. I know that this is not a traditional view, but it certainly comports with the basic concepts of the Scripture which always shows faith as a gift from God and not a development of the human emotions. In conjunction with the parent coming to understand the personality of the child, it is vital for the parent to come to grips with one's own personality as it grows and develops along with the child. Who are you now and what were you when the child was born? There might be, or perhaps should be, some difference. There is certainly a basic tenet of behavioral science that we change as we interface with one another. Thus, in the case of couples, one's personality might undergo certain changes with one mate that would be different than the changes that would take place with another mate. And so with children. Each child induces certain changes in the personality of the parents. An unruly child, for example, can affect the personality of a parent differently than a child with a moderate temperament.

So what do we do about all of this?

These factors only serve to point up the complexity of the task and to show the essential requirement of trusting Christ for help. But they also point up the reality of viewing the child not as an object of simple discipline and nurture but of sensitivity toward who and what the child is as a person. In this respect it is essential to realize that a personality can be easily altered by mishandling. Thus, a child can be traumatized by constant negativism and criticism, or belittling. And thus, the parent is certainly very much a part of the development of that personality.

But doesn't that put a lot of burden on the parent to handle the child properly? It seems a very difficult thing to do.

No, it is not difficult — it is impossible, apart from the help of Christ. These things have been said merely to make the parent keenly aware of what they are facing in the raising of a child. It is essential to integrate with the child so that the parent and the child grow together.

So what then is personality, and how does one go about integrating with the child?

Personality is the sum total of character traits and habit patterns of attitudes and conduct with the motivations that induced them. The most fundamental basis of personality is the DNA chain of molecules that are contributed by both parents and interwoven to form an independent pattern made up of both. If this sounds technical, the net result of this process is a complex of traits picked up, not only from the parents, but from previous generations in a process of selection that can skip a number of generations. Thus, to say that a child is just like the child's father or just like the child's mother is an oversimplification. This discussion is, itself, an oversimplification, but it serves to open up the subject for our purposes. On the other hand, it is an unfortunate over-simplification to attempt to classify personality in anything more than a very general way. There are some very broad types, such as the introvert or extrovert, or something in between, called the mesovert. But that is about as far as we can really go with all honesty. There are an infinite number of combinations of genes which, to separate and classify, would be like separating the ingredients of a bowl of soup.

So what are we going to do? This seems a rather formidable task.

The answer is really rather simple — observation and prayer. Be sensitive and alert to how your child responds in given situations and how you respond to the child. Do you tend to be moderate in your responses or do you overreact? If you overreact, the child will overreact. If you are calm and steady, the child will tend to be calm and steady.

But I can't seem to control myself in these situations.

That is understandable, but then don't blame the child. Maybe it has some of your character traits. So you sit down and talk about it. "I'm sorry I overreacted, but your behavior is very frustrating to me. We'll have to help each other." There is nothing wrong with a parent apologizing and admitting mistakes. It makes the parent seem more real.

Or perhaps there is an anxiety problem. "I'm sorry but I can't help worrying about you when you go off like that. I guess I'm like my mother, but we care about you a lot and don't want you to get hurt. You'll have to help me by remembering that I do worry about you a lot." These are examples of ways in which parent and child can grow together. Some myriads of personality variables do not admit dealing with them individually, but it is important to be aware of the possibilities. Sometimes a frank discussion will do a lot more than a scene.

If the behavior is a matter of defiance, that is something else and different action may have to be taken. We will discuss disciplinary procedures in the next section. But these must be taken in conjunction with, and understanding of, just what is effective with a given child and what is not. A very important principle, overlooked in many textbooks, is the genetic inter-relationship between the parent and the child. This genetic inter-relationship allows

interactions between a parent and child that work only with that given relationship. In a certain sense, the parent and the child understand each other more than is obvious and do allow for certain actions, even though the surface reaction may be misleading. Down deep inside, the child knows the parent is right, but is not willing to admit it. Thus, there is a certain tacit understanding that passes between the two as a result of a certain genetic compatibility. Different parents can “get away with” different things based upon that unique relationship — a relationship not usually explored in the textbooks.

The above discussion serves only to help alert the parent to various possibilities of interfacing with the child on a much higher level than mere corporal or punitive measures, per se. That is not to exclude such measures, but rather to seek more effective solutions. It is especially important to find solutions that will preserve the rapport between the parent and the child. Your children are going to need you for many years to come and it is important not to do anything to alienate them and lose that relationship. You don't need to be a master psychologist to accomplish this. As one psychiatrist (head of a psychiatric hospital) put it — “Throw away the books and treat the children like human beings.” The Bible gives a clear statement of this — “*Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, lest they be discouraged [disheartened]*” (Colossians 3:21).

But what about Solomon's admonition to “beat him with the rod, and save his soul from hell” (Proverbs 23:14)?

In the first place, that was an Old Testament concept where stoning was the penalty for many sins. In the second place, Solomon's personal life was not all that successful. The New Testament standard is love and caring; kindness and mercy. But remember, we are not advocating no discipline or penalties, but rather penalties administered in a context of sensitive application, especially in the matter of getting to know one's child and oneself, and growing together.

In coming to grips with the issue of personality, it is important to understand that none of the neat categories which have been devised to classify age groups is really adequate in distinguishing the development of personality traits. There is no classic textbook definition of an adult or a teenager or an adolescent. These are only applicable to chronological age. There are words that are used to describe an adult, for example, such as “responsibility,” “dependability,” and “stability.” But there are so many variables in these classifications that they become useless. So what is the alternative? The alternative is to identify each individual as a person, whatever the age level. And every person is in a state of development, so we are talking about “developing persons.” From the moment of birth to the moment of death, persons are in varying stages of development. Actually, a three-year-old is nothing but a “short person.” In relating to persons such as our children, it is necessary for us to consider what is the stage of development. Parents have a vital place in aiding this development. The parent must be conscious of the fact that, whatever they do with the child, it becomes part of the data of experience that is affecting the growth and development. It is not an easy thing to determine just where each individual is at their stage of development, but it is important to be aware of this vital reality.

Here is where it is essential for parents to recognize the place of the Holy Spirit in this process. The child possesses the Holy Spirit within, which gives to it the vital substance of the meaning of persons, but then, the approach of the parents to the child, in this light, is the recognition of the need of the help of Christ in developing the personality of the child. If the child is raised in the context of a Spirit-oriented home, the chances of developing a viable personality are much greater. Although as we have pointed out previously there are no guarantees when it comes to personality, because there are so many forces affecting it. Nevertheless, with the Lord's help, it is quite possible to be successful in the raising of children. Of course, success or failure must be seen in the context of each individual.

THE FOOTHILLS OF PREADOLESCENCE AND ADOLESCENCE

As we have noted in the previous section, these are categories that have more to do with chronological age than actual development. Each child is at a different stage of development and, of course, possesses great variables in terms of genes. This constitutes a problem, especially when comparing the children of one family with the children of another. It makes it difficult to establish general rules and practices in the raising of children. The way the family next door handles their children may be quite different than the way you must handle your own. Once again, we must reiterate the fact that the task is a formidable one. Who can really know what to do with their own children? One thing that helps is the genetic interaction between parent and child which allows for something of an intuitive sense of how to handle one's own children. But in the last analysis, it is essential that the Spirit of Christ should give direction to the parents in raising their children. The preadolescent and adolescent years are perhaps the most fertile years for the establishing of inner substance that will carry them through the teen years. Steering the course of teenagers is a very difficult task. One gets a head start if the preadolescent and adolescent are given proper instruction early. The start can be made at day one. The attitude of the mother in caring for the child; the singing of lullabies that honor Christ; the prayers the mother makes. The child's first books can be Bible stories. In the adolescent years discussions can be very profitable in giving input of a proper nature. In fact, this is where we begin the family discussion group.

It is essential for families to get together for fellowship and discussion. There ought to be one day in the week set aside for this, possibly Saturday. It is not just a time for a Bible reading, but time for the children to speak up to express their own views and to ask questions. The family discussion hour is an excellent time to ferret out any mistaken notions that come from sources outside the family. The time can have something of a catechetical nature, where questions are asked about who God is and what Christianity is all about, etcetera. Instruction in family values, as well as the concepts of Christendom must be taught in such sessions as these. Attempting to teach at times of discipline will be misapplied. That is to say, that while discipline is a matter of teaching, to try to discuss family values in the emotional upheaval of the discipline situation is very difficult. Remember that from day one children are going through stages of development and these are the best years for the kind of input that will bring about growth. If this hasn't been done as yet, by all means start. If you feel you are inadequate for such a thing, seek the help of Christ. At this point it is well to remember that the children need to feel free to express themselves. You need to know what they're thinking, no matter how off base their thinking may be at this stage. And then, of course, the Holy Spirit can be as much in attendance at these family sessions as at times of formal worship.

Preadolescence

Preadolescent children are in the stage that I call the "no-no" stage. They are not likely to be interacting with concepts of discipline but they certainly can be taught what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. It is here that we must apply the concept of positive and negative reinforcement. That is to say, one does only what is necessary to get the point across. It may be a slap on the wrist or a switch on the legs or a swat, but it serves notice that this is not acceptable. Further, we must realize that we do not have to teach this in one lesson. The Bible gives a very sound rule — *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, and there a little"* (Isaiah 28:10). Normally you will have many years to work with your children and one must be patient to teach principles in a gradual way. It is very difficult to teach teenagers it is a little, late for those who "already know everything." That doesn't mean, of course, that we do not have opportunity to teach our teenagers, but only that the task is more difficult as they get older.

Adolescence

In adolescence we have the “mind me” syndrome. This is the time when children can be taught the meaning of authority. The request for obedience can, and should be, accompanied with explanations. It is not that they will always receive the explanations, but that we must begin to teach them one’s value system. Discipline can be far more complex than in the “no-no” stage. For example, it is quite appropriate to ban television until homework is done, or to take away telephone privileges, or to deny certain social privileges.

While we are discussing discipline, it is well to consider what is appropriate discipline. There are certain very important principles that accompany the issue of discipline. The primary principle is that the parent must seek guidance from the Lord in the administering of discipline. There is the unfortunate practice of “shooting from the lip.” That is, to speak before thinking. Parents can get themselves into difficulty administering a complex of penalties that they have trouble keeping up with. It is very important to take a moment and offer a prayer before making a decision about discipline. Even with all the years of dealing with young people, I frequently resorted to this for guidance in what to do.

The second principle is to remember that, whatever you do, it will have some affect on the input of their developing personality. Therefore, one must avoid at all costs disciplines that are vengeful or unfair or that go beyond the seriousness of the misdemeanor. It is, of course, to be remembered that children can often call something unfair, knowing all the while that it is not unfair. I have often responded to this by saying that “I don’t know what a fair penalty is. If one wants ‘fair’ one must not do the crime.”

The third thing to remember is that retaining the rapport between yourself and your children is of vital importance. There may be moments of misunderstanding, but, generally speaking, the child must sense at all times that you do care and that you are always a friend. They can sense this even though they may have some negative reactions against you at the time. It is, therefore, very important to express affection at times apart from discipline. Words of appreciation for jobs well done are always important. And the embrace is essential from time to time. Remember that you are growing together and that you are learning as you go, even as the young person is learning. If you feel that you have been unfair or made a mistake, it is always in order to apologize.

The fourth rule is consistency. Your own practices and habits must always be in keeping with your principles. The children must know at all times that you are not phony or hypocritical. Don’t ever say, even to yourself, “Do as I say and not as I do.” Children are quick to catch inconsistency, even in the adolescent years. It is, therefore, important never to ask them to falsify anything. For example, in the extreme case to ask a child to tell someone on the telephone that you are not home or that you are busy, when you are not, is totally out of order. Sometimes parents are tempted to write false notes for their children for school. This does not go unnoticed by the adolescent, as well as the teenager.

The fifth principle is that the child should not be deprived of food even though it seems a quick way to make a point. To go without a meal can heighten the problem. Even sending a child to a room can have an unsound affect since it provides opportunity to sit and ponder resentment. The old adage — “An idle mind is the Devil’s workshop” is appropriate here. Many a plan “to run away from home” is hatched in the loneliness of a room in times of resentment.

Remember, again, that your effort in all discipline is negative reinforcement — that is to say making a point. Over the period of years you are trying to instill in your young person your own value system. There are things that are right and things that are wrong and this is what you must get across. It doesn’t really need severe penalty to accomplish this. The key word in

all discipline is “rapport.” That is to say, maintaining the lines of communication is vital. There may be brief moments of negative reaction, but generally speaking, the child must feel accepted and loved and cared for. It is not necessary to accept the actions of the child in order to accept the child. It is important to understand that children who feel accepted at home will not be as likely to seek unsound companionship at school. The real trouble comes when a child feels rejected at home and feels that no one really cares. This, of course, brings up the thorny issue of drugs. Young people get into drugs while seeking companionship. The desire to be accepted outweighs the threat that the drugs may offer. Again, the family discussion time with the discussion of drugs is very important. The adolescent years are, obviously, not too early to talk about these things. With prayer and proper input and acceptance, the drug threat can be greatly minimized. Perhaps the most important thing is the prayer, and secondly, the expression of love and acceptance.

The Incurable Child

There are cases where a child is totally out of control. Medication can be very helpful. This is not to suggest tranquilizers, which are addictive and temporary. The problem is often physiological and can be treated with medication that affects the neurotransmitters. Such medication is, in some respects, akin to insulin for the diabetic. It handles deficiencies in the chemical system. Some incurability is identified as autism which presents a pathological self-orientation, either in aggression or withdrawal. Both of the above personality conditions need professional help. Don't chalk this up to inadequate parenting or try to handle it alone.

The comments in this chapter are not exhaustive, but they point the way. The administering of discipline is a very personal thing and we have refrained from offering specifics because it is important that parents function within the framework of their own intuitive relationship to their children. It is vital, of course, that one should seek the Lord's wisdom in prayer. Discipline should always be relevant to the nature of the child, which the parents are or should be in the process of determining. The adolescent years are perhaps the most important years of all in establishing the principles that will later carry them through the teen years and through adulthood.

THE TEEN TEMPEST

It is universally assumed, not without justification, that the teen years are turbulent. Partly this is because few people really understand this phenomenon; and partly it is because the conduct of teens often shakes up our otherwise tranquil life. The former probability we'll deal with in this section; the latter will have to be dealt with on an individual basis. In keeping with our former discussion of the problems of personality, we must reemphasize the point that it is impossible to use the categories of teenage and adult for more than chronological convenience. We have rather concluded that everyone from birth to death is in something of a developmental process. There are far too many variables in this process to attempt any kind of viable classification. Thus, we must go back to the original premise that we are really dealing, not so much with teenagers, per se, but individual persons within the teen years.

Having said this, we must also recognize certain general characteristics of this age group. These characteristics are based upon the fact that there is a certain physiological process of development that is common to this age level. Of course, this physiological process does have its affect upon the mental development. A major area of development is in the endocrine gland system. These are what we call ductless glands that secrete hormones directly into the bloodstream. The hormones are chemical substances that pretty much control our day-to-day well being. Without becoming too technical, these behavioral glands include the pituitary, thyroid, adrenal, and the gonads. The pituitary is a master gland that controls the other glands. The thyroid controls our metabolism, or rate of assimilation of food (which has a great effect on behavior). The adrenal gland controls our capacity to handle stress. The gonads control the male and female hormones androgen and estrogen. I have mentioned these things at the risk of oversimplification because the changes that are taking place in this system are also affecting the attitudes and actions of the teenage group. It is not that the average parent can really get involved in much analysis of the physical situation but rather to be aware of the forces that are affecting the teen years.

In addition to the physical forces that affect the developing teen, there are other actions and attitudes that must be taken into consideration. These are not absolutes, but they are potential trouble spots to take into consideration.

The Pendulum. In the developing years, teenagers are often like pendulums. They are being pressed in different directions by the home and the school and the church and the peer group. They will be swinging back and forth from one extreme to another. It is important that, while the pendulum is swinging in unsound directions, nothing be done to prevent it from returning to normal.

The Kaleidoscope. Moods may take on many different colors and, unfortunately, often at the same time. Just when we think we have figured something out, the color changes.

The Data Bank. Ideas are being fed in from many different sources. This makes for confusion on the part of the teen, and for many phase changes. It is well for the parents to keep feeding in positive and Christ-oriented data.

The Observer. Those around the teen are constantly being watched. It may seem unfair that all of your ideas and actions are being scrutinized, but that's the way it is. Parents must always be on their guard to remain consistent and un-hypocritical. The home must continually reflect a Christ-centered environment.

The Explorer. The teen is continually trying to find a way in this confusing world. Experimentation is common and parents must be patient and wise in their guidance.

Precipitous actions in attempting to counteract undesirable actions and attitudes will not help calm reactions.

The Challenger. Ideas, values, and actions will constantly be challenged. These challenges must not be taken as threats but rather an attempt to find the way.

The Groupie. It is vital to a young person to be accepted in some circle of friends. It is important to see to it that acceptance comes first from the home and then from the church group (assuming the right clique). The young person will be less apt to gravitate to wrong groups if they have a strong value system that attracts them to right groups. Once again, acceptance at home is an important key. The young person has got to know that he or she will always find a friend and a supporter and a guide at the family level.

The Follower. You might be surprised at how much a teen is looking for a role model. The role model must be: a) someone they can admire; b) someone with whom they can feel comfortable and able to share things with; c) someone whose words are wise and practical. You might also be surprised at how much they look for someone who is wise in spite of the fact that on the surface they seem to shun wisdom. If the parents can be such role models, they will have the primary opportunity to guide the young people in the right direction.

Discipline

This is a very tricky area. That is why we suggested in the previous section that a large amount of discipline be taken care of at the adolescent years where it is far simpler and more effective. But there are certain guidelines that are important.

Example. No amount of discipline will lift the teen higher than the parents'. You cannot use the "do as I say and not as I do" adage.

Caring. Whatever discipline is used, the caring must ultimately come through. And it will, in spite of immediate reactions by the young person, if the caring is there.

Corporal Punishment. There is no place for it in the teen years. It only builds resentment and has no positive place in teaching.

Idleness. Disciplines that focus on idleness, such as sending to the room, must be used sparingly because they allow opportunity to build resentment. The old adage "An idle mind is the Devil's workshop" is worth thinking about.

Prayer. No human is wise enough to handle the proper discipline and training of another person. It is therefore crucial that we look to Christ for guidance in all these matters.

So what then is left? Probably the most effective kind of discipline is the withdrawing of privileges. But this is only a suggestion. It is very important that you get to know the teenager in your home and discipline accordingly. Here you might have to depend upon intuition, based upon the genetic interaction between yourself and the young person.

Drugs

Drugs are probably the thorniest problem today that parents and their children face. There are no easy answers to the problem. Probably the most consistently effective measure is prayer. But next to prayer is patience and acceptance. Not, of course, acceptance of the drug use, but of the young person who is involved. You mustn't drive them away from you with precipitous measures. The teenage level is late. The best place to start is in the adolescent years where young minds are more malleable and regulations can be more rigid. And, of course, the input comes ahead of the problem before habits set in. Perhaps most importantly

of all, apart from prayer, is the consistent input which we have talked about that establishes a value system.

Once the drugs get hold of a young person, it is of no value to put them on a guilt trip. Young people get into drugs long before they understand what they're doing. You want the young person to get off the drugs, but you don't want them to feel rejected by you, who are probably their only means of ultimate help, outside of Christ. It's not really a matter of guilt, but of entrapment. Young people are trapped before they know what they are doing. This is not a matter of being soft on drug use, but rather reaching out to young people who have been caught in a trap. With your understanding and positive input you have a chance of drawing them away from the negative aspects of their lives. It is often true that positive health habits will do more to prevent disease than medication.

Of all the things that we have said throughout this entire book, the most important thing is prayer and partnership with Christ. A home that is oriented to Christ and filled with His love will ultimately prevail over the forces of evil in the world. It may sometimes take patience and time but in the end Christ will prevail.

REACHING FOR THE SUMMIT

It seems such a formidable and discouraging task to come through all of the rugged inclines and feel some sense of success. But let me encourage you in many ways. In the first place, I've been through it. I've raised my own children through all of the maze until they are now, all of them, middle-aged. In addition to that, in the nature of my work, I have raised many other children of other families. I have also dealt with thousands of young people in the educational program. My own children have come through the typical teen problems and are now wonderful adults. In fact, for some sixteen or seventeen years my wife and I have lived with our oldest daughter and her husband. It has been a delightful experience. This is the true test of relationships; to be able to live under the same roof and share the same facilities day in and day out and year in and year out. One could not ask for more wonderful companions, and they went through their troublesome times. I have dealt with a great many young people in Bible study groups and have been so encouraged to see their positive response to the teaching of the Word.

Whatever the age of your young people, it is not too late to start. I have seen young people come from suicidal inclinations to stable development and young adulthood. I have seen young people of rebellious nature soften and become open to Christ and to the ministry. But there are several basics to remember in starting up with your teens. You must be honest and straightforward with them. Your presentation of Christ must be honest and straightforward. You must focus on their ties to Christ and not so much on incidentals of surrounding religious beliefs and practices. I always look for the "sprig of green" — that indicator, however slight, that they do, in fact, recognize Christ. It may be a comment at an unexpected moment. Don't discourage this. Let them have their own kind of relationship. If you force them into an artificial mode of belief, you may damage them. It is important to guide them in matters of doctrine, but that should not take precedence over the vitality of life with Christ that they may exhibit. You must never "de-Christianize" them. You must never say "How can you be a Christian and do those things." As much as we press the conduct issue, they are saved by the presence of Christ in their spirits and not by their manner of conduct. If they have Christ, they will have a chance of growing out of unsound ideas and actions. If they are separated from Christ, where will they get their help? It is very important that they be allowed to develop their own walk with Christ, even though they may seem to stumble from time to time. Parents must give credence to their young people's faith, however weak it may seem. Young people must see your identity with Christ in the same light. They ought to see it as a vital day by day life with Christ and not as a system of religious beliefs and practices. Christ's complaint with the Pharisees was that they had rigid laws and rules but no life.

Nothing is more important than this tie to Christ. Methods of discipline are important and helpful but never absolute. Parents all make mistakes in the use of discipline because no one really knows what is a fair penalty. But all of this is secondary to the encouragement of a vital personal life with Christ, not based upon religious forms and ideologies, but upon the young person's own personal life with Christ. The Holy Spirit within can do far more to straighten out a life than all of our human mandates and methods. So pray for your young people, encourage them, accept them as persons. Be firm but let the love of Christ come through.