

Family Ministry Articles

by Karen Holford



Hello,

Here are some of the articles that I have written about a range of family issues for the 'Journal' over the past few years. *Stronger Together* (formerly *The Journal*) is an international quarterly magazine for SDA ministry spouses, and these articles come from my regular column "Family Matters".

The articles have been arranged into three sections - articles about parenting, articles about marriage and articles about general family relationships.

These articles are for your own enjoyment, to share with others, and to translate and reprint. If you choose to translate these articles, or reprint them, please include the credit - 'This article was first published in *Stronger Together* (formerly *The Journal*) published by the GC Ministerial Spouses Association and cite the date and issue details.

Some of these articles may also be useful as the basis of a seminar, or to give away as a handout, or to add to your own local newsletters.

Please let me know if these are useful to you and how you use them. Thank you!

Blessings,

Karen

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20 TIPS FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH

HOW TO NURTURE EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING IN YOUR FAMILY

SARAH'S PARENTS HAD BOTH lost their parents and experienced abuse in their homes. They started their adult lives running away from their families and making unwise choices. They met and married under difficult circumstances and lived in a city that was heavily bombed in World War II. Sarah's father was an ambulance driver who served during the London Blitz, and he was deeply traumatized by what he saw and experienced. Unable to believe that God could let such things happen, he became an alcoholic.

Sarah met Johnny, whose family had also experienced tragedies and severe poverty. Even though the couple didn't have good role models, they set out to raise their family as Adventist Christians with a healthy picture of a loving and gracious God, healthy relationships, a positive mental attitude, and good values. It wasn't easy because there weren't many books about positive parenting when they started their family. But they prayed and gathered what they had learned about God and relationships from the Bible, from *The Adventist Home*, and from the role models of pastors, youth leaders, and well-functioning families. They managed to raise their three children with tender love and grace, without passing on any trauma from their own families onto future generations.

It's more important than ever to make our homes places of love, peace, joy, hope, and healing, giving our children the best foundation for their mental, spiritual, physical, and relational well-being. In this broken world we are all vulnerable to various kinds of illness, including mental illness. Here are 20 tips we can use to support good mental health in our families.

- Pray for wisdom to guide your family through the complex issues and seasons of life. Prepare well for the next stage in your family life by reading books and going to seminars.
- Keep growing your relationship with an ever-loving, ever-present, ever-gracious God, who delights in you as His son or daughter (2 Peter 1:5-11).
- Help your children to experience that God totally loves them, that Jesus died to show us God's love, that God is with them every moment of the day, and that they bring joy to Him. Make sure they have the most loving picture of God you can give to them (Psalm 103).

SCAN FOR AUDIO



They managed to raise their children without passing on any trauma from their own families.

- Have a few simple rules that are enforced lovingly, calmly, and gently. Physical punishment, harshness, and shouting are hurtful, abusive, and shaming to children and can cause mental health issues.
- Place forgiveness and grace at the center of your family so your children will find it easier to accept God's forgiveness and grace. Don't misrepresent our loving God by saying that He is not pleased with them, that He will stop loving them, or that He wants to punish them. His perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).
- God said that loneliness isn't good for human beings. Make sure your children know you will always love them, no matter what they do. Children are more likely to misbehave when they feel disconnected from you, so show them your love in creative ways.
- Comfort them when they are sad, as God comforts all His children in distress (Genesis 2:18; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
- If you have a conflict with your child, mend the relationship before bedtime. Disconnection from parents and conflicts that aren't resolved before sleep can increase the risk of anxiety and depression.
- Model healthy conflict resolution in your marriage. A loving and peaceful home is a huge support for good mental health.
- Notice God's blessings and gifts to your family. Share gratitude together (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Look for where God is at work in the world and find ways to join Him in His mission of compassion to your local community. Being kind to others helps protect our mental wellness.
- Make worships and Sabbaths positive and enjoyable. When children are happy during worships, church, and Sabbath, they are more likely to fall in love with God (Isaiah 58:13).
- Listen to your children. Invite them to talk about anything that troubles them so they learn to talk to God about everything too. When we listen lovingly to our children, we can often help them with their difficult thoughts and experiences before they become problematic (James 1:19).



- Help your children learn as many words as possible to describe their feelings. The easier it is to identify their feelings, the easier it will be to express them appropriately when they need to.
- Be a positive role model. Infuse your family life with activities and conversations that focus on healthy emotions. See the children's pages in this issue for some simple ideas.
- Make sure your words and actions are in harmony. Children find it very confusing when you say one thing but act quite differently.
- **Help your children to develop in their unique and God-created way and to feel positive about the body and skills God has given to them. Let them explore different interests so they can discover their joys and skills. Support them in their own choices of studies and work, rather than expecting them to do what you did, or what you wish you could have done. Develop their character strengths too.**

Don't misrepresent our loving God.

- Don't show favoritism. Bible stories reveal how painful and disastrous it is. We are all equally precious in God's sight (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11).
- Speak positively and kindly to your children to embed healthy thoughts in their minds (Ephesians 4:29).
- Design your home to be well-ordered, tidy, clean, and peaceful. But don't make cleanliness and tidiness a burden. Let children have a few toys at a time so it's easier for them to tidy up. Train them to be tidy and organized, because when we live in a muddle it creates extra anxiety and stress.

Keep learning how to support the well-being of children and young people. There are many things we can do to protect and nurture good mental health in our families when we prioritize it as Sarah and Johnny did. It's just as important to care for our mental health as it is for our spiritual and physical health, because all these dimensions affect each other. 7

Karen Holford has graduate degrees in developmental psychology, family therapy, and leadership. She is particularly interested in how homes and families can nurture people's well-being.



SCAN FOR AUDIO



Caring WHEN LIFE HURTS

NAVIGATING HARD TIMES TOGETHER

WE ALL ENCOUNTER TRAUMA of some kind at some point in our lives. This is one of the sad facts of life in this very fractured world. We might not face it personally; it might be someone in our family, congregation, or community. But even then, it scrapes and bruises our hearts and minds.

In these very complex and confusing moments of trauma, we need to feel the compassion of someone who cares deeply for us and who will slow down and pause to help us recover our sense of safety.

THE BLESSING OF NUMBNESS

Whenever we go through trauma or shock, our first reaction is likely a sense of numbness. We may be in denial. We may feel frozen or confused because any kind of sudden trauma is disorienting.

We've been tipped out of our familiar comfort zones and into a painful chaos. We struggle to make sense of what is happening. The numbness is our mind's natural way of preventing us from being overwhelmed by how terrible things are while we try to cope with our immediate needs for safety or medical attention.

RECOVERY ZONE

Whether trauma touches us directly or indirectly, finding a quiet place to sit and let our senses recover from the ordeal can help. We can snuggle in a blanket and sip warm, soothing drinks, such as herbal teas with honey. We can also take slow, deep breaths to help our body calm down naturally and to lower the levels of the stress hormones adrenalin and cortisol.

Being close to someone who cares for us, hugs us, and reminds us to rest, eat, and drink will also help us to find peace. We might need someone to hold our hand and pray for us, but it's best to keep it short and simple. A distressed mind will struggle to stay focused or learn new information.

INTENTIONALLY FORGET THEIR WORDS

When sitting with someone in trauma, we might be startled by their words. Sometimes going through a traumatic time makes finding the words to express our feelings difficult. It's quite common for people who don't usually use bad language to become angry or say words they wouldn't usually use. The kindest thing is to let this go as long as no one will get hurt. Don't add to someone's distress by judging them for what they do and say in moments of severe emotional trauma. And be kind enough to keep these moments confidential. By doing so, we won't add to their painful memories by gossiping and damaging their reputation.



Whenever we go through trauma or shock, our first reaction is likely to be a sense of numbness.

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TALK . . .

We used to think that talking about trauma helped us recover from it. However, counselors have noticed that reliving the memories and experiences can add to our trauma and slow down our recovery. Instead, it's best to let people decide for themselves whether they want to talk about their experiences (Ecclesiastes 3:7). If they do want to talk, they may share things that will distress us. If we are not ready to listen to their stories, we can help them find a trained counselor or someone who can be a good listener (James 1:19).

LISTENING WELL

If we choose to listen, here are some simple tips for listening well. By making eye contact, we show that we are paying attention to the speaker. Our ears are listening. When they pause for us to talk, we should summarize

what they have said first to check that we have heard well. This also reassures them that we are truly listening and interested in what they say. It also allows them to clarify anything we might have misunderstood or forgotten. We keep our brain engaged and stay curious about their story so we can ask warm and helpful questions. And we listen with our heart, showing empathy and compassion, and offer our hands to help where needed.

COMPASSION ON A TOUGH DAY

Even if we or our loved ones are not experiencing trauma now, we can all have tough days. It's good to plan how we will care for ourselves or anyone else who has a bad day. If we're feeling troubled or exhausted by the day's experiences, we can choose to do something that helps us feel happier, calmer, or more loved. Our "Comfort List" could include any of the following:

Warm and positive relationships with other human beings help us to manage the ups and downs of life in this unbalanced world.



He notices every tear and heartache (Psalm 56:8).

- Pray.
- List ten things we are thankful to God for.
- Watch or do something that makes us laugh.
- Listen to soothing praise songs.
- Name three things that went well during the day.
- Ask ourselves where we saw Jesus at work today.
- Plan something to look forward to.
- Look at something God made that fills us with wonder.
- Breathe in deeply and exhale slowly, as if we are blowing bubbles.
- Do something kind for others.
- Spend time working on your favorite hobby.
- Gather with friends. Warm and positive relationships with other human beings help us to manage life's ups and downs in this unbalanced world.

We can also make a "Comfort List" of all the ways that the people in our family like to be comforted when they have had a challenging or painful day and keep it where everyone can be reminded how to care for each other.

If we live with other people, we can share our stories of the day together. Comfort the sad moments. Be kind, appreciative, helpful, and encouraging toward each other. Do something fun together for a few moments in the evening. We can be intentional about telling each person in our home how special they are to us. Sharing daily experiences together will help us feel less alone with our challenges.

SOOTHE BEFORE SLEEP

Soothe someone who has experienced trauma as much as possible before bedtime, especially on the same day as the trauma. When we go to sleep with a distressed brain, it can add to our levels of anxiety and sadness. Say comforting things, such as "I am so sorry about what has happened to you. No one should ever have to endure something like that." "You are special to me, and I care about your suffering." "I wish I had been there to comfort and support you." They may like a warm bath, a hot milky drink, or a hug to help them calm down.

GOD IS OUR COMFORTER

When we are traumatized or having a bad day, it's good to remember that no matter how we feel, God is always with us. He notices every tear and heartache (Psalm 56:8). We can give ourselves a big hug from God by wrapping our arms around our chest. We can encourage others to do the same and to remember that He is always holding them in His loving arms and whispering words of love and compassion (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). **L**

Karen Holford is a family therapist. She is a departmental director at the Trans-European Division and teaches pastoral/theology students how to care well for others.



Change Happens...

ONE OF THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES of the COVID-19 pandemic was that, almost overnight, almost everything changed for almost everyone. How we work, shop, study, travel, visit, worship, and wash our hands may never be the same again. So it was quite natural that many of us felt disorientated and anxious for a while. Many people were surprised how tired they felt as their brains adapted to all the new rules, routines, and patterns of behavior. The virus has given us all a crash course in change management and tested our resilience and adaptability.

Ministry families encounter all kinds of changes in their lives. One of the hardest transitions we make is being asked to move churches when we love our current church district and we have no desire to move. It's also tough when the pastor's spouse has to leave an incredibly fulfilling work or study position and start all over again.

PREDICTABLE OR UNEXPECTED?

Change is a natural part of creation. The seasons, clouds, trees, flowers all flow through the process of predictable change. Humans grow and develop and face countless changes every day.

When the changes are predictable, we need to prepare for them ahead of time. We put snow tires on our cars before winter, check that our teenagers have life skills before they leave home, and prepare financially for retirement.

It's also predictable that pastoral families will move regularly. After a few moves, my husband and I chose white furniture that could be mixed and matched into a "new" home more easily, and we kept our stored items in strong, stackable, and labeled boxes that were all ready to go.

Unexpected changes usually happen suddenly. Sometimes they are amazing and enjoyable, like a generous gift. But often they are negative changes. An unexpected move, an illness, a death, a local disaster, the loss of a job, a pandemic . . . These disruptions are more likely to make us feel disorientated because of the chaos that accompanies them and all the powerful emotions they evoke.

Here are seven practical tips for navigating change in your family's life:



The coronavirus has given us all a crash course in change management.

1. PREPARE CHILDREN FOR CHANGE.

Help children to embrace change and see the exciting possibilities. Share how God has used changes in your life to help you grow and learn. Talk about some of the different ways He has helped you through those transitions. Use worship times to explore change in the lives of God's followers throughout the Bible. Talk honestly about the challenges change can bring, and let children know that you are always there to support them through the tough aspects of change in their lives and that God is there too (Deuteronomy 31:8).

2. RECOGNIZE THE LOSS.

Whenever there is change, there are losses, for you and for your children if they are living with you. When there are lots of losses at once, it can be helpful for each person to list them. Rate each loss on a scale of 1-10 so that you can begin to understand each other's pain and sadness. Suggest ways that your family members might help you to manage that loss more easily, such as praying with you and being understanding, supportive, and comforting.

3. MAKE A MAP.

When life is changing, try drawing a map together. Use a large sheet of flip chart paper or a roll of wallpaper. At the left side of the paper, draw, write, or map out previous changes that you have negotiated as a family, the challenges you faced, the ways in which God guided you and provided for you, the different things that helped you, and the pleasant surprises and gifts that came out of the change. Then continue the "road" to where you are now. Make a list of

the things you are most thankful for in your current situation, how you have grown spiritually, and the things that you would like to change about where you are now.

Then draw several roads into the future, describing different possible routes you might take. Explore the possibilities, gains, and challenges in each route. Pray together about the way forward. Be open and honest in your prayers about your feelings and thoughts, as God knows all about them anyway and cares deeply and compassionately for you, whatever you are experiencing (1 Peter 5:7).

4. SHARE YOUR FEELINGS.

Change can evoke sadness, excitement, fear, stress, hope, frustration, anger, curiosity, etc. Write each emotion on a different index card, with a simple description of the feeling. Take turns picking up a card that describes a feeling you have about the change. Talk about your experience of the feeling, when you are most likely and least likely to feel it, and how others can support you when you are feeling like that. Create a chalkboard where you can each write down how you are feeling today and how others can help you.

5. STAY CONNECTED.

Whenever change involves being separated from those we love, it's helpful to make a clear plan about how to stay connected after the move and to plan a return trip within a few months, if possible. Just having a future visit to look forward to can help to bridge the friendship gap, especially for children and teenagers, until fresh connections are made in their new place.

6. HOLD HOPE.

It can be hard to hold on to hope in the face of many difficult changes. Scatter lots of things to look forward to across your family calendar and involve your children and teenagers in the plans. Acts of kindness toward others, being thankful together, laughter, and walking in nature are helpful antidotes to the stress and anxiety of change.

7. JUST KEEP TALKING.

Several years ago my family experienced an unexpected and life-changing move. I would lose my job. We would have to tear our youngest, teenage son away from his friends and transplant him into a remote rural community with a vastly different culture. I raged and cried. I've moved many times and usually enjoy the new possibilities and challenges, but this time it was different. My husband listened to my frustration and tears and comforted me. Talking things through helped me to make sense of my thoughts and emotions, and when he understood how I was feeling, I felt less alone in my struggle.

Seven years after the most challenging change in my life, I looked back and saw how God had used those difficult years to shape me for an amazing purpose I had never imagined. That experience has given me the courage to face future changes with greater peace and hope. ■

Karen Holford is a family therapist and the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.



CONTENTED CLEANING

CAN WE ACTUALLY BE THANKFUL FOR CHORES?

I PULLED OUT THE BROOM and started to sweep our wooden floors. I worked erratically, annoyed at the task, pushing the broom this way and that and banging it into the furniture. It was Friday. The house was a mess, I had a long to-do list, three small children ran around my feet, and I felt exhausted. I gathered the sweepings into the dustpan as quickly as I could and dumped them with a deep sigh.

As I dragged the broom to the next room, a little voice spoke up.

“Mommy, why don’t you like cleaning our house? It’s so nice when everything looks pretty for Sabbath.” My 6-year-old daughter looked up at me with questioning eyes.

I tried to smile as I swept the hallway, but Bethany’s question wandered through my thoughts. *Why am I so grumpy about cleaning? What if I was more grateful and content about housework instead of seeing it as a boring burden? Isn’t that a bit ridiculous though? I mean, how can cleaning ever be a joy?*

I wondered how my life would change if I cleaned with contentment and gratitude. I remembered Paul’s words: “In everything give thanks” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Could I even be thankful doing the housework? Paul also told the Colossians, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (Colossians 3:23, NIV). *Now, there’s an interesting thought . . . How do I clean the house as if I am cleaning for the Lord?*

INTENTIONAL CHOICE

That evening my family and I walked around the house. In every room we thanked God for all the things we hadn’t thanked Him for before—kitchen utensils, rugs, and garbage bins. And then we blessed each room as a place where kindness and joy could flourish. If there was something I wasn’t thankful for, I decided to give it away. I started to declutter what we didn’t need and to cherish what filled me with joy.

I made an intentional choice to have a positive attitude about cleaning. It was easy to feel annoyed by the workload. But that wasn’t helpful. Jesus said that everything I was doing for my family, to make the home lovely for them, I was doing for Him. As I cleaned, I prayed, “Jesus, I am so glad I can do this for You, and for my family.”

I couldn’t pour perfume on Jesus’ feet. I’m not a pastor or missionary. But when I am tidying up, sorting



Now I think of housework as art.

the trash, and cleaning the bathrooms, I am still doing it for Him. And that, in a strange way, gives me deep joy. Even when I clean places no one will ever see, Jesus knows I am doing it for Him.

My attitude toward laundry, ironing, cooking, and shopping changed. Each of these tasks became an act of joyful kindness when I said in my heart, “I am doing this because I love Jesus and my family.”

Now I think of housework as art. Yes, art. I love to make beautiful things, and I realized that cleaning and tidying is also creative, because it makes our home a more beautiful place. Focusing on the artistic aspect of cleaning helps me stay positive and enjoy the difference my work makes to the way our house looks. Cleaning helps me stay fit by walking, stretching, and carrying. Sometimes I listen to praise music and sing while I work.

PRAYER CLEANING

As I clean each room, I focus on a different aspect of my prayer life. In one room I focus on praising God. The bathroom is good for confessing because I can imagine that all my sins are washed away forever! I thank God for the clothes we have as I wash and mend and iron. I thank God for providing good food for us as I cook dinner or go to the grocery store. I pray for a specific person during each of my different cleaning tasks. When I visit my grandchildren, my special job is to match dozens of pairs of clean socks, so we turn it into a matching game and make it fun for everyone to get involved!

This “gratitude attitude” toward chores didn’t happen overnight. I recognized that sometimes my negative attitudes came from my own unrealistic expectations about what my home should look like, or how much I should get done in a day. I learned to accept “good enough” cleaning so I can find balance in my life. I still get grumpy about

the housework from time to time, particularly if I feel overwhelmed. Fortunately, my husband knows that if I start to get irritable, the best thing he can do is offer to help me and appreciate what I am doing.

There have been some unexpected results from my experiment with contented cleaning. I now look forward to housework! I see it as a peaceful and soothing break from the intensity of the “thought work” and screen time involved in my ministry. Our children have grown up with a more positive attitude toward chores, because when I showed that I enjoyed them, they were more willing to help too.

It’s good for my mental health because now I enjoy doing the chores. I no longer see myself as an overwhelmed servant but as a “domestic artist.” Working with creativity and love gives me a sense of purpose. I have an increased sense of gratitude for the many things God has provided for us—the things that need cleaning and the things that help me to clean.

God is with us all the time as we work, clean, cook, repair, do yardwork, and care for our families. He cares for us no matter how mundane our work may seem. He longs for us to experience joy rather than sadness and frustration, because our contentment and gratitude blesses us as well as those around us. Jesus invites us to come to Him whenever we feel burdened and overloaded so He can give us rest.

So try your own contented cleaning experiment. And may you find grateful blessings in whatever you do for Him, right in your home, because He sees everything. He knows that you are doing it all for Him, and He will treasure these apparently “insignificant” actions of love forever. ■

Karen Holford is the Family, Women, and Children’s Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division. After being a pastor’s wife for nearly four decades, she now has lots of white furniture and accessories, mostly preloved things that she has painted white or bought in thrift stores.

They don’t show the dust, most white fabrics can be bleached clean, and things coordinate easily whenever they move to another house!

Create a Warmhearted Home

MAKE YOUR HOME A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN ON EARTH.



HOME IS WHERE WE can experience a taste of heaven on earth, no matter what kind of house we live in or whom we share it with. With a little care we can infuse our homes with Christian values and create places that soothe and refresh. My Danish relatives call this experience *hygge* (“hooga”), which is roughly translated as a happy, friendly, simple, and cozy sense of togetherness. (But it’s much quicker to say *hygge*!)

Creating a warmhearted home isn’t just about making your house more attractive. It involves helping everyone who lives there to feel happier and calmer and less likely to feel anxious or quarrelsome.

Read together Proverbs 24:3, 4. Then, as a couple or family, make a list of your home values. You might include such things as warm welcomes, togetherness, joy, comfort, peace, helpfulness, gratitude, and an atmosphere of simplicity and beauty that reflects the presence of God. Then blend these values into your home so that they create an atmosphere of love.

WARM WELCOMES (Romans 15:7)

The response you experience from others the minute you step through your front door is very important. Do people welcome you, hug you, help you bring in the groceries, or sit down with you and chat about your day? What kind of welcome would each person like? What can you do to make your homecomings a little more warm and joyful?

The Wilson family has a welcome ritual. Whenever anyone arrives home, everyone else stops what they’re doing for five minutes. They sit down together, light candles, and take time to reconnect.

When my husband comes home at the end of a busy evening, we sip fruit tea, share a square of chocolate, and talk about our day. It’s a tiny little thing, but it keeps us connected and gently slows us down for bedtime.

Pastor Jack asks everyone in his family the same questions every evening: “Where did you see God in action today?” and “How did you show God’s love to someone today?” These questions help everyone to look for God in unexpected places and to find creative ways to show kindness to others.

TOGETHERNESS (Psalm 133:1)

Recent research has helped us to understand the importance of eating together. It’s more than just feeding the family. It’s a time to talk about your day, discuss your ideas and your values, share your experiences, be thankful to God, celebrate the good things that have happened, and comfort each other when sad things have happened. Eating several family meals each week helps protect teenagers from all kinds of peer pressure and negative influences.

One family shares, “We make our family mealtimes screen-free and drop all the gadgets in a basket. We light low candles all year round because they make us feel more peaceful. Everyone has to spend at least five minutes helping to make the meal and at least five minutes helping to clear up. And we try to make that time cozy and peaceful too.”

“We installed a woodburning stove in the family room. It draws us together in the winter, and we all want to be close to the warmth. We don’t have a TV in the room, just a pile of our favorite family games and a stack of good books.”

JOY (Philippians 4:4)

Tell each other about the happiest moment in your day, and thank God for the experience.

Find natural things that bring you joy, such as flowers, interesting seeds, beautiful shells, rocks, and photos of nature, and arrange them in your home.

Collect favorite Bible verses and quotes. Create small posters and pictures that include the quotes, or look for inspirational printables to download. Place them around your home where they can inspire you every day.

Share the funniest thing you saw, did, or heard during the day. Watch funny video clips of animals, children, or Christian comedians.

COMFORT (Proverbs 31:21, 22)

Create a home where you enter and breathe a sigh of relief, because just being there comforts your heart.

Add softening touches to your home and make it a comforting place to be: vintage quilts, soft woolen throws, white embroidered linens, and hand-stitched pillows. Natural materials such as wood, ceramic, and glass are more pleasant to use than plastic. Bake homemade bread and simmer warming soups to make your home smell comforting.

PEACE (1 Samuel 25:6)

Flickering candles soothe our stress. Battery-operated tea lights and strings of fairy lights can also add a glimmering sparkle.

“I feel much more peaceful when my home is tidier,” says Julia. “It doesn’t have to be clinically perfect, just neat. Whenever a person leaves a room, they have to leave it tidier. They pick up their stuff and take it to their room, or they carry something to the kitchen and stack it in the dishwasher. All these little things help to make our home a nicer place for everyone to live.”

“We’ve decided not to yell in our house,” explains Heather. “It’s so much nicer to find each person and talk to them face-to-face, even when we want to tell them dinner’s ready! In fact, sometimes we whisper in their ears instead of yelling, and it’s made our home a kinder and gentler place to be.”

HELPFULNESS (Galatians 6:2)

If we’re struggling on our own, we often feel sad, lonely, and even resentful. But when someone offers to help us, it feels like we’ve been given an incredible gift!

Do chores together. Offer to help each other with something challenging for five to 10 minutes. Make it fun to help in the home, bake pizza, and create a positive atmosphere around teamwork. Doing things together also helps to build our children’s confidence and character.

GRATITUDE (Psalm 107:8, 9)

“We decided that we weren’t paying enough attention to gratitude in our home,” Dave shares. “Every day God blesses us with more gifts and treats than we can count, even when times are hard, and we hardly ever thank Him for everything. We have a large chalkboard in our kitchen, and everyone writes or draws on it anything they want to thank God for. But we’re not allowed to repeat the same thing twice in a week! It’s helped us become more aware of God’s gifts.”

He adds, “Sometimes we go on a gratitude walk through our home. We have to find at least 20 things to thank God for in each room before we move on!”

TIME TO REFLECT

- What are your favorite tips for creating a warm-hearted home?
- What difference does it make to you and your family when you grow the *hygge* in your home?
- How can your home be a blessing to everyone who lives there and everyone who walks through the door? **7**

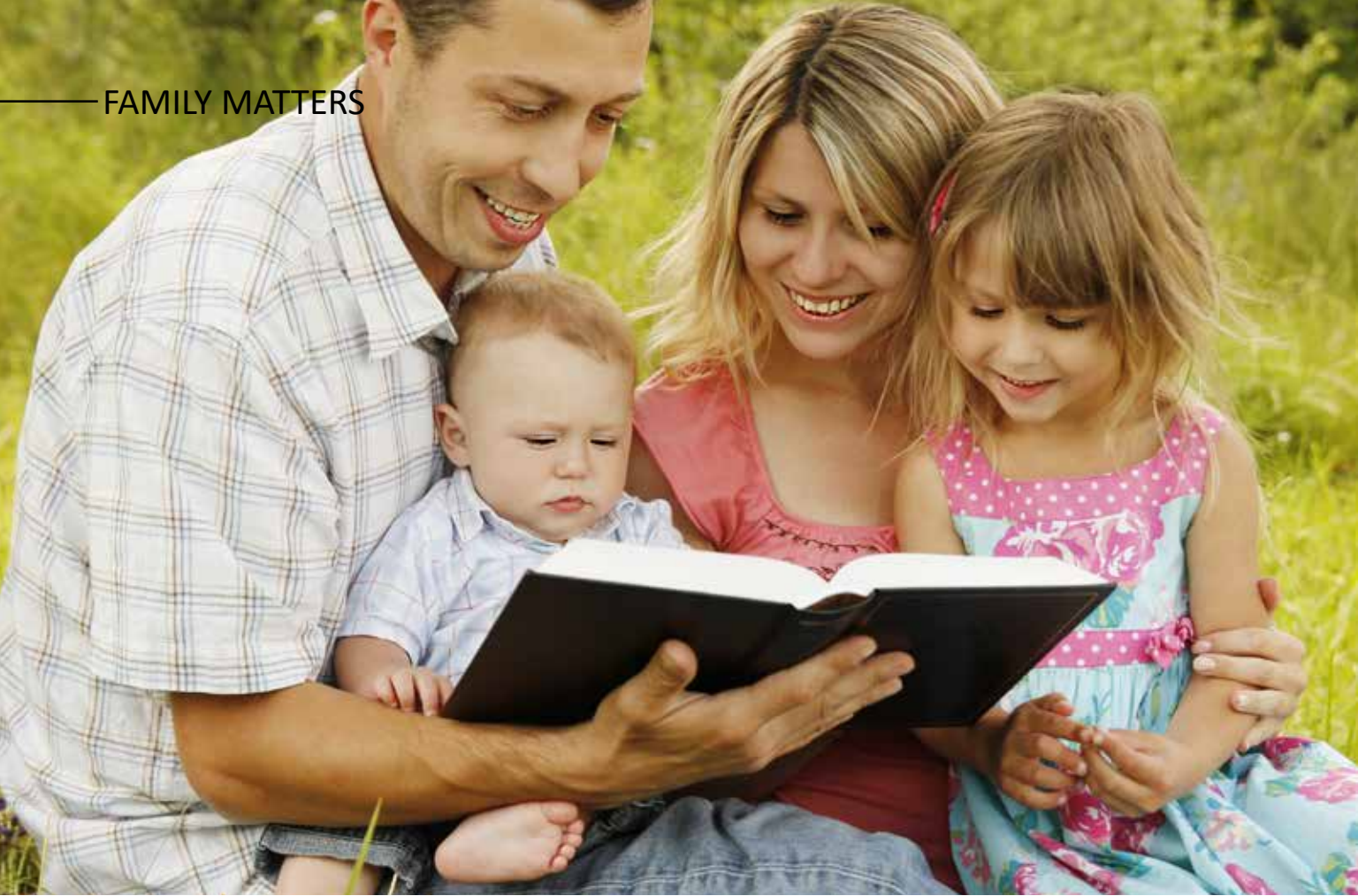
Karen Holford is director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division.

**ELLEN WHITE’S
WARMHEARTED
WORDS**

“Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness”
(The Adventist Home, p. 16).

“Troubles may invade, but these are the lot of humanity. Let patience, gratitude, and love keep sunshine in the heart, though the day may be ever so cloudy”
(The Ministry of Healing, p. 393).

“The home may be plain, but it can always be a place where cheerful words are spoken and kindly deeds are done, where courtesy and love are abiding guests”
(The Adventist Home, p. 18).



FAMILIES INFUSED WITH FAITH

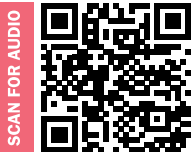
SEE HOW ONE COUPLE BROUGHT THEIR FAMILY
“BACK TO THE ALTAR.”

SARAH AND MARK TOOK THEIR children to church, studied the Sabbath School lessons, and had family worship together as often as they could. Yet they felt that something was missing from the spiritual experience of their family. They went back to the Bible and reread Deuteronomy 6. After praying through these verses, they decided to do exactly what the passage said. They would infuse their lives with faith and make God’s love real and known through their everyday life, including when waking, walking, eating, and going to sleep.

MAKE A FAITH PLAN

First, they made a faith plan for their family. They wrote down everything they wanted their children to learn about God. “We decided that God’s loving, generous, and graceful character needed to be at the heart of our family and infuse everything we do. The more we explored God’s loving character together, the more excited we were about sharing God with our children in wonderful and creative ways,” explains Sarah.

Mark adds, “We realized that we loved each other because He first loved us. So we let God’s love soak into our own lives and hearts and then flow through us to our children so they would fall in love with Him too.”



We make the most of teachable moments and spontaneous spiritual opportunities.

Sarah and Mark decided to study a different aspect of God's loving character every month of the year for family worship. They took a big whiteboard, divided it into 12 sections, and wrote a different characteristic in each square. Then they added other ideas and Bible verses to the board. They purchased a file with 12 sections where they could drop additional ideas, worksheets, and craft supplies to help them plan creative worships together.

"We made this our shared couple project," says Sarah. "We sat down for an hour a week to plan fun and interactive worships for the children. We also wrote a list of good questions we could discuss together as a family on busy days, at bedtimes, in the car, or during dinner." (See the sidebar for examples.)

IDENTIFY CORE VALUES

Sarah and Mark decided what they wanted their children to learn about faith, prayer, and the Christian life. They chose their core values as a family and the character strengths they hoped to nurture in their children. They wanted their children to experience delightful Sabbaths and be joyfully and creatively involved in their local church as well as a caring outreach project.

They used these core values when writing their plan for infusing their family with faith. What would they do to make Sabbaths delightful? What traditions would they start, and what resources might they need? How could they make church a joy for their children? How would they notice and nurture their children's character strengths? How would they creatively help their children develop good values? What kind of caring projects would work best for their children and family with their unique skills, resources, and passions?

FAMILY FAITH DISCUSSION STARTERS

TRY THESE AT MEALTIMES, BEDTIMES, TRAVEL TIMES, AND ANYTIME.

- What was one of the happiest moments of your day? Let's celebrate that joy together!
- What was one of the saddest moments of your day? We want to listen to your story so we can comfort you. (Romans 12:15)
- When did you feel most afraid today? How can we help you feel less afraid? (1 John 4:18)
- What did you see in God's creation that filled you with wonder today?
- What can I pray about for you today?
- What's the most helpful thing I can do for you today?
- What three things did you do well today, with God's help? Let's celebrate those moments!
- Which character strengths did you practice today? (Find a list here: <https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>.)
- These are three things I saw you doing well today. (List them.) I was filled with joy!
- You made a good choice today when . . .
- Where did you see God at work today? How did you join Him in His work?
- When did you experience God's love today? What effect did that have on you?
- What did you learn about God's love today? Let's praise Him for His love!
- How did you share God's love with others today? What happened when you did?

PRAY TOGETHER

“We want our children to pray simply and freely to God, as if they’re chatting to their daddy, as Jesus did,” explains Sarah. “We stop wherever we are and just tell God how His beautiful sky fills us with wonder, or tell Him about a disappointment, or ask for help with a math problem. We want them to learn that God cares all about their lives and loves their curious questions about the world.”

“We even pray prayers that might not be answered, as we hope to help them understand that our prayers may receive unexpected answers,” says Mark. “It doesn’t mean that God isn’t hearing, or that God doesn’t care, or that we need to pray harder. God is just working things out in ways we cannot understand and see right now—but He will make everything beautiful eventually. We don’t want them to think that God is like a Father Christmas, who will answer all our prayers if we’re good.”

STAY SPONTANEOUS

“We’ve learned the importance of listening to the Holy Spirit and making the most of teachable moments and spontaneous spiritual opportunities,” Sarah and Mark state. “When the children were playing with a remote-controlled toy, we used it to illustrate how the Holy Spirit works in ways we cannot see. Last week a lady fell outside our home. We picked up her shopping and stayed with her until the ambulance came. So the children learned more about kindness and compassion. Our youngest asked if he could pray for her, and the lady was so touched, she cried. That evening we explored the story of the good Samaritan.”

BE TRANSFORMATIVE

“Infusing our whole life with faith has transformed our family,” shares Mark. “Putting God’s love into action changes how we discipline our children with love, how we show forgiveness to each other, and where we see God at work in each other’s lives. We are also more transparent about our own faith journeys with our children. We tell our children what God is teaching us, how we listen for His voice each day, and how we experience His continual and loving presence in our lives.”

Sarah agrees. “We are seeing many more opportunities to share our faith with our children, in real and practical ways, than when we just focused on worship times, Sabbath School lessons, and getting them to church. And our faith, as adults, has developed in directions we could never imagine! Infusing our family with faith, wherever and whenever we can, has been hard work, but also very rewarding. We’re all on a journey into the very heart of God’s loving character, and I think it’s an adventure that will last forever!”

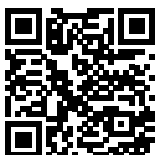
Karen Holford writes from England, where she is also on an amazing and eternal adventure of discovering God’s love.



FEELING LONELY?

IF SO, YOU'RE NOT ALONE . . . BUT THERE'S HELP.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



IT'S THREE DECADES AGO, and I'm sitting in the park with my young children, praying for a friend. As an introvert, I don't often feel lonely. But with my family far away and no other young families in our tiny church, my heart longs for the friendship of another young mom.

Soon a mother arrives at the park, and our children play in the playground together. She's also called Karen, and she's the organist at the village church. We start having playdates with our children, and now, 30 years later, we're still in touch. God sent the friend I wanted just when I needed her.

THE CHALLENGE OF LONELINESS

Loneliness happens when there's a deficit between what we want in our friendships and how we experience our relationships. This

will be unique for each person because we all have different expectations, and we all experience our relationships in different ways. For some pastoral spouses, loneliness can be one of the biggest challenges of ministry life. Frequent moves, distant families, busy church districts, differing cultures, and confusing messages about being friends with church members can all make it difficult to build and maintain the supportive relationships that are crucial for our well-being.

Humans are wired for connection. Even in Eden, a perfect world where Adam spoke face to face with his Father, God declared that it wasn't good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Recent research has highlighted the dangers of human loneliness. When we're lonely, our immunity can be lowered, heightening our risk of infection and disease. Chronic loneliness can be as bad for humans as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness affects our mental, physical, and spiritual health. Jesus told us that the two most important laws are loving God and loving others because He knew they are vital for our well-being (Matthew 22:36-40).

Humans are wired for connection.

An experience that is very lonely for one person may not feel like loneliness for someone else. If you're feeling lonely, it's important to think about how you define loneliness. Is it the number of friends you have, or the amount of time you spend doing something with friends? Then think about the kind of relationships that would help you feel less lonely. What do you most need from others to help you experience closeness and reduce your risk of loneliness?

NOT ALONE

When we're lonely, we're not alone. Many people feel lonely. Even extroverted people who have lots of friends can still feel isolated, whereas an introvert might be searching for one close friend. Some pastoral spouses reach out to other SDA pastoral spouses and make friends. Some find friends among their local Christian communities. Some join gyms and clubs or start craft or cooking classes in their home. Others learn how to manage good friendships within their local congregation. We all find different ways to build the important connections we need.

Many characters in the Bible experienced loneliness. Elijah felt alone when he thought he was the only prophet in Israel (1 Kings 18:22). David felt lonely when he wrote Psalm 142. Jesus felt alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. The woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery, lepers, and the woman with the issue of blood all felt socially isolated.

There's no stigma about feeling lonely. It's a normal human experience that encourages us to seek friends and connect with others. Life is complex, and we are all stronger, happier,

healthier, and safer when we can share our skills, wisdom, emotions, and resources. When we admit our sense of aloneness, we can start reaching out to other lonely people rather than waiting for others to find us.

Here are some practices to help offset loneliness.

- 1. Remember that God is with you.** Our loving Father knows it's not good for us to be alone. He reassures us that He's always close beside us and will never leave us (Deuteronomy 31:8; Romans 8:38, 39). Set a timer for each hour to remind yourself that God is always present. Imagine the conversations you would like to have with Him and listen to what He would like to say to you. Or give yourself a big hug and imagine Jesus is hugging you.
- 2. Audit your friendships.** Make a list of your friends, past and present. Which friendships filled you up and energized you and which ones drained you? Are there friendships that are worth rekindling or nourishing—even if you are many miles apart? Arrange regular online conversations. Share prayer requests, read the same devotional book and discuss your reflections, or find some other online activities to share. Or choose a charity and raise funds together.



3. Look around. Jesus noticed people on the edges of society and on the edges of crowds. Ask God to open your eyes to the people on the edges of your life who need friendship. Do they need a listening ear, a hug, an encouraging word, or a helping hand? Maybe they need to know that they matter to someone else, or maybe they'd like someone to share in their special interests or hobbies. Listen to their stories, find out what they enjoy, and do something amazingly kind for them. I found it's often easier to make friends with others who are new to our church or community.



Loneliness can be a source of misery, or it can be a catalyst for creativity and kindness.

4. Scatter kindness. Being kind is an excellent antidote to loneliness and sadness. Whenever we plan or do acts of kindness, however small, it helps release the hormone oxytocin into our brains. This is the lovely hormone that helps mothers bond with their babies, and it gives us a warm, peaceful, and joyful sense of being loved. Even if we're being kind to others in anonymous ways, we can still experience the healthy sense of connection and well-being we usually get from close friendships. Check out live:kind at <https://ted.adventist.org/live-kind/> and scroll down to find 14 lists of kind things to do. You'll find free ways to be kind and ideas for things you can do without even leaving home.

5. Start a loneliness mission. One of the greatest gifts we can give to our communities is bringing lonely people together for care and companionship. Your church could host vegetarian dinner evenings, run crafternoons (afternoon craft groups), or start a walking club that lonely people can join. Make friends with those who come along and bring joy and kindness to their lives.

Loneliness can be a source of misery, or it can be a catalyst for creativity and kindness. Even if you don't feel alone right now, look out for others who may be feeling alone and be a channel of God's love into their lonely hearts. ■

Karen Holford was one of the world's shyest pastoral wives when she married her husband, Bernie. But with his loving care and friendship, she is now director of Family, Women, and Children's Ministries for the Trans-European Division.

Flourishing Together

THE TINY CHURCH HAD ONLY 18 members, but it was full of family conflicts, interpersonal challenges, and destructive criticism. It was so hard to change their negative culture. We were fresh out of college, and they had an inherent distrust of pastors.

We had a choice: we could shrivel up in this emotional and spiritual desert, or we could strengthen our dependency on God, learn how to support each other, and find a way to flourish in spite of our circumstances. It wasn't easy. We were perilously close to burning out and giving up. But we learned how important it is to help protect each other, and our marriage, from the wear and tear of ministry.

PRAY FOR EACH OTHER—Heb. 4:16

Just hearing our partners pray for us can soothe away the stress. When we pray for our partners, we're handing them a magnifying glass that helps them see God's love more clearly. Kate and Liam have different schedules, so they keep two small notebooks on their kitchen table. One is filled with Kate's prayer concerns and one with Liam's. Each day they pick up their partner's book, pray for the person's concerns, and sometimes write a short prayer in the notebook or on a slip of paper to carry and read throughout the day.

Tina and Joe send each other short SMS prayers throughout the day. Whenever Joe



“Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: if either of them falls down, one can help the other up. . . . Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken”

Ecc. 4:9, 10, 12, NIV

has a challenge he sends Tina a message. He knows she'll be praying for him during a difficult meeting or a sensitive visit. And he does the same for her. These brief, comforting prayers help them to feel closer to God and to each other.

BE INSPIRED TOGETHER

Make a list of Bible verses that strengthen and comfort you. You might focus on Psalm 103, Psalm 145, or 1 John 4:7-21. And Philippians 4 will help re-balance your emotions when you feel drained. Paul has packed this short passage with practical suggestions for flourishing in the desert, such as focusing on the good things in your life, finding gratitude in every situation, praying about your concerns, and supporting each other through your struggles.

ENJOY MOMENTS OF WONDER—Ps. 104

Taking a short walk together up the hill behind our home is one of our lifelines. Along the path we chat, share ideas and prayer concerns, burn off some energy, and immerse ourselves in God's creation. We watch wildlife, pick berries, and notice the trees changing with the seasons. On the summit we catch our breath and admire the hills and valleys in every direction. Someone has inscribed Psalm 121:1 on a rock. We watch the sunset swirls of rose and gold. Twilight mist hovers over the river valleys, and the moon rises with the stars. We're filled with wonder as we wander back home feeling refreshed, happy, and calm.

Admiring God's creation always lifts our hearts and brings us closer together. If you don't have an inspiring place to walk, find some shells, flowers, feathers, or even your own hands. Choose an object, focus on it quietly until you think of at least five things that fill you with wonder, and then spend a few moments sharing your discoveries with each other.

CHOOSE GRATITUDE—1 Thess. 5:18

Even in the desert there are diamonds. They're harder to find, but they're still there. Focusing on God's gifts, even in tough times, can help us to feel more hopeful. Make a list of 30 things

you're thankful for; 30 reasons you're thankful for your spouse; 30 reasons you're glad you're a ministry couple, or 30 good things about pastoring and fellowshiping with your local church.

Create a poster reminding you of your blessings and place it on your bathroom mirror or fridge. Share your gratitude for the smallest blessings. Focus on what went well each day, and thank God for helping you through the challenges.



LAUGH TOGETHER—Prov. 15:13

Laughter fills you with positive hormones that help counteract the stress in your body, especially when you're laughing together. Try making your partner laugh at least once a day. Find crazy cards to send, look at funny photos of animals, watch a Christian comedian for a few minutes, or plan surprises for each other. Search the Internet for clean jokes and humor, play games, and do the things you used to do for fun.

DO SOMETHING WELL TOGETHER—Col. 3:23

Find a ministry or hobby that you both enjoy. During our desert experience we started running marriage retreats. Some of our ministry friends joined a tennis club to help them have fun together, stay healthy, and make friends in their community. You could plant a garden, restore furniture, make music, or go on a mission trip.

KEEP CALM—John 14:27

Take care of each other by lowering your partner's stress and anxiety. In this issue you'll find an article about de-stressing for couples; try the ideas that appeal to you. Try to notice and do more of what soothes your partner. If you accidentally add to your partner's stress, try saying, "I'm so sorry. I realize what I just said or did wasn't very helpful. What can I say or do right now to soothe some of your stress or take something off your load?"

HOLD ON TO HOPE—Jer. 29:11

When you're walking through the desert, the whole world can feel dark, and it's hard to be optimistic. Share your hopes for the next day, week, month, year, and even farther ahead. How can you nurture your spouse's hopes—or make those hopes a reality? How can you encourage your spouse when they are feeling overwhelmed? What are God's hopes for each of you, and how can those hopes comfort you and guide you through the desert?

LOVE GOD, OTHERS, AND YOURSELVES—1 Cor. 13:4

"And the greatest of these is love." When we focus on God's love for us and let His love flow through our lives into each other, we can flourish in the driest deserts. Be kind and gentle, lifting each other's burdens rather than adding to them. Ask your husband or wife what you do that helps them to feel especially loved, and just do it. You'll both be blessed.

And finally, "Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder" (Rom. 12:11, 12, *The Message*). J

Karen Holford writes from her home on a Scottish hillside. Her husband, Bernie, is president of the Scottish Mission.

GOD'S *Hospitality*

ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM US, START WITH OPENING OUR OWN HEARTS TO GOD'S LOVING HOSPITALITY.

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I dreamed of staying at the beautiful Welcombe Hotel near Stratford-upon-Avon. We drove past it every time my father preached to the tiny congregation that gathered in the town.

I grew up and forgot all about the hotel until my husband, Bernie, received an invitation to a retreat for pastoral couples. It was completely free—sponsored by an organization that focused on developing healthy pastoral marriages and families so

that they, in turn, could nurture healthy relationships in their congregations.

“So, where’s the retreat?” I asked Bernie.

“It’s in a hotel near Stratford-upon-Avon,” he said. “The Welcombe Hotel.”

I was astounded. “*The Welcombe Hotel?* Welcombe with a B near the end?”

“Yes . . . do you know it?”



“When I was a little girl, I used to dream of staying there! And now we can go there for real!”

At the start of the retreat, our host welcomed us warmly. “You’re probably wondering why we’ve brought you to the finest hotel in the area. We know you work long hours for your churches, often with very little appreciation. We want to show you how beloved you are to God and to bless you as He would bless you. The extent to which you can love your husband, wife, children, and members of your congregations is the extent to which you have experienced God’s love for you. We love ‘because He first loved us’ (1 John 4:19), and this gift to your marriage is only a tiny glimpse into His magnificent love for you.”

We learned many things during our stay that reshaped our relationship and our ministry. But my time at the Welcombe Hotel will always remind me of God’s warm, smiling, extravagantly generous and loving welcome for each one of us.

GOD’S HOSPITALITY

Dozens of stories about God’s wonderful hospitality are scattered throughout the Bible. In Psalm 23 He leads His sheep by still waters and fresh green grass, and He’s right there with them through the frightening and dangerous Valley of Death. He even prepares a feast for those He loves and promises that they will live in the extravagant generosity of His eternal hospitality forever. In Isaiah 55:1 God opens His arms, smiles at us, and says, “Come! Come as you are; I will provide everything you need!”

Many of Jesus’ parables have hospitality woven through their narratives. Parties for prodigal pig-keepers. Celebrations for found sheep. Kings hosting banquets for beggars. Neighbors needing bread at midnight. And a room in an inn for a seriously injured man.

In Revelation 3:20 God stands at our door and knocks, patiently waiting for us to open the door and let Him in. He doesn’t mind how messy our lives are behind our doors. In fact, the messier they are, the more He longs to come in and help us sort everything out.

No human being is ever beyond the reach of His invitation.



*God doesn't
mind how
messy our
lives are
behind our
doors.*



God's hospitality is not just about caring for our physical needs. His welcome flows from His deepest desire to be close to us. He wants to make sure there are absolutely no obstacles that prevent us from coming to His door or prevent Him from entering ours. He invites us, every day, to the metaphorical feast that He has prepared, where there is always more than enough to meet every need and basketfuls of blessings for us to share with others.

No human being is ever beyond the reach of His invitation. He inclusively invites every race and kindred, tongue and people, the social misfits and outcasts, the children, the old people, the refugees, and especially those who wonder if anyone will ever notice and love them.

He invites us to come as we are, with all our imperfections, brokenness, and messiness, because, as the most loving father ever, He welcomes every child generously and joyfully, even rude, selfish, disrespectful, and destitute children who come home smelling of pigs (Luke 15:11-31). Our loving Father puts on a clean linen apron, kneels to wash our sore and dirty feet, sets the table, and spreads before us a feast overflowing with everything that brings us joy. All we need to do is sit in the wonder of His presence and experience the deepest love we've ever known.

God's invitation for us to come, to spend time being lovingly served by Him, is not just for some distant time in the future. It is also for now. We can pause at any time, sit with Him quietly, and let His generous compassion soothe our tired, aching, and burned-out hearts (Psalm 103).

All our relationships with others, especially those who are different from us, start with opening our *own* hearts to God's loving hospitality. And then we can pass on His welcoming acceptance to others, just as Jesus did for Zacchaeus, the woman at the well, and the woman caught in adultery. Tidying our home is not nearly as important as working with God to clear away the junk of our selfishness, our pride, and our personal prejudices. What effect might our critical and rejecting attitudes have on other people's beliefs about whether God is able to welcome and love them, too?

Paul urges us to welcome each other as God welcomes us. In Romans 12:9-21, he encourages us to offer hospitality to people, loving them deeply, showing them respect, blessing them instead of hurting and cursing them, comforting them in their sadness, celebrating their joys, and being humble and patient with others, even those who are different from us or who have sometimes hurt us.

This is where true hospitality starts—when we welcome others, generously and abundantly, into the “ever-Welcomme Hotel” of God's love, and invite them to taste God's eternal hospitality. How will you practice this open-hearted generosity with each person you meet? How can our welcoming attitude toward our children, spouse, friends, colleagues, church members, and complete strangers help them to feel welcomed into God's family? **J**

Karen Holford is director of family, women's, and children's ministries for the Trans-European Division. She has been amazed and inspired by the hospitality of grace she has received in God's welcoming arms of love.



“Great” GRANDPARENTS

BEING A GRANDPARENT is an amazing opportunity to pass on your love and spiritual heritage to the next generation, just as Lois in the Bible shared her faith with her daughter, Eunice, and grandson, Timothy. Today many grandparents also become step-grandparents when children remarry, or even surrogate parents when their grandchildren need another family for a while.

Whatever your family situation, you can have a significant role in your grandchildren’s spiritual development. You can pray, share your faith stories, open their eyes to God’s love, help them to discover the wonder in God’s creation, and nurture their character strengths.

Even if you don’t have grandchildren, you can be an “adoptive” grandparent for a family that doesn’t have nearby grandparents, for a single-parent family, or for an immigrant family. You can make a big difference by being a stable influence in the life of a child and by supporting their parents.

CONNECTED GRANDPARENTS

- Stay warmly connected to your grandchildren whenever possible. You’re a secure base when they face challenges during their teen years, or if their relationship with their parents becomes shaky for a while.
- Find out what makes your grandchildren feel especially loved, then do those things as often as you can.
- Look for creative ways to love and bless your grandchildren through appreciation, affirmation, support, and encouragement.
- Be good listeners when they chatter away. Take notes about their friends, their strengths, their interests, their struggles, and their dreams.

PRAYING GRANDPARENTS

- Prayer is an amazing gift that you can give your grandchildren every day.
- Pray that they will know Jesus, follow Him, and make good life choices.
- Pray that their parents will parent with wisdom and love and grow closer to God through the experience of parenting. If your own children are currently taking a break from church, the Holy Spirit can use your grandchildren to touch their hearts again.

- Write and illustrate prayers for your grandchildren and mail your prayers to them.
- Say a short blessing over them when you put them to bed or when saying goodbye on the phone.

SPIRITUALLY-NURTURING GRANDPARENTS

- Tell your grandchildren about your own spiritual journey, the difference your faith makes in your life, and how God has answered your prayers.
- Make worship kits for your grandchildren because ready-made worship kits are a blessing when you're busy. Visit *The Journal* website and search for the children's pages in the archives. Look for any ideas that your grandchild might enjoy, write out the instructions for the worship activity, gather together all the supplies needed, and put everything in a resealable bag.
- Make story bags. These are cloth drawstring bags containing a Bible storybook and all the materials needed to tell the story. For example: the Lost Sheep story bag could be in a green cotton bag (which doubles as a field). The bag could contain a piece of tan fabric (such as burlap) to represent a desert, gray foam shapes to represent rocks, several sheep, and a shepherd. Wooden popsicle sticks can be used to create a sheepfold or the shepherd's house.
- Come up with challenges that help children use their hobbies and interests to explore Bible topics.
- Help them memorize Bible verses by turning it into a fun game. Write each word of a verse on separate cards and ask them to arrange the cards in the right order.
- Write a Bible verse on an appropriate picture, cut the picture into pieces, and mail them all the pieces to arrange correctly.
- When you tell your grandchild a Bible story, use these open-ended questions:
 - o What did you like best about the story?
 - o What was the most important message in the story for you?
 - o Which part of the story seemed most about you? Or where are you in this story?
 - o What does this story show about how much God loves us?

CHARACTER-BUILDING GRANDPARENTS

- Make a list of positive character strengths that you would like your grandchildren to develop. Print off the "Periodic Table of Character Strengths" at www.letitripple.org.

- Spot your grandchildren demonstrating one of their character strengths, and let them know that you noticed: "When you did . . . you were being so kind/patient/brave/wise, etc. You made a great choice!"
- Explore the character strengths of Bible characters and talk about fun ways your grandchildren can develop their own character strengths.
- Plan activities that help children to be creative, work as a team, be hopeful and optimistic, and grow positive values.

SUPPORTIVE GRANDPARENTS

- Parents appreciate grandparents who support their style of parenting and their values. Ask how you can be most helpful, learn how they discipline their children, and find out how to support their routines for mealtime and bedtime.
- Fit around the family's routines and be respectful of their parenting choices. Many parenting practices that were popular when we parented young children have been replaced by new approaches. We may need to let go of our old ideas and embrace some new and better ones!

GIVING GRANDPARENTS

- Give your grandchildren inspiring books, perhaps the stories you enjoyed as a child. Ask a children's librarian for some good book recommendations, and read the stories before buying a copy for your grandchild.
- Other great gifts are Christian DVDs, books, and games; nature, science, and craft activities; good construction toys that develop fine motor skills, creativity, and imagination; outdoor toys that encourage healthy activity; and good quality wooden toys that have enduring and creative play value.
- Give experiences instead of toys, such as season tickets to the zoo; knitting or woodworking lessons; or a camping trip together. Or you might pay for music lessons, sports club fees, language classes, or whatever else they are keen to learn. J

Karen Holford is a grandma to Zara, Leo, and Max. She loves watching their faith grow.



GROWING TOGETHERNESS

YOU NEED JUST FOUR INGREDIENTS.

IMAGINE THAT YOU REALLY want a chocolate cake. You have all the ingredients in your cupboard. You even have a recipe, a cake pan, and a stove. But for some reason you decide to sit still and just long for a taste of the delicious chocolate cake. You even pray for a chocolate cake. And at the end of the day, you are utterly disappointed because you never got the cake you wanted.

So, what happened? You knew how to make the cake. You had everything you needed. But you never tasted a crumb of the cake or a lick of the frosting.

Relationships are like chocolate cake. We want to have closer relationships with people. We even have all the ingredients we need as well as good recipes. But we struggle to do the things that will help us create warmer connections and experience deeper togetherness.



FIRST THINGS FIRST

The first ingredient of any closer relationship is always kindness. When we feel loved and cared for, we feel safe and happy, and our hearts are open for a deeper connection. A smile, a gentle touch, a helping hand, a thoughtful treat, some loving words all help to develop warmth and trust.

Imagine that blending the softness of butter and the sweetness of sugar are like creating the caring foundation for closer relationships, just as they are the basis for a good chocolate cake. It's important to mix them smoothly and thoroughly so the cake has a good consistency.

Jesus started each new relationship with compassion and kindness. He saw everyone He met as a beloved child of God. He wanted to show them how much God loved them, because they had no idea how loved they were. He noticed their need, moved closer, listened to their story, and reached out in kindness to bring healing, comfort, grace, and peace.

LET'S TALK

The second ingredient of a good relationship is the ability to have authentic and vulnerable conversations. These help us learn more about each other. We don't share everything about ourselves all at once. We share a few drops and watch for the effect that it has on the relationship. Does it bring us closer together or push us further apart?

Then the other person may share a few drops. We mix them into our relationship, and they become part of our growing understanding of each other. We slowly add teaspoons of information about ourselves and our values, beliefs, opinions, and ideas. Eventually we feel safe enough to talk about the vulnerable parts of ourselves, hoping that each time we do, the other person will continue to accept us as we grow in trust and love.

We don't share everything about ourselves all at once.

This communication process is like adding eggs to the cake mixture. Most cakes need at least two eggs. The eggshells need to become “vulnerable” and crack so they can share their contents with each other. We add the beaten egg to the butter and sugar mixture a little at a time so it can be gently integrated into the batter. If we put all the egg in at once, the mixture may be hard to blend, or it may curdle.

In the hours before His death, Jesus told His disciples that they were more than servants—they were His friends. That’s when He had told them everything the Father had told Him. Jesus communicated deeply about His love for His disciples and the whole world (John 15:9-17).

WORKING TOGETHER

The third ingredient in a deepening relationship is doing things together. As our care and communication increase, our trust in each other grows and we feel more confident about taking on a project together.

When we work together in practical ways, we learn how to balance our skills, how to collaborate, how to give and take. In a home, this might be growing a garden together, freshening up a room, raising children, or being involved in mission projects. In a church context this might be developing a children’s ministry, decorating the space for a wedding, or starting a ministry to the community.


Working together grows relationships because it involves the ingredients of caring for each other and of open communication. This is like sieving the flour, cocoa, and baking powder together and mixing them into the butter, sugar, and egg batter. All these ingredients need to work together to make a good chocolate cake. None of them would work on their own.

Jesus taught His disciples the importance of collaboration. Together they fed more than five thousand people. Paul described the church as a body in which everyone is an essential part of a well-functioning one, each gifted with spiritual gifts and designed for loving and caring relationships (Romans 12).

GIVE IT UP

The fourth ingredient of healthy relationships is the ability to give to one another in a balanced way. This involves listening to each other so that we are aware of each other’s relational, spiritual, emotional, and physical needs. It involves having a generous spirit that enjoys giving to others, because “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Relationships in which each person is blessing the other, by giving kindly and freely in ways that bring their loved ones joy, are like well-watered trees that flourish and grow delicious fruits.

Every ingredient needs to give to the others to make a good cake. If any ingredient refuses to share, the cake will be spoiled. Selfishness, self-importance, and expecting others to give to us without giving loving care in return will not result in the delicious relational “cake” that God planned for us. Jesus showed us how to have happy and healthy relationships by following His recipe of loving care, vulnerable communication, collaboration, and generosity.

So if we want a slice of that delicious chocolate cake, and if we want to have rewarding relationships that transform our lives and the lives of others, let’s pick up those ingredients, follow the recipe, and practice making the loving cakes that will bring joy to our marriages, families, churches, and communities. 

Karen Holford is the Family, Women, and Children’s Ministries Director of the Trans-European Division. She loves baking healthy cakes and healthy relationships!

Healing the Hurts

SOMETHING SMALL HAD HAPPENED, so small I don't even remember what it was. But I was angry, defensive, arguing . . . and, admittedly, irrational. After a few moments my husband, Bernie, asked gently, "What's really going on for you? This isn't about what just happened; this is way bigger. Does this remind you of something else that happened in your life?"

He had pressed my pause button. I sat down, took a deep breath, and tried to retrace the path through my memory. I discovered a huge cavern of pain caused by the cruelty of my first grade teacher. One small event, and I had tumbled back into the fear and humiliation of that distant childhood classroom.

Life can hurt like crazy. Experiencing pain is an integral part of being human. God wants us to remember that if it wasn't good to be alone inside of Eden (Gen. 2:18), it certainly isn't good to be alone outside of Eden! Loneliness intensifies the pain, but gentle togetherness with a loving spouse can soothe the pain, heal the hurts, and bring us closer in love and compassion.

PRAY SIMPLY

When your spouse is hurting, they need your prayers. Even when they don't have the words to pray, your prayers can be a huge blessing. Hold their hands. Pray a short, focused, caring prayer, asking the God of all comfort to comfort them (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). When people hurt, short prayers



are best because it's really hard to concentrate when the emotional center of your brain is in pain. Look at your partner through God's eyes, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray a sensitive prayer. Pray that God will give you compassion to support and understand your partner.

EXPLORE THE ICEBERG

When your hurting spouse is talking, focus on the feelings beneath the words and behavior. Sometimes people sound angry when they are really feeling sad, frightened, frustrated, or disappointed. Instead of reacting to their words, wonder what they might be feeling. Say, "It sounds to me as if you're feeling disappointed/sad/overwhelmed. What can I do to help?"

Help them to draw a picture like a huge iceberg. On the top that's visible above the water, write what they are saying about their pain and what other people might be seeing from the outside. On the underwater iceberg, write the feelings and thoughts that are deep underneath. This can help both of you to understand the issue.

BE GENTLY CURIOUS

Whenever your spouse's emotions seem out of proportion and you're tempted to think they're "overreacting," you might be missing a story of past pain that's never been completely healed. Ask about other times when they felt similar emotions, maybe during childhood or adolescence. As they tell their painful stories, listen comfortingly, tell them how sorry you are that they went through such pain, that their hurt breaks your heart too, and that if you had been there at the time you would have comforted them by . . . (fill in

the blank with what you would have done). This kind of healing listening enables us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15, NIV).

EMOTIONAL FIRST-AID

You don't have to be an expert to help a hurting person. Just ask, "When you're hurting like this, what's the best thing I can do to soothe you or to help you feel better again?"

Write a list of things that help each of you feel better when you're sad or hurting.

Comfort is . . .

- not trying to fix them.
- not telling them what to do.
- not comparing their suffering with a time you suffered.
- not changing the subject to something happier.
- not walking away and leaving them to sort out their own problems.
- not being afraid of their tears and fears.
- not trying to "jolly" them out of it (Prov. 25:20).

Comfort is . . .

- being there with them.
- listening with empathy by imagining what they might be feeling.
- accepting their feelings.
- trying to understand them.

Comfort in ways they appreciate. Be with them in their sadness and let them know that their sadness touches your heart.

MEASURING PROGRESS

Some couples find it helpful to use a simple scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is extremely sad and 10 is extremely happy. You can ask, "What's the saddest you felt today on a scale of 0-10?" and "What's the happiest you felt today on a scale of 0-10?" Be curious and wonder what was happening when your spouse felt very sad or very happy, as this can give you some clues for helping them.

Or use www.positivityratio.com/single.php to monitor your emotions every day. We need a ratio of 3:1



positive to negative emotions in our lives to help us flourish. The “positivity ratio” can help you to identify days when you’re low on positive emotions, and then you can choose to do something funny, creative, relaxing, soothing, inspiring, or interesting to help balance them out.

EXTRA HELP?

If you think your spouse might benefit from talking to a professional, try to find a Christian counselor who will see you both together. As a couples and family therapist, I have seen many people recover more quickly from their hurts when they get help together with their spouses. Talking things through together often takes their relationship to a deeper level of understanding and love.

PERFECT LOVE

Perfect love takes away fear (1 John 4:18). How can your love take away

fear and hurt? What else does your loved one need from you? Your warm and loving touch, your sensitive words, your thoughtful kindness, your helpful support, your respect for their difficult feelings, your closeness and your commitment to be with them through every challenge? Invite God to use you as a channel of His healing love to your spouse’s heart.

HEALING HURTS

- Sit in God’s lap and look at the hurting person through His eyes. Look carefully and notice how He sees their hurt and how He wants you to show them His love.
- Help them to understand that God is with them through this painful process. (Psalm 23:4 promises they are not alone.)
- Study Philippians 4. It is packed with good ideas for turning painful thoughts and feelings into positive ones.
- Ask what you can do that would really comfort and support them. Then do whatever they say.
- At the end of each day ask, “What went well today?” Help them find three things, however small, and thank God for them together.
- Make a hope candle. Fold a sheet of heavy paper in half lengthwise to make a card. Cut the top to look like a candle and a flame. Inside the card write all the things that bring hope: Bible promises, sentence prayers, past experiences, supportive and understanding people, etc.
- Do something each day that helps them to relax, laugh, and feel good. Go for a walk in nature, have a warm hug together, look at photos and video clips of funny animals, or work on a creative project and don’t worry about the end result. God gave us laughter, hugs, wonder, and creativity to release the happy hormones that can help heal our hurts. 7

Karen Holford is a family therapist and pastor’s wife living in Scotland.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



HEALTHY FRIENDSHIPS

WHY WE NEED THEM AND HOW TO FORM THEM

I WAS A YOUNG MOM in a new town. My husband was pastoring a challenging church. We were the only young family, and I felt so lonely. Each day I strapped my toddler into her buggy, snuggled my baby boy into a carrier on my chest, and walked to the local park. Just walking past other people helped me feel less alone. Then I met another mom in the park. Our children were the same ages, she lived around the corner from me, and she was also named Karen.

We met in each other's homes and chatted over hot drinks and cookies while our children played together. We talked about faith, life, parenting, and everything in between. She helped me flourish when our church was full of criticism and conflict. Our friendship was a gift from God at the loneliest time in my life. This week we met again after several years of letter-writing and chatted as if we'd never been apart.

LONELINESS IS NORMAL

Humans need other humans. In the beginning God told us: "It is not good for the man [or woman] to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). God is a wonderful friend to all His beloved children, and Jesus promises to be with us always, so we are never truly alone (Matthew 28:20). Many godly people in the Bible felt lonely because they needed other human beings, just as we do. In many of the stories, God helped them find a friend, like Naomi and Ruth, or reconnect with their community, like the woman at the well.

God created us to have warm and close relationships with other people, because we are safer, happier, and healthier when we are part of a community. So it's normal to feel lonely when we don't have many friends, when we're in a new place, when we're caring for a new baby, or when we've lost someone we love.

Loneliness is an epidemic, despite our constant connection with others through our cell phones and social media. Severe loneliness can shorten our lives by up to a decade. Just imagine! By being a friend to someone else, you are helping both of you be happier, healthier, and live longer!

THINKING ABOUT LONELINESS

When you feel lonely, be kind to yourself. Tell yourself that it's normal because God designed us for connection. Ask yourself: When do you feel most alone? When do you feel less alone? When do you most enjoy being alone, and when do you least enjoy being with people? What would it take for you to feel less lonely? To see people? To have deeper conversations with people? How could you fill those gaps in your life?

Many godly people in the Bible felt lonely because they needed other human beings, just as we do.



Look around and see who else might be feeling lonely. Walk and sit in places where people gather safely. Try starting a conversation when you're buying groceries, waiting in line, or sitting in a park. Volunteer to work with a local charity or join a special interest group. Call an old friend, write a letter, or set up a video chat online so you can see each other. Maybe there's someone in your own family who is lonely right now whom you can reach out to.

Are you lonely for more time with your spouse? Be good friends with each other too. Plan a distraction-free hour at least once a week and go for a walk, visit a café, or work as a team on home repairs or a garden.

God created us to have warm and close relationships with other people, because we are safer, happier, and healthier when we are part of a community.

FINDING FRIENDS

It's not easy to make and maintain friendships as a pastoral spouse. Each move brings goodbyes, creates distance, and involves building relationships in a new community. After a few moves the goodbyes hurt, and it can be harder to make new friends. And someone, somewhere in our church history, spread a rumor that pastors and their families should not make friends with church members in case people think they have favorites. This advice has caused so much pain and distress over the years.

Even Jesus had different circles of friends. He was closest to three disciples, Peter, James, and John. The next circle of friends was His disciples. But there were many other followers of Jesus whom He called special friends. Jesus needed special friends in His life, and we certainly need them too.




When we move to a new district I befriend someone else who is new to the church. I also try to build relationships with people in the community by joining a hobby club and talking to people at my bus stop or the café where I occasionally eat lunch. Is there someone in your church who needs a friend? Even smiling at people on the street can help you feel better.

POSSIBILITIES, NOT PROBLEMS

If you are struggling with aloneness, make a list of things you enjoy doing on your own to help your time alone be happy and meaningful. Discover a new hobby, learn another language, or write a book. Make another list of things you can do to bless other lonely people. Start your own mini ministry. Visit the lonely, elderly, or sick people in your neighborhood and do kind things for them. I began walking with an elderly neighbor each week to help her experience nature and feel confident going outside, and now we have become friends. My mother is caring for my father at home. She knits beautiful representations of Bible characters to encourage young families to share Bible stories.

A MINISTRY OF FRIENDSHIP

Perhaps your church could organize events to help people feel less lonely, such as lunches for the elderly, a free café with healthy drinks and snacks, playtimes for young children to attend with their families, or craft afternoons where people can chat, make simple things, or learn how to paint. A community garden on the church property brings people together to grow healthy food. Some churches host board game evenings so young people can enjoy playing games with people in real life.

Lonely people are everywhere. Even if you don't feel lonely right now, ask God to show you someone who needs your friendship. They will bless you too—more than you can ever imagine. 

Karen Holford is an introvert. She has several close friends, and each of them invited her to be friends with them. They are all gifts from God, and they have been an amazing blessing in her life.

*When you feel lonely,
be kind to yourself.*





HELPING HEAL THE PAIN OF ABUSE

LISTEN, PRAY, AND LOVE

“PLEASE, CAN I TALK TO YOU? My daughter’s boyfriend abused her. I want to help her and comfort her. But I don’t know where to start.” My heart went out to Melody.* I knew the story. Her teenage daughter, Ana, had come to me for counseling, and our conversation was confidential. However, I could still help Melody navigate her fears and concerns and give her some simple skills to support Ana.

ALL KINDS OF ABUSE

Abuse can happen in many ways. Anything that violates a person’s sense of safety and well-being and leaves them afraid, hurt, sad, and even ashamed can be a form of abuse. Abuse can be **physical**—when the body has been injured and hurt. Abuse can also be **emotional**—when a person has been shamed, belittled, criticized, and made to feel afraid, or when someone tries to distort their sense of reality. There is also **sexual** abuse—when someone has been forced to engage in sex acts against their will. **Financial** abuse can happen when their money is taken away from them or when they are not given enough for their basic needs and the needs of their dependents. **Spiritual** abuse happens when any of these abuses occur in a religious context or when the Bible and spiritual teachings are used to manipulate and hurt people.

Anything that violates a person’s sense of safety and well-being and leaves them afraid, hurt, sad, and even ashamed can be a form of abuse.

Helping Heal the Pain of Abuse

ARE YOU OK?

Not everyone feels safe to talk about their abuse because abusers often threaten their victims into silence. Someone might be more withdrawn than usual or stop using social media. Abusers often disconnect their victims from their friends and family. Those who have been hurt may stop coming to church or wear long sleeves to cover up their bruises. They may look sad and avoid eye contact, not have enough money to buy food, or be restricted from leaving the house. If you notice changes in a person's life, quietly ask them if they are OK or need help. Make sure that no one else can see you or overhear your conversation. Slip them a note or find a secure way for them to communicate with you. Be aware that their abuser might ask to read all their messages and emails.

LISTEN WELL

It's not easy to listen to stories of abuse and pain. We don't want to hear them. But we need to speak up in a supportive and loving relationship. Melody needs to be aware that hearing Ana's story might cause her distress, and she will need to calm herself with prayer and deep, slow breathing when comforting Ana (James 1:19, 20; Ephesians 4:29).

TALK ABOUT THE EFFECTS

We used to think that people had to talk about their abuse to find healing. Now we understand that talking about abuse can be traumatic too, as people re-live their frightening experiences. Melody can ask Ana about the effects that the abuse has had on her life. What has Ana stopped doing that she used to enjoy? What is she doing differently to help keep herself safe or to find healing? What are Ana's hopes, and what are the best ways for Melody to support and help her?

HEALING MESSAGES

Melody can share these healing messages with Ana: I believe you. What happened to you was wrong. You are not to blame. You were a victim of someone else's very bad choices. You did the best you could in dangerous circumstances. You were courageous and made good choices that protected you from more harm. I care about you, and I am so sorry that you went through this



We used to think that people had to talk about their abuse to find healing. Now we understand that talking about abuse can be traumatic too, as people re-live their frightening experiences.

experience. God cares about you. He hurts so badly that this happened to you, His precious child. God is always with you and notices every tear. He wants to comfort you and help you to feel safe and loved (1 John 4:18).

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

When someone has experienced abuse, it's important to let them make their own choices about how others can help them. Ana may feel like a broken victim. Empowering her to make decisions will let her know that her choices are important. If Ana is not sure what she needs, her mom can offer some suggestions and let Ana choose the one she likes most. Melody can ask Ana what she can do to help. She can write a comforting prayer for Ana to read. She can help Ana access medical, legal, and counseling support; protect her from further abuse; and plan lovely things to look forward to that will help her feel precious and loved.

A BASKET OF COMFORT


If you know someone who's been abused, fill a basket with experiences that will help them feel cherished and blessed, such as a book of encouraging devotionals, hand cream, a handwritten prayer, favorite treats, a creative distraction such as Bible verse coloring cards, and a print out of the "Father's Love Letter" from www.fathersloveletter.com. The website provides the letter, based on many Bible verses, in almost every language.

SITTING IN GOD'S LAP

Melody can help Ana remember that God loves her. The abuse didn't happen to punish her or because God wasn't caring. He hurts with us when we are distressed. He notices all our tears, and He binds up the brokenhearted (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; Psalm 56:8; Psalm 147:3). Melody and Ana can imagine that they are sitting in God's loving lap and that He is giving them a big hug. He is rocking them in His loving arms, stroking their hair and crying with them as He wipes their tears. What do they think their loving Father would say to comfort them in this moment of deep distress?

FINDING JOY AGAIN

As part of the healing journey, Melody can encourage Ana to list 100 things that bring her joy and help her to do as many of them as possible. They can share three things that went well each day and thank God for them. Melody and Ana can plan kind things to do together for other people because kindness to others can help us heal our sadness and distress. You can find lots more ideas for emotional healing at <https://ted.adventist.org/family/flourish/>.

We are not all therapists or counselors, but we can all find ways to be present in the lives of others like Ana by listening kindly, loving them, praying for them, and helping them to find joy and confidence again in the safe arms of their loving Father. 

*All names and circumstances have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Karen Holford is a family therapist who has helped many people in their journey from abuse to joy. She is a departmental director at the Trans-European Division.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



IDENTITY CRISIS

GOD HELPED ME REDISCOVER MY VALUE.

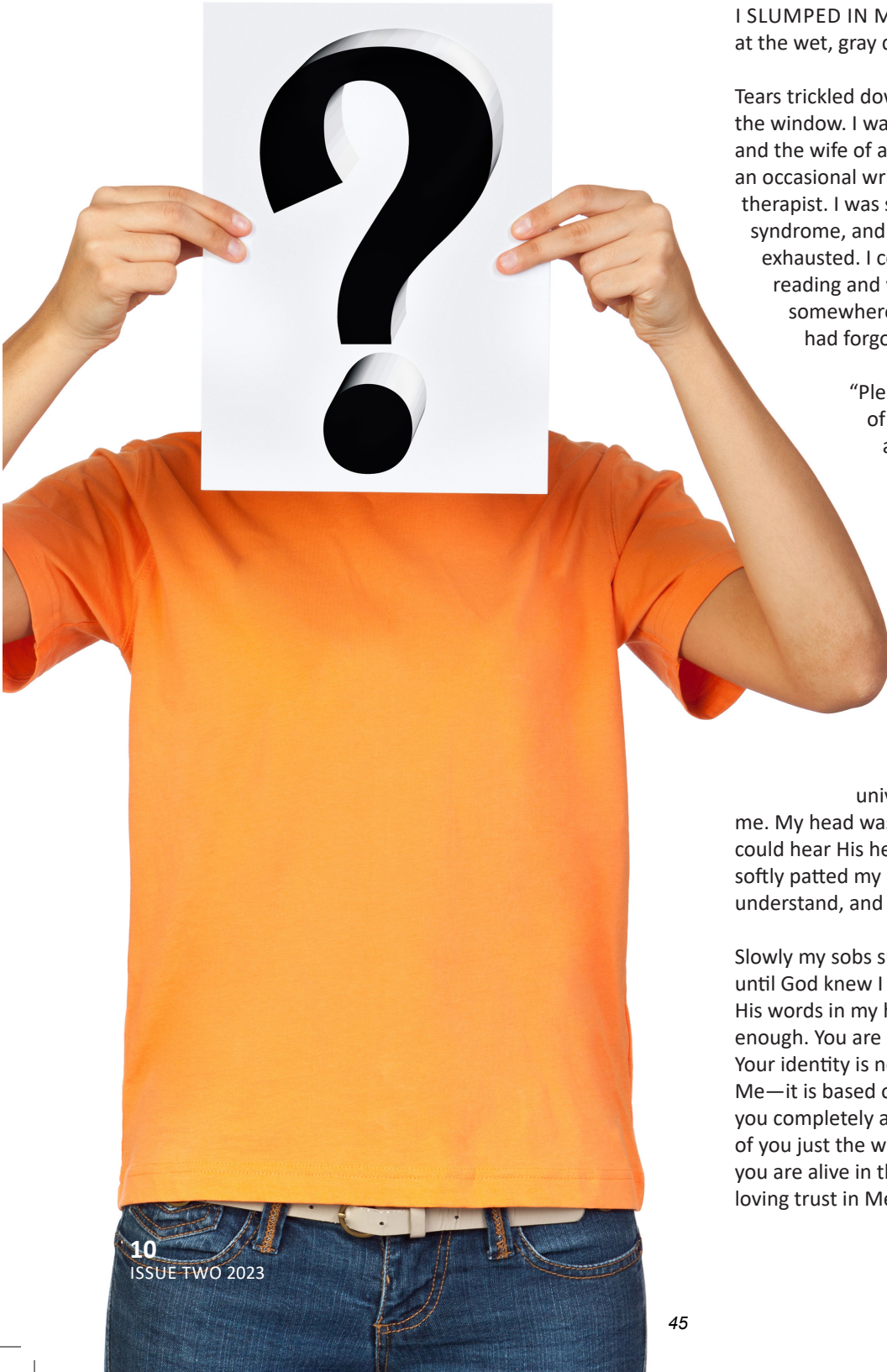
I SLUMPED IN MY CHAIR and gazed out the window at the wet, gray day. *Who am I?* I wondered.

Tears trickled down my face like raindrops down the window. I was a mother of three young children and the wife of a pastor. I was an introvert. I was an occasional writer. I used to be an occupational therapist. I was struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome, and even the smallest task left me exhausted. I couldn't do anything at church. Even reading and writing were too much effort. And somewhere between motherhood and now I had forgotten who I was.

“Please, Father, help me to make sense of my life. What use am I to You, to anyone, in this useless state?” The tears fell faster as I cried out my prayer.

In my imagination God bent down, picked me up like a little child, sat me on His lap, and cuddled me close to His chest. This was always a wonderful place to be. Loved, safe, and comforted, soothed by a gentle and loving Father with all the time in the universe, even for a broken person like me. My head was pressed against His chest, and I could hear His heart beating with love for me. He softly patted my back. “It’s OK to cry, Karen. I’m here, I understand, and I care.”

Slowly my sobs subsided and we sat together quietly, until God knew I was ready to listen. And then I heard His words in my heart: “Be still, my little one. You are enough. You are a human being, not a human doing. Your identity is not based on what you are doing for Me—it is based on what I am doing for you. And I love you completely and utterly. I have made every part of you just the way you are. It is enough for Me that you are alive in the world. What brings Me joy is your loving trust in Me, when you come to Me like this,



Even the smallest task left me exhausted.

honestly and openly, with all your challenges and questions, and you trust Me with your very self and you love Me. You are beloved, and I am well pleased with you. This is your time to rest and recover, and one day you will be strong again and we will do great things together.”

I took a deep breath and rested, at peace and relaxed, on His strong and loving chest.

ON HIS LAP

That was almost three decades ago. But I have sat on His lap many times since, for all kinds of reasons, joyful and tragic, to make sense of who I am with God. It is so easy to lose perspective. I hear what my church wants from me, what my children need from me, who my husband would like me to be, what society expects me to be . . . and it can be confusing and overwhelming. So many conflicting expectations and needs and desires. But the most important thing is to understand, first, how God sees me and how He loves me and cares for me. This helps me to gain perspective as I make sense of all the messages in my head and the pushes and pulls of the people around me.

God tells me that I am His child. Uniquely handmade by Him (Psalm 139:13, 14), beloved by Him (1 John 4:18, 19), and gifted by Him to bless others (Romans 12:3-10). Let’s explore these special qualities of our identity.

Handmade: Reflect on how God has knit you together and shaped who you are. You are unique, and you bring Him joy. Thank Him for the way He has made you, even the parts that you may not like so much, because He sees you as wonderfully created, and He is far more concerned with the beauty of your heart and soul than He is about your outward appearance.

Beloved: Read the love letter to you from God at www.fathersloveletter.com and respond with a love letter of your own to Him. Your true identity is in the relationship your Father God has with you as His precious and beloved child. You are an heir in His kingdom, a prince or princess. Even if, like me, your life events prevent you from functioning very well for a while.

Gifted: God has given you gifts, especially chosen to bring joy to you when you use them to bless and give joy to others. These gifts might be serving others, teaching, encouraging people, giving generously, leading out, discernment, evangelism, faith, wisdom, preaching, pastoring/shepherding, tongues

MARRIED TO A PASTOR?
Discover a safe place to fellowship, ask questions, and learn from others on Facebook and Twitter!

DISCUSS SHARE CONNECT

Official groups for ministry spouses online:
f ministerialspouses @ministryspouses @gc_ministerial_spouses
NEW <https://www.facebook.com/groups/esposasministeriales/>

(communication), showing mercy (kindness), etc. You can read about these in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11-13. When we use our gifts well, our community is strengthened and we help show others what God is like. What are your gifts? You can learn about your spiritual gifts and take a test at <https://spiritualgiftstest.com/>.

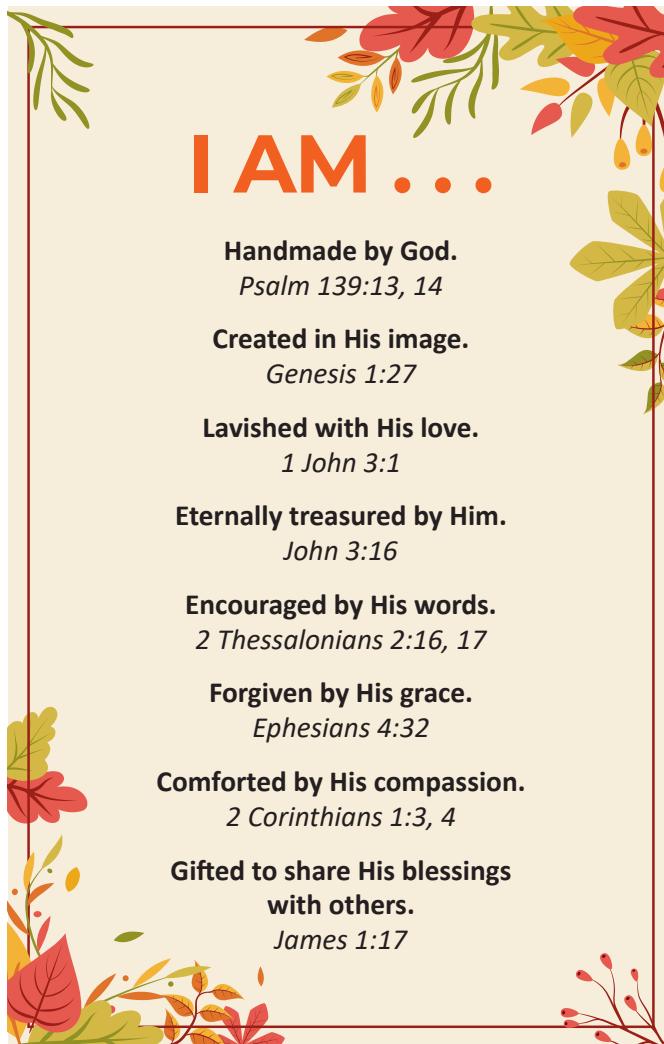
How have your gifts been a blessing to you and those around you? How would you like to grow these gifts God has given you by learning about them, practicing them, and using them in different ways? If you are going through a phase in your life when it's not so easy to use your gifts because you are unwell, busy with studies, or parenting intensively, God understands. You are probably using your gifts in ways you don't

“I’m here, I understand, and I care.”

even notice! Or maybe this is an opportunity for others to use their gifts to bless you. Maybe this is your time to rest and receive for a while, and maybe you will find your strength again in the future.

Imagine you are sitting in God's lap and held lovingly against His chest. He smiles at you and wipes away your tears. What are the questions you would be asking Him today? And what do you imagine He would say to you out of the very center of His heart and His love for you?

God does not love you any more or any less because of what you can or cannot do, or what you look like, or how others treat you. You are continually beloved by Him. You are amazing because your Father, the God of the entire universe, loves you, and you are precious to Him. This is who you are; this is your identity, and nothing and nobody can ever take that away from you because you are His child. 7



Karen Holford is a family therapist and writer. She lives in England and is currently working as the Family, Children's and Women's Ministry director for the Trans-European Division. She is married to Pastor Bernie Holford.

Learning to Love?

ON OUR WEDDING DAY I could have written everything I knew about marriage on the back of the menu. Bernie proposed to me a month after our first date, and we were married three months later. Two weeks after the wedding, we arrived at Andrews University. That first semester, Bernie took a class in Marriage and Family, and I went along for the ride. The class required us to attend two marriage retreats, a parenting seminar, and a family worship seminar, all within the first three months of our marriage. I remember going to a workshop on managing conflicts in marriage and wondering what all the fuss was about . . . I soon learned!

Those seminars were the best wedding gifts ever. They helped us develop a deep spiritual foundation for our relationship, inspiring us to serve as family ministries directors in England and eventually to study family therapy. I don't know how our relationship would be if we hadn't learned so much, because even now, there are days when it's very hard to put all those great skills into practice.

WHY RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION IS IMPORTANT

Marriage and parenting are the most challenging jobs. If we need a dozen lessons and a license to drive a car, how much more important to have pre-marital counseling and relationship skill building before we get married or have children! We'd never drive a car without servicing it regularly, yet many of us never think about "servicing" our marriages, a much more valuable and long-lasting resource. If I need 21 CEUs each year to maintain my professional registration, why not spend at least 21 hours learning how to improve my marriage? After all, what's more important than learning how to have the loving relationships that God wants for us?

RIPPLES OF LOVE . . .

We've seen powerful effects when ministerial couples make it a priority to nurture and grow their relationships:

- They experience more of God's love in their lives through the way they care for each other.



“So this is my prayer: that your love will flourish and that you will not only love much but well. Learn to love appropriately. You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent, not sentimental gush. Live a lover’s life, circumspect and exemplary, a life Jesus will be proud of: bountiful in fruits from the soul, making Jesus Christ attractive to all, getting everyone involved in the glory and praise of God.”

Phil. 1:9, The Message

- Their marriages often become stronger, happier, and more resilient.
- Their parenting improves.
- Their children are more likely to flourish emotionally and learn vital relationship skills from their parents.
- The pastor is more likely to preach about healthy relationships to nurture the individuals and families in the congregation.
- The minister is more likely to have the courage, wisdom, empathy, and experience to help couples and families in the church who are facing challenges.
- The church is more likely to reach out to families in their community.

But when the minister’s marriage is struggling and unhappy, the couple, their family, and the families in their congregation and community are much less likely to have these positive experiences.

BUT MY SPOUSE ISN’T INTERESTED . . .

Even if your husband or wife would never read a book or go to a marriage seminar, you can learn simple skills to have a profound effect on your relationship. With prayer, love, wisdom, and the Holy Spirit, one spouse can transform a marriage through loving and positive persistence. Try exploring www.divorcebusting.com for some helpful ideas and resources, or read Michele Weiner-Davis’ book *The Divorce Remedy*.

LEARNING FROM OTHER MARRIAGES

Choose a marriage mentor. Find a ministerial couple who has been married at least ten years longer than you have, and ask them to mentor your marriage. They need to be able to pray with you; listen to your highs, lows, and challenges; talk honestly and openly about their own struggles; and share how they’ve nurtured their own relationship. Read *Mentoring Marriages* by Harry Benson and also share it with the couple you choose as mentors.



LEARNING FROM YOUR OWN MARRIAGE

If it's too difficult to get away for a weekend marriage retreat, and you don't have time to read or watch DVDs, these simple questions will help you grow your marriage right where you are. At the end of each day, ask these questions:

- What did I do or say that brought us closer together as a couple today? How can I do more of those things?
- What did I do or say that pushed us farther apart today? How can I do those things less? And what can I do to repair the damage I caused?
- What can I do tomorrow to help my spouse experience more of God's love through me?

DIY "HOME IMPROVEMENT" TOOLS

If you can't escape for a marriage retreat, try some of these "at home" ideas for improving your relationship:

DVD SERIES

- *The Marriage Course* is an excellent DVD series designed as an outreach ministry by British Christians. It's now available around the world and in several different languages (www.relationshipcentral.org/marriage-course).
- *Laugh Your Way to a Happy Marriage* is a DVD series by Mark Gungor, a U.S. pastor, family counselor, and stand-up comedian. Watch sample clips on Youtube to check whether his unique approach works for you. Even the most reluctant husband usually enjoys Mark's fun style.

BOOKS

Read books and listen to audio books when you're out and about:

- *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman
- *The Marriage Book* by Nicky and Sila Lee
- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John Gottman

NAD Ministerial Association has produced a series of resources for ministerial couples and families. They include ideas, tips, and video discussion starters so that ministerial families can access help within their own home and schedule.

Go to www.nadministerial.org and click on "Family" and select "Sacred Family Circle." Choose from the following topics:

FINANCES

DEPRESSION

SURVIVING A MARRIAGE CRISIS

STRESS

PARENTING

FORGIVENESS

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION

FREEDOM FROM PORNOGRAPHY

MOVING

- *Fighting for Your Marriage* by Howard J. Markman, Scott M. Stanley, and Susan L. Blumberg
- *Hold Me Tight* by Sue Johnson.

PODCASTS

Download and listen to marriage-building podcasts:

- *Care for the Family: The Marriage Challenge* podcasts (www.careforthefamily.org.uk/family-life/marriage-support/the-marriage-challenge)

INTERNET

Explore websites filled with marriage tips and ideas, downloads, and videos:

- GC Family Ministries website (www.adventist.family.org) and your local conference and division family ministries websites
- www.2-in-2-1.co.uk
- www.familylife.com
- www.thedatingdivas.com (for creative cheap dating ideas, printables, and a fun experience based on *The Five Love Languages*).

Karen Holford writes from Scotland, where she and Bernie enjoy learning how to grow their relationship into the marriage that God wants them to experience.

Loving with a Heart Like Jesus

TWELVE PAIRS OF DUSTY feet stood awkwardly on the wooden floor of the upper room. The table was set, the food was ready, water had been carried from the well, and clean linen towels had been folded neatly on a bench. But someone was missing. Eyes avoided contact, elbows nudged, someone coughed nervously. But no one wanted to do the work of a servant. No one was willing to kneel at the feet of his friends. No one was humble enough to wash away the dirt from two dozen dusty feet.

They all stood proud and tall—except Jesus, who quietly picked up a towel, poured the water, and knelt on the ground to show His love. For three long years He'd shown them that true love kneels to serve and is willing to make sacrifices. For three long years He'd shown them that true love puts others first. But they still didn't understand.

Years later, Paul wanted to help Christians love each other with a heart like Jesus. So he shared what he'd learned about love in a letter to the Romans. His practical ideas for healthy relationships are as relevant today as they were two thousand years ago.



“Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

Romans 12:10, NIV

LOVING DEEPLY AND PURELY

Romans 12:8, 9

Jesus' love for us is deep and pure. In its depth He is totally forgiving, and in its purity He leaves no room for anyone to doubt His love.

- How deep is your love for your husband or wife? What do you need to forgive, and what do you need to say you're sorry for?
- How pure is your love? Do your words or behavior ever prevent your spouse from experiencing your love as pure and transparent?

LOOKING FOR THE DIAMONDS

Romans 12:6-8

Make a list of your partner's special gifts, qualities, and strengths. Write down as many as you can, and add more when you notice them. When we focus on positive qualities, we help each other to blossom and grow.

- How can I show appreciation for the spiritual gifts and character strengths of my spouse?
- How can I develop my own spiritual gifts and character strengths, and what positive effect might they have on our relationship?

BEING AFFECTIONATE

Romans 12:10

Love needs to be expressed in warm words, eye contact, smiles, gentle touching, time together, thoughtful gifts, or helpful support. Different cultures and families express affection differently, but the important thing is to love others the way they like to be loved, not just the way we want to love them.

- Ask your husband or wife to write down ten times when they felt especially loved by you and three other gestures that would make them feel loved. Then spend at least five minutes a day doing whatever makes your partner feel loved. Notice the difference it makes to your relationship.

CONNECTING EMOTIONALLY

Romans 12:15

Jesus was happy with His friends when they were happy, and sad when they were sad. When something amazing happens to your husband or wife, celebrate together! And when your spouse is sad, just sit and be sad together. When our partners don't share in our sadness or joy, we can feel very alone. But when we share in each other's emotions, we strengthen the love-bond between us.

- How can I be more responsive to my partner's emotions so that we can strengthen the love-bond between us?

CROWNING YOUR PARTNER

Romans 12:10

When Jesus met people who felt downtrodden and rejected, He lifted them up and showed them how valuable they were to Him. Healthy relationships are based on mutual respect. When we place our spouses a little higher than ourselves, we're both lifted up. When we look down on our spouses and act superior in some way, we're both dragged down. See your partner as a unique and amazing creation that God has made just for you. Honor your spouse as the king or queen of your home. Discover what makes your spouse especially happy, do it for them, and watch what happens to your own joy.

- What can I do to honor my husband or wife and to show them how valuable they are to me?

HUMBLY HOSPITABLE

Romans 12:13

When Jesus knelt down to wash His disciples' feet, He wasn't only being humble but also hospitable. Hospitality is doing whatever it takes to make someone feel comfortable, welcome, and special. It's pouring a glass of water for your spouse on a hot day, setting the table attractively, turning the heated blanket on to warm their side of the bed, or doing anything else to touch their heart with a smile.

- How can I show warm hospitality to my partner today?

LIVING PEACEFULLY

Romans 12:18

Loving like Jesus means creating a peaceful atmosphere where people feel safe, forgiven, accepted, and heard. It means going the extra mile to make sure conflicts are resolved by listening to the other person's concerns and by exploring their ideas for a win-win outcome. It also means letting go of your desire to win the argument, to get your own way, or to have more power than the other person.

- How can I prevent an argument by putting my partner's needs and wishes first?

DEVOTION—LISTENING TO THE HEART

Romans 12:10

Jesus listened to the heart. He wanted to hear the real needs in people's lives. When your partner is hurt, tired, angry, disappointed, afraid, or sad, respond to their unspoken needs rather than reacting to their frustrated words. See the difference it makes!

- When does my partner most need a hug, a helping hand, some time together with me, or some appreciation, respect, or encouragement?

DOING WHATEVER IT TAKES

When we love with a heart like Jesus, we do whatever it takes to show the other person how much we love them. Jesus laid down His life for us so that we'd never have to doubt His love for us.

- What sacrifices do I need to make for my partner's happiness?

SPENDING TIME WITH JESUS

Romans 12:1, 2

In order to love like Jesus, we need to spend time with Him studying and praying, learning about His love, and listening to His heart for our partners and for us. This is how we are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1, 2).

- Which aspect of my life most needs to be renewed so that I can love my partner more like Jesus does? j



Karen Holford is a family therapist working with troubled families and couples in Edinburgh, Scotland.

MAKE SABBATH A *Delight*

IT WAS SABBATH MORNING in the Holford home. We had two young children and a 6-month-old baby. During breakfast Amanda called to say her family had food poisoning, so they couldn't host the family of the visiting speaker. I searched through the freezer desperately trying to expand our simple dinner to feed six more people.

Then Mrs. Smith called to ask if we could bring some flowers from our garden to arrange in the church. Our 6-year-old daughter, Bethany, gathered a fistful of bright dandelions—clearly our garden had more weeds than real flowers! In the meantime the baby got sick all over my husband, Bernie, and he was busy looking for a fresh shirt. Our son took off his best shoes and hid them because he thought it would be great fun to watch us find them again.

It was chaos! By this time we were all running around and shouting at one another.

We finally piled into the car. The baby was wearing only a diaper and a blanket. Bernie and I weren't speaking to each other, and the two older children were squabbling in the back seat.

Suddenly Bethany said, "You know that song we sang last night? 'Sabbath Is a Happy Day'? . . . Well, it isn't really, is it?"

In Isaiah 58:13 God tells us to call the Sabbath a delight. We often lose sight of the importance of *delightful* Sabbaths because we are too focused on the unhelpful translation of not doing "your own pleasure." "Pleasure" might be better translated as "your own business"—doing what you want to do for your own gain, such as work, shopping, or empty entertainment.

Sabbath is an incredible gift from God. It is like an every-week birthday present for the world, designed to help us pause, rest, wonder, worship, love, and rebalance. God doesn't want Sabbath to be a day of "don'ts" because experiencing "no" makes us feel anxious, afraid, and sad, and it's incompatible with the "yes!" of delight He longs for us to experience.



How can Sabbath be your best breathing space?

We're all created differently, and each of us finds very different things delightful, which is why God has created so much diversity for us to explore. What fills you with delight? How can that delightful experience enrich your Sabbath? What is delightful for your family members and your church? When we are experiencing the pure delight of Sabbath, it's an incredible witness to the overworked, overstressed, and over-busy people in our communities.

I've used the acronym SABBATH to explore some of the key components of a delightful Sabbath.

SIMPLICITY AND SHARING

God intended Sabbath to be a day of simplicity and peace for us, not the busiest day of the week! How can you simplify your Sabbaths? How can you make sure the workload for Sabbath is shared evenly so no one in your home or church feels overwhelmed by their responsibilities?

ACTIVE ANTICIPATION

Do you look forward to the Sabbath with eager anticipation? Or is it one of the most challenging days of your week as you juggle multiple responsibilities, unrealistic expectations, driving from church to church, and caring for your children? What would make Sabbath the day your family looks forward to the most? How can everyone in the family have an active part in preparing for Sabbath each week? When our children were young, they took turns choosing and making a special dessert or treat for Sabbath. It gave me precious one-on-one time with each of them too.

BLESSINGS AND BENEFITS

What are the blessings and benefits of Sabbath that you most want to thank God for? How could you express your gratitude in a creative way? If you're not feeling blessed by your Sabbaths, what might help you and your family be enriched by the way you spend Sabbath together? In our family we try to go for a walk for at least an hour. It doesn't take much preparation, and it gives us time to relax, exercise, talk together, and look in wonder at God's creation.

BEAUTIFUL BREATHING SPACE

God intended Sabbath to be a day to pause from work and rebalance our lives. Today we need a breathing space where we can breathe deeply and give a huge sigh of relief that we have come safely through another week. How can Sabbath be your best breathing space?

ASTONISHING AWE

The God of all creation made a day for us to enjoy our wonderful world. Experiencing awe at His handiwork is good for our well-being because wonder fills us with a sense of joy, peace, and beauty. What can you do to bring awe into your home or to seek it in the natural world around you? Choose a few flowers for a vase and explore all the tiny, incredible details of God's creation. Look for something on your walks that you've never examined properly before.

TRADITIONS AND TOGETHERNESS

Creating your own family Sabbath traditions gives you a sense of togetherness and specialness. Sharing what you are thankful for, reflecting on the past week together, eating special foods, having candlelight, and enjoying delightful ways to open and close Sabbath will linger in the memories of your children. They may even continue these traditions when they leave home. What are your favorite Sabbath traditions? Why not create some new ones?

HAPPY AND HEALTHY

Does your Sabbath leave you feeling happier and healthier, or frustrated and exhausted? How does your Sabbath experience enhance your well-being and help you to flourish? Are there responsibilities and expectations you need to let go of? And what would add extra delight to your Sabbath?

Why not take time out to audit your Sabbath experience and to focus on making it a day of pure delight for you, your family, and the members of your church? ■

Karen Holford is director of Family, Women's and Children's ministries for the Trans-European Division.



MINGLING MISSIONARIES

HOW ONE FAMILY IMPACTED THEIR TOWN

MARK AND JULIE WANDERED around the tiny, postcard-perfect town in rural England with their two young daughters. There were no other Adventists in the whole town. They'd been sent to be "mingling missionaries," and they wondered where to start.

They decided to look for a home with a large lounge space where they could invite people to events and even run seminars. They found the local real estate office and explained what they were looking for. An agent named Anna understood just what they needed. As she showed them around the house, she explained that her husband had left her with three young children, and she was struggling as a parent. "If you ever start parenting seminars here, I want to be the first to know!" she told them.

Mark and Julie were inspired by the message in Jeremiah 29:7, basically saying: "Go to Babylon and be a blessing to the people there." Well, if Anna would be blessed by parenting seminars, maybe other people would enjoy them too.

As soon as Mark and Julie settled their little family in their new home, they baked dozens of cookies, packed them into pretty tins, and took one to each of the neighbors on their small street. Their daughters, Lily and Lucy, stood on each doorstep, smiling, singing, and giving out the cookie tins. After all, who could turn down a gift from a happy child? Julie told the neighbors, "Please enjoy the cookies, and we'll come back in a week to collect the tins so we can use them again!"

The next week they picked up the tins. As they chatted with the neighbors, they learned more about them and offered to help if they were struggling with anything. Julie was a nurse, and Mark had learned car mechanics when he was going through college. After a couple more weeks they invited a few neighbors at a time to join them for afternoon tea—juice and cakes—in their neat little garden.

Every day they looked for ways to be a blessing in their neighborhood. They took old Tom Jones to his hospital appointment. They helped Kate fix her car. And they sat with Mrs. Wilson until the ambulance came after she fell and broke her hip.

They didn't forget about Anna, either. Whenever they were in town, they visited her office with a homemade cake and stopped for a chat. Julie found a parenting course written by Christians that was ready to use. All she had to do was show the DVD and facilitate a discussion around the topics. Anna was excited about the course and suggested they offer it to parents of students at the local school, where she was also an administrator. The school let them have the room for free and advertised the course to all the parents.

Julie was a little nervous on the first day. Would it all go smoothly? Would anyone even come? Anna had shared the course through several of her social media networks. She knew lots of parents who were struggling. The room quickly filled up. The course was designed to encourage parents to talk together, make friends, and share their challenges and ideas.



The more they looked for ways to bless others, the more opportunities came their way.

Soon Julie and Mark had an expanding group of people to bless. They felt impressed to find ways to bless them as often as they could. So they invited two to three parents at a time to meet them in a local café so they could get to know more about their lives and their needs. Each need could be an opportunity to bless them.

Looking for other ways to make friends and bless people, Julie joined a women's craft group and Mark volunteered to help with a football club for teenagers. Even Lily and Lucy joined in with swimming lessons and an orchestra for children so they could make friends with other children and their families.

The more they looked for ways to bless others, the more opportunities came their way. When Anna went into the hospital for surgery, she was very relieved that her children could stay with Mark and Julie. The local town asked Mark to sit on their improvement committee and even gave the couple funding to expand their parenting project and start other community groups.

Mark and Julie befriended people and showed them God's love. Every evening they prayed for each person on their contact list. Then they waited for people to ask them about God and their faith when they were ready to learn more. They believed it was important to let the Holy Spirit be in charge of the timing and the process.

Eight years later, when they moved away to be mingling missionaries elsewhere, there was a church with 40 members in that little town. And Mark and Julie are still "mingling missionaries" to this very day.

HOW TO BE A BLESSING IN BABYLON

Jeremiah 29:7 reads: "Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper." What are some practical ways to do that?

- Pray for your local community, asking God to bless it with peace and enable it to flourish.
- Look for the ways He is blessing you so you can pass on the blessing to others.
- Find out the greatest needs in your community and look for ways to help.
- Ask God to show you where you can be a blessing in your community.
- Make an intentional decision to bless at least one other person in your community every week, or even every day.
- If you have children, involve them in your "blessing" activities.
- Join local clubs or volunteer groups to widen your sphere of influence and networks.
- Visit your neighbors regularly with seasonal gifts, such as garden produce, baked goods, or homemade cards.
- Welcome people into your home and share your hospitality with them.
- Start small projects that will bless your neighborhood: campaign for a safer road crossing, pick up garbage, befriend lonely people, plant a community garden, etc.
- Pray for the people you are blessing and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your interactions.
- Create simple printed cards to share with your neighbors, offering to help them in small ways and giving them your contact details.
- Discover people's birthdays and surprise them with a tiny treat.
- Support small local businesses so that people get to know you. Collaborate with them on ways to bless others.
- As we mingle and bless others, we are living examples of God's love, helping to open their hearts and minds to wonder about Him. When they have a positive picture of God through us, they will turn to Him at just the right time. **7**

Karen Holford mingles by taking the bus to work. She chats with people at the bus stop and along the journey and listens to their stories.

PAUSING TO GROW IN HIS LOVE



SCAN FOR AUDIO

RENEW YOUR SPIRIT WITH A MINI RETREAT

AS MINISTERIAL FAMILIES, we're super-busy on Sabbaths and often spend our vacations attending church camps. We rarely have time to immerse ourselves in God's love and to focus on our families' faith.

Here are a few ideas for creating your own spiritual retreat to help you breathe slowly, pray together, and grow closer to God. You can explore the ideas on your own, as a couple, and even share them with your children or grandchildren. Choose the ideas that appeal to you and create a tailor-made spiritual retreat to renew your heart and soul—for an hour or a whole day.

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

When God inspired His people to share their faith with the next generation, He told them their priority was to love Him first (Deuteronomy 6). John explained that we can only love God and others when we have first experienced God's love (1 John 4:7–21). Otherwise, we won't be able to recognize true love. Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and that the second was like it: loving others as we love ourselves (Matthew 22:39, 40).



Pausing to Grow in His Love

George Barna, a Christian researcher in the USA, identified the top two levels of Christian maturity as loving God profoundly and loving others profoundly.¹ These important scriptures, and Barna's thorough research, emphasize the importance of experiencing God's love for us, loving Him with all our hearts, and loving others as Jesus would love them.

When we pause and open our hearts to more of God's love, then our love for Him and others will grow. This will help us have a stronger relationship with Him, our loved ones, and everyone we meet.

PRAYING THROUGH GOD'S LOVE

Write the letters of the alphabet down the side of a sheet of paper. For each letter, think of at least one aspect of God's love. See how many you can find. Then focus on one word at a time. Praise God for that dimension of His love and thank Him for loving you in this way. Think of Bible stories and verses that illustrate this aspect of His love and consider your personal experiences too. Gather them in a notebook or create an illustrated scrapbook of God's love.

REFLECTING ON GOD'S LOVE

Choose one of the following Bible passages: Psalm 23, Psalm 103, Psalm 145, Ephesians 3:14–21, or 1 John 4. Read it very slowly, one verse at a time, and write down what each verse tells you about God's love. Or discuss the passages together as a couple or family.

HUNTING FOR GOD'S LOVE

As you reflect on God's love, think about objects around you that illustrate different aspects of His love (safe water, bread, lights, blanket, fruit, soap, pillow, rock, map, etc.). Search for twenty things that remind you of His incredible love for you. Explain why you chose your objects. Draw or display some of them to remind you of His love.

FOCUSING ON GOD'S LOVE

Pause and focus on God's love for you in this moment. Even if you have experienced trauma and abuse, the Holy Spirit can help you experience God through clear spiritual lenses and a warm, open heart.

How do you like to be loved? God will love you in that beautiful way. Remember that He is present with you every moment of the day. Imagine Him hugging you. What would He say to tell you how much He loves you? What are the special gifts of love He has given you in the last week? How has He helped you to carry your burdens? Thank Him for every loving gift. Keep your eyes and heart open to notice every expression of His extravagant love for you. Write them in a journal.

Keep your eyes and heart open to notice every expression of His extravagant love for you.





STORIES OF GOD'S LOVE

Recount the story of your life with God. Look through the lens of being God's beloved child, even if you haven't always known Him. Gather the life stories that remind you of God's love for you through all the joys and challenges of your life. He has been your Psalm 23 Shepherd. He is your provider, protector, restorer, comforter, and guide. He is with you in your dark valleys, and He celebrates your joys. Write, draw, or tell how God has loved and cared for you.

GROWING IN GOD'S LOVE

Read 1 Corinthians 13. Write down all the different aspects of God's love described in this chapter. His love is patient, kind, forgiving, respectful, hopeful, lovingly honest, persevering, and more. How are you growing in these qualities of God's love? Reflect on the past year and consider how you have grown more patient, kind, forgiving, and respectful. Describe times when you were especially hopeful, loving, or persevering.

Then look ahead to the coming year. Which of God's loving qualities would you like to nurture? Ask God's Spirit for wisdom and power to develop that aspect of love in your life. Encourage one another to grow more like Jesus.

CREATIVELY RESPONDING TO GOD'S LOVE

After reflecting on God's love for you, consider what you would like to make or do in response to His love. Take a photo, draw a picture, write a prayer or a psalm, or make a collection of hearts that express different aspects of His love. Create a banner, a garland, or something else that summarises and expresses your experience of His love for you and your love for Him.

EXPANDING YOUR PICTURE OF GOD'S LOVE

Pray that God will expand your picture of His character by growing your awareness of His love. Ellen White says that we will spend eternity learning about God's infinite and indescribable love (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 740). Keep a diary and write down fresh aspects of God's love as you notice them every day. Set your watch to vibrate every hour as a reminder to tune into God's constant loving presence.

SHARING GOD'S LOVE

How has this purposeful pause with God's love inspired you to share His love with others? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you someone who needs a deeper experience of God's love. In cooperation with God, what will you do to touch their heart with His love? How could you share this retreat experience with others? 2

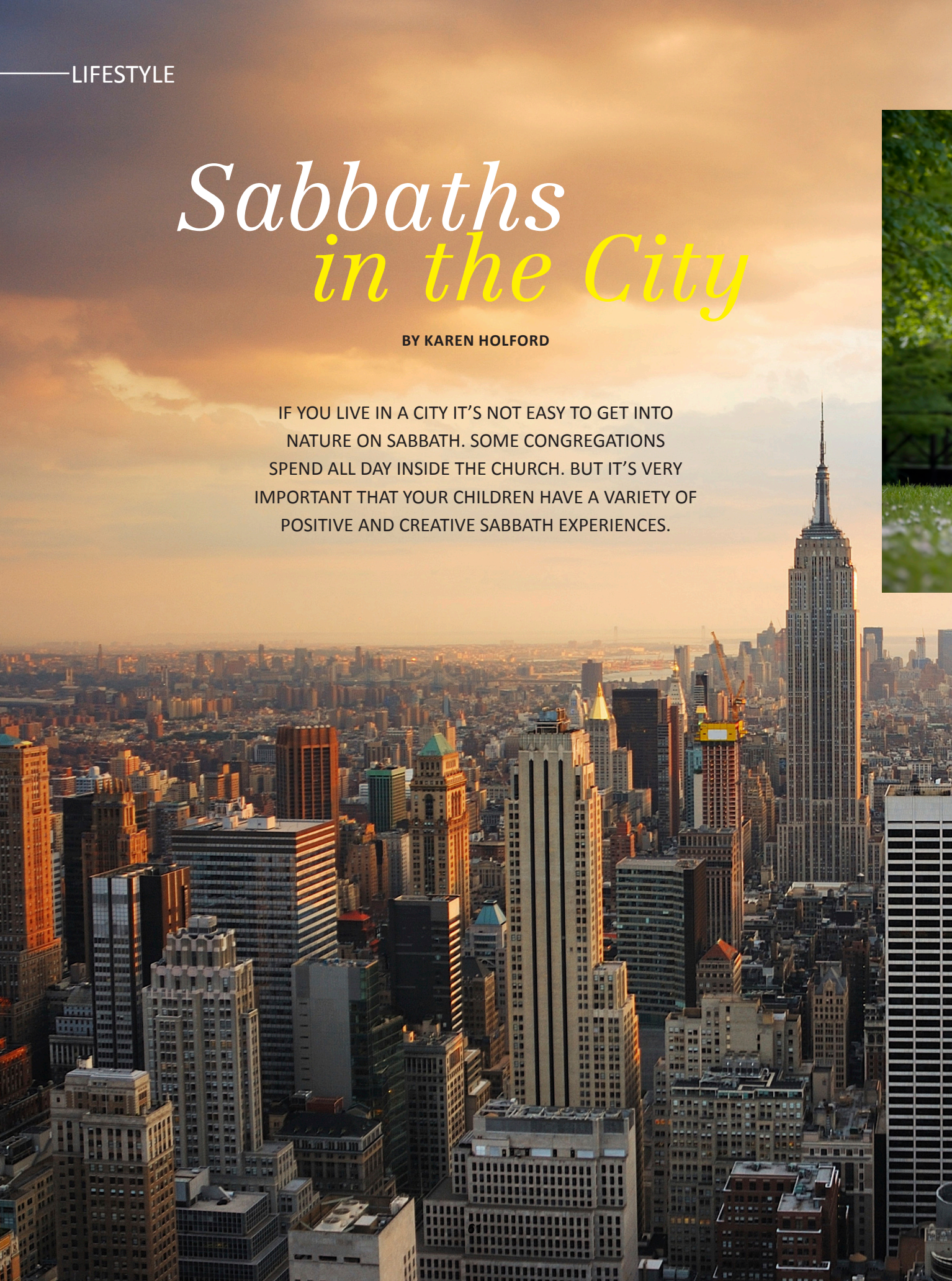
¹ "Research on How God Transforms Lives Reveals a 10-Stop Journey," Barna Group, March 17, 2011. <https://www.barna.com/research/research-on-how-god-transforms-lives-reveals-a-10-stop-journey/>.

Karen Holford writes from England. She is a departmental director at the Trans-European Division. The different ways God has expanded her understanding of His incredible love inspire her, and she loves to share His love with others.

Sabbaths in the City

BY KAREN HOLFORD

IF YOU LIVE IN A CITY IT'S NOT EASY TO GET INTO NATURE ON SABBATH. SOME CONGREGATIONS SPEND ALL DAY INSIDE THE CHURCH. BUT IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT YOUR CHILDREN HAVE A VARIETY OF POSITIVE AND CREATIVE SABBATH EXPERIENCES.





DIFFERENT CULTURES have different ideas about appropriate Sabbath activities, so choose the ones that meet your needs or adapt the ideas to suit your context. Invite other families to join you so they have happy Sabbaths also! Pray that your city Sabbaths can be an inspiration and a witness. Here are some ideas for Sabbaths in the city:

PARKS AND PATHS

- Ask your city's information center about the best city walks. Sometimes there are pretty paths in unexpected places, like along canals or through leafy neighborhoods.
- See how many different insects you can find under the bark of a decaying branch.
- Go on a scavenger hunt. Look for anything that reminds you of God's love, His character, or any of the Bible stories.
- Do a Bible plant search: Print a list of all the plants in the Bible (try this

list: www.christiananswers.net/dictionary/plants.html) and see how many you can find. Photograph them, make leaf and bark rubbings, etc.

- If your city has a zoo or urban farm, consider an annual pass so you can visit free at any time. Then you can create appropriate Sabbath visits to experience with your children, studying animals and nature and maybe even completing requirements for Pathfinder honors.

PARACHUTE PRAISE!

- Purchase a colorful play-chute (a parachute designed for children's play). One Adventist church in England uses this to witness to children in their local parks.
- Choose a play-chute to suit the size of your group and invest in a small book of parachute game ideas to help you understand the potential of parachute play.
- With a little creativity you can turn many action songs into parachute activities (try "Jesus' Love is Very Wonderful").
- Use parachutes to tell Bible stories (such as when Jesus calmed the storm), play Bible games, pray, and learn memory verses.
- Doing parachute activities in a park usually attracts other children to come and play with you. Perhaps your stories, songs, and games will help them to learn about Jesus?
- For some basic ideas visit <http://ministry-to-children.com/parachute-games>

CHALK TALK!

- Take along your sidewalk chalk and draw lovely sidewalk "posters" or encouraging Bible verses with colorful borders.

Sabbaths in the City

- Look at Christian t-shirt designs for creative inspiration: www.religioustshirts.co.uk

HELPING

- Visit your local volunteer agency and ask them about ways you could help as a family. Some volunteer opportunities make ideal family Sabbath activities, allowing you to help your community, teach your family how to serve, and share God's love.
- Choose activities you feel comfortable doing on Sabbath. Some families clear garbage from vacant lots and plant flowers instead, walk dogs for disabled people, check the condition of local pathways, count the kinds of birds in a park, and so on.

ART GALLERIES & MUSEUMS

Before Sabbath, visit a gallery and locate paintings and pictures that are based on Bible stories, then:

- Make a picture treasure hunt, using Bible clues and a map of the galleries to help the children find the best Bible story paintings.
- Write down titles of the paintings so that each letter in the title is on a different numbered dash/line. Use these numbers to make a code that spells out a Bible verse.
- Choose one painting from a familiar Bible story. Visit the painting with your family, read the Bible story together, and look at the picture.
 - How true is the picture to the story?
 - What might each person in the picture be thinking?
 - What does this picture tell you about God?
 - What do you like best about the picture?
 - What do you think is the most important message the artist is trying to say?
 - Invite everyone to draw their own picture of the Bible story. How are they different from or similar to the artist's painting?
- Some museums have appropriate sections for Sabbath activities. Check your local natural history museums and use their children's activity trail sheets. See if you can find an animal, stone, insect, etc., beginning with each letter of the alphabet. Marvel at the way God created each of them.



- Visit churches and chapels in your city. Some are open for visitors, and you can learn a lot by visiting old churches. Find the interesting features in each church and explore them together. Discuss what each church tells you about God's love.

WORD SEARCH

- Choose a verse or passage from the Bible that you or your family want to learn. Write or print out the passage on a small card that you can carry with you as you walk.
- Go for a walk anywhere in the city that is safe and look for the different words in your verse. They may be on billboards or on street signs and names. For difficult words just find the letters or groups of letters to form the words you need. You can also photograph any objects in your verse, such as trees, homes, or hearts.

Sabbath: Edenic Togetherness?

EVENING USHERED in a perfect sky at the end of a perfect day in a perfect world. God was delighted. Colors swirled and glowed around the setting sun just the way He'd imagined. The garden was glorious with fragrant flowers, juice-dripping fruits, joyful birds, and gentle creatures. It had taken time, creativity, energy, and love to grow this perfect place in which to meet His children for the first time. Now they had a whole day to be together!

Sabbath is packed with goodness.

It's a gift of grace, an experience of God's hospitality, a celebration of creation, a day to worship Him, a sign of trust and faithfulness, an oasis of peace.

It's also a day for building and restoring our relationships with Him and with each other. But that's much easier said than done in the pastor's home, where Sabbath is the busiest day of the week.

Sabbath in Eden had some key elements that can enrich our Sabbath experience today:

- Simplicity
- Anticipation
- Beauty
- Blessing
- Awe
- Togetherness
- Happiness

SIMPLICITY

Life in Eden was simple. Food was plentiful, fresh, and ready to eat. There were no rooms to tidy, no clothes to press, and no sermons to prepare. Sabbaths are usually super-busy days for pastoral families. Think carefully about your Sabbaths. Simplify your expectations, activities,





Take a few moments on Sabbath to focus on a single aspect of God's creation.

and meals so your mind is less cluttered and stressed. Slow down and take time to focus on God and each other. Bread and soup are just fine!

What changes can you make so your family's Sabbaths are simpler, slower, and more serene?

ANTICIPATION

While God was busy assembling Planet Earth, He happily anticipated spending time with us. Enjoy the anticipation of happy Sabbaths with your family. Plan ahead, spread your preparation throughout the week to make life easier, and share the workload so no one feels overloaded and resentful.

Plan Sabbath activities to be the highlight of your week, and then look forward to them together. Explore nature, worship God, use your talents, be creative, and find kind things to do for the people in your community. There are hundreds of quick and easy nature, craft, worship, and kindness projects available on Christian Web sites.

What does each person in your family look forward to the most (or the least!) when they think of Sabbath?

BEAUTY

Eden was a gallery of God's exquisite designs. He created us to appreciate beauty. Attractive surroundings inspire,

delight, and help us feel welcomed and treasured. Natural fragrances, fresh flowers, candles, sparkling tableware, and white tablecloths can transform the everyday into something beautiful.

What effect do beautiful surroundings have on you, your worship, and your family relationships on Sabbath?

What can you do, simply and quickly, to make your home a beautiful setting for Sabbath togetherness?

BLESSING

Sabbath is like a gift box full of good things. But Sabbaths in pastoral homes are often so chaotic that there isn't time or space just to be still and know God. Do whatever it takes to make Sabbaths a delight in your home. If your Sabbaths are leaving anyone in your family drained and miserable (including the pastor!), it's time for a serious rethink.

How can you rebalance life so everyone in your family can experience the rich blessing of Sabbath?

How can you prayerfully or practically bless each person in your family on Sabbath?

AWE

The infinite details of God's creation give us insight into His detailed care for us (Matt. 6:25-34). Sabbath is a day to focus on creation and be filled with awe at everything He has made. When we share moments of wonder, we are bonded closer to each other and to God.

Take a few moments on Sabbath to focus on a single aspect of God's creation. Explore a tree in detail.



Carve out and fiercely protect a significant time and space to be together as a family during Sabbath.

Watch the stars. Photograph nature. Stop. Look. Be filled with wonder and share the awe.

How can you and your family experience more moments of wonder on Sabbath?

TOGETHER

Ministry families easily skip the blessing of being peaceful, joyful, and loving together on Sabbath. But we need to appreciate the important people in our lives and heal any family relationships that have been hurt during the week. It's refreshing to slow down and talk about our faith and our experiences of Jesus.

Carve out and fiercely protect a significant time and space to be together as a family during Sabbath. The day needs to be special for *your* family too, not always shaped by the needs of your congregations. Take time to grow your family relationships with worship, conversation, and laughter.

How can you be together on Sabbath in ways that strengthen your important relationships and your faith in God?

HAPPINESS

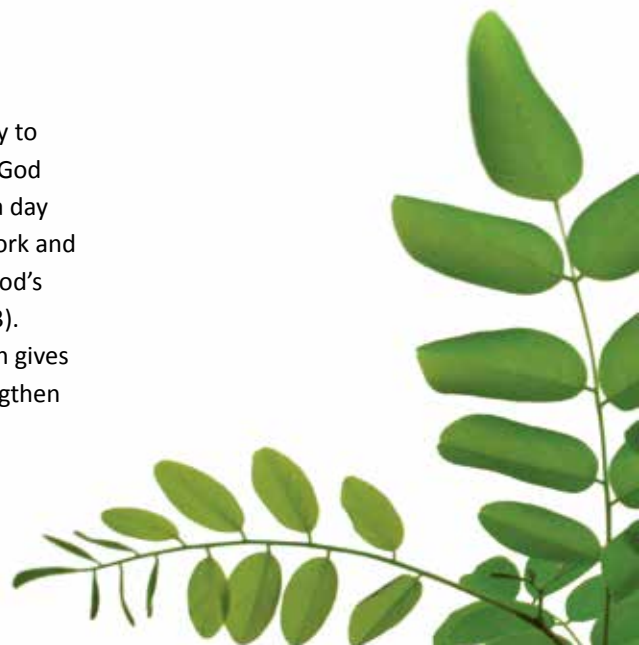
Sabbath isn't just a day to *keep*; it's a day to *celebrate*! It's a day to pause and thank God for the gifts He pours into our lives. It's a day to experience the joy of putting aside work and distractions. It's a day for delighting in God's love and forgiveness together (Isa. 58:13). Creating happy Sabbaths for our children gives them powerful memories that can strengthen their faith in a loving God.

Discover what makes Sabbath a delight for each person in your family. Weave those delights into your Sabbath plans.

On a scale of 0-10, where 0 = very stressful and 10 = very happy, how would you rate your last four Sabbaths?

Ask each person in your family to list three things that will make your Sabbaths even happier.

Karen Holford writes from Scotland, where she loves to climb the hill behind her house on Sabbath afternoon.





“Specially” Hospitable

WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL DIETS

I’M WHEAT-INTOLERANT. One crumb of wheat will give me severe pain and discomfort, decreased energy, and other nasty symptoms for up to six weeks. I’ve been aware of my intolerance for more than 20 years, so I’ve learned to live with it. Here are some things I’ve learned along the way:

Going to an ordinary Adventist potluck when you have a food allergy or intolerance is like walking through a minefield! Fortunately, as I’m intolerant to wheat and not allergic to it, my reaction isn’t life-threatening. But for someone with a severe allergy or a potential for anaphylaxis, incorrectly labeled food can be catastrophic.

My worst experience was at a church banquet. The caterers had been told about my diet, but they had forgotten. I couldn’t eat the appetizer, and they promised to find me an entrée I could eat. I asked if I could just eat the vegetables, but they wanted to wait until the entrée was ready. They were too busy to find me anything. I couldn’t eat the dessert either. Finally, two hours after the meal started, I was given a quick apology and a plate of cold, leftover vegetables.

THE POTLUCK CHALLENGE

Many people who have special diets no longer come to potlucks because it’s too stressful to eat food in an environment that is not allergy-aware and safe. Some bring their own lunch and make sure that no one accidentally drops any crumbs on their food.

We can also feel awkward when we have to ask the cooks specific details about their ingredients. We often feel excluded from church social events, such as pizza parties and veggie-burger barbecues.

And although it's tempting to be curious about our food intolerances and allergies, please try not to ask, "So, what happens if you accidentally eat some?" Most of the side effects are very unpleasant, and we don't really want to discuss them in public!

PROTECT THE PREPARATION

- Ask those with special diets in your church to train others how to care for their needs.
- Write an information leaflet explaining the importance of being scrupulously careful when cooking and serving food for people with special diets.
- Make food for special diets using spotlessly clean utensils and work surfaces. Avoid making other dishes at the same time so that you don't accidentally transfer contaminated ingredients on utensils, by hand, or even through the air.
- Line pans and dishes with baking parchment or foil in case there's a residue of allergens on the container.
- Keep special diet dishes covered and protected so they're not contaminated. Place them on the top shelf of the oven so that contaminants such as pizza crumbs don't fall into the food accidentally.
- Search the Internet for a list of allergen-free ingredients. Lots of everyday recipes are made with perfectly safe ingredients. Use gluten-free breadcrumbs in nut roast recipes, use spiralized vegetables instead of pasta, and cut thin slices of butternut squash or grill aubergine (eggplant) slices to replace pasta strips in lasagne dishes.

- Purchase a variety of allergen-free entrees and desserts and keep them in the church freezer. Make a sign for the food table or church bulletin that welcomes visitors with special diets and invites them to choose special meals that can be quickly prepared especially for them. When they can be guaranteed that the food is safe, they'll feel more comfortable joining in with the meal.
- Provide printed labels for potluck foods listing the most common allergens. Ask people to name their dish and tick any of the allergenic ingredients it contains. Make sure that they check the contents of *every* ingredient they use, as some allergens are not always obvious in things such as seasonings, sauces, and soup mixes. For example, soy sauce usually contains wheat, but many people are not aware of this.
- Your label could look like this:
This dish is ... Eggplant parmigiana.
It was made by ... Karen Holford.
It includes dairy ___ wheat ___ gluten ___
eggs ___ sugar ___ celery ___ soy ___ etc.



“Specially” Hospitable

SERVING SPECIAL FOODS SAFELY

- Place dishes made for special diets on a separate table.
- Provide each special dish with a separate spoon. If someone uses a spoon from another dish in the special food, they will contaminate the food and make it unsafe.
- Discourage people who do not have special diets from trying out the special dishes.
- Invite people with special diets to take their food first. Give out passes for the special diet table to prevent other people from taking the food.
- Never “top up” branded sauce, dressing, and ketchup bottles from cheaper bulk catering packs because it “looks better,” unless it’s exactly the same brand and the same ingredients.

DON'T FORGET COMMUNION

- People who cannot eat wheat and gluten often feel excluded from Holy Communion. Provide a wheat- and gluten-free alternative for everyone to eat, or provide a completely separate plate of wheat- and gluten-free crackers.

INVITE US!

Please invite people with special diets to your home. We just want to be with people without having to worry about the food. Feel free to ask us to bring along an entrée or dessert that everyone can eat, or we can share our favorite recipes with you.

A simple soup or a hearty salad are perfect, and we can bring our own bread if we want to. We’re usually offered fruit salad for dessert, but if you can be a little more creative, that would be wonderful! Search your grocery stores for “free from” alternatives, and find out which of your local bakeries and cafés specialize in wheat- and gluten-free cakes. Look online for raw dessert recipes, which will never include wheat. Try out recipes for raw brownies, made with dates, pecans or walnuts, cocoa, and other natural ingredients.

EVERYBODY’S WELCOME!

With a little thought and preparation, your church can provide meals for those with special diets, and everyone who comes to your church will feel welcome. It’s such a tremendous gift to me when I go to a potluck where I can share in the food—and the joy—with everybody else. Thank you! J

Karen Holford is the Family Ministries director of the Trans-European Division, and she likes experimenting with raw and wheat-free recipes, especially desserts.





Surviving Holiday Stress

IT'S CHRISTMAS, Thanksgiving, New Year's Day, or maybe a family reunion. Three generations of in-laws will spend a week parked in every corner of your home so everyone can have fun together—well, everyone except you. Your spouse is busy with extra church services and community outreach. You're working full-time. Your freezer is too small for all the food you'll need. You're coordinating the children's program. And your chances of having any fun during the event are about 0.01 percent.

Perhaps holidays aren't such a big thing in your culture, but there are other massive events in your church to manage, or big family gatherings that put pressure on your relationships.

How can you put loving God and loving others at the top of your priority list? How can you focus on what's most important, lower your expectations, share the load, and reduce each other's stress?

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

It's easy to get carried away with elaborate menus, decorated homes, idealistic expectations, and unnecessary traditions. Create a mini-retreat for yourself so you can reflect on the meaning and purpose of this celebration or family reunion. For Thanksgiving, focus on gratitude, study thankfulness in the Bible, and list your blessings. If you're focusing on Christmas, read the stories in the Bible, imagine the scenes, and focus on the key values of faith, hope, courage, hospitality, and generosity. Pray that your time together will be a refreshing blessing for everyone, including yourself, and ask God for His wisdom and balance.

FOCUS ON VALUES RATHER THAN OBLIGATIONS

How can you reduce your workload? What can you and your family leave out and still make the celebration special? Set a price limit on gifts, or agree to donate money to a charity instead. Choose simpler menus, make simpler plans, work together on baking and decorating projects, and invite lonely people to join your family. Ask yourself how each activity helps you to experience and/or share God's love, and use that as your benchmark to guide your plans.

MARRIAGE STAFF MEETING

Plan to support each other by having a marriage staff meeting when you're both relaxed and comfortable.

- Tell each other your hopes and concerns for the upcoming holidays.
- Mention appreciation for each other's support during previous holidays and gatherings.
- List everything you both need to do on different days to make the event smooth and successful. Include church, work, and family events. Also include every individual task, such as making up guest beds, buying and wrapping gifts, serving beverages, setting the table, clearing up, preparing vegetables, shopping for groceries, doing laundry, entertaining guests, and organizing a family outing or walk. This will help you to understand each other's workloads and stress points.
- Agree who will do what and when. Cross tasks off the list when they're completed to help you both keep track of tasks.
- Discuss your concerns and explore ways to manage stress points better.
- Explore how you could simplify the celebration to create more time to experience God's love and joy, and more time to share His love with your family and those who are hungry for hospitality.
- Plan regular breaks during the busy period so you can catch up with overdue tasks, chill out, or connect with each other.

GET AHEAD

Identify all the tasks you can do in advance and scratch them off your list. If you give gifts, buy a few each month, wrap them, and label them. If you send cards, address them several months in advance, and write personal messages when you have a spare moment. Bake ahead, ask other guests to make and bring their favorite dishes, and look for good offers on ready-to-serve dishes.

SCALE YOUR STRESS

Make a scale using numbers from 0 to 10, where 0 is no stress and 10 is extremely stressed. Place the scale where both you and your spouse can see it, such as on the refrigerator. Use two different magnets, which you can place along the scale to indicate your daily stress levels. Ask how you can support each other during the most stressful times.

CARING CONNECTIONS

Schedule regular couple times for praying together, discussing ongoing needs, thanking each other, and

showing your care for each other. List at least 20 ways you can lovingly connect with each other in one minute. Generously scatter at least 10 of these caring moments throughout the day to help reduce stress, conflict, and resentment. Kiss, squeeze hands, smile, offer to help, make a drink, send a loving message, share a treat, and more.

STRESS POINTS

Every family celebration includes tricky moments and conversations, whether it's managing Uncle Fred, who talks too much; soothing the small child who's struggling with sensory overload; listening to cousin Meg's endless complaints; or calming Tom and Mark's arguments about religion or politics.

Prepare some fun "minute to win it" games to distract people from awkward conversations. (Check out www.thebudgetdiet.com/top-30-minute-to-win-it-games. Some of the ideas are better than others—use your good judgment). Introduce a gratitude activity whenever someone starts being critical or is complaining. Keep a handy list of things people can do to help you so you can invite them out of awkward conversations, such things as folding napkins, setting the table, preparing fruit and vegetables, or reading a story to the children.

When a topic of conversation treads on sensitive areas, try saying, "I hope you don't mind me changing the subject, but I really need your advice/help." Choose something that falls within their area of expertise and experience, such as gardening, cooking, or traveling. Or invite them to share favorite childhood memories with you.

REFLECT GRATEFULLY

When all the intense activity has subsided, make space to reconnect as a couple and do something special together. Talk about what went well, appreciate each other's support, and list what you want to do differently next time. Talk warmly and creatively about how you'll improve these areas. Thank God for what went well, and ask Him to help you make next year even more successful. J

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist, pastor's wife, and Family Ministries director for the Trans-European Division.

Talk About DEATH

WE IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD imagine the agonizing death of Jesus on the cross. Crucifixion was death by asphyxiation, as the torn and beaten arms worked to lift the weight of the body to enable each excruciating breath. As I write, many people are fighting their own battle to breathe, as coronavirus ravages their lungs. I don't know what the world will look like when this is over, but nearly everyone will know someone who has died during this global pandemic.

This is a tough reality for us, our children, and the elderly and vulnerable. It's even tougher when we're not prepared for it. It's healthy for families to talk about death together, both before and after it happens, in order to process their thoughts and feelings. Here are some ways to do that.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN

Use a natural springboard to talk about death, such as when a pet dies, when you find a dead creature on a walk, or when someone you know dies. You can ask your child what death means to them, because they will often have some ideas of their own. This helps you to check any misconceptions. Share what death means to you and what you believe about death. Many Bible stories include death and grief, but we often glide over them rather than explore the important issues with our children. This can inhibit us from being honest about the pain of loss and the natural sadness and grief we feel when someone dies. Ask your children what they think their family members thought and felt when they died. Ask how they might like to be comforted.

Some children's books can help you to explore the experience of what happens when someone dies. *Miss Grandpa* is a book I wrote for Adventist children to help them understand death and resurrection. It also includes some practical ideas for helping children with their grief.

Use straightforward language when talking about death. When we say we've "lost" someone, children think they'll be found again.

The term "passed away" makes no sense to children, and even saying that someone has "fallen asleep" can make children feel frightened to sleep in case they die too.



WHAT THEY NEED TO KNOW

- When someone dies, they are no longer breathing and living, and we won't be able to talk to them and see them again.
- When someone dies, it makes us feel very sad because we loved them so much.
- We will miss them for a very long time, and it is normal to feel sad about that and to cry.
- In between crying for the person we can't see and talk to anymore, we can still laugh together and enjoy the good things of life.
- There will be a funeral, which is a service in which family and friends come and say goodbye and honor the person.
- Their body will be put safely in a wooden box, like a treasure.
- The box is buried in the ground, or sometimes it is burned. Either way, the body becomes like dust. But that doesn't matter because God can bring anyone back to life again.
- Jesus was brought back to life after He died, and He was taken up to heaven to live with His Father.
- One day Jesus will come again. He will bring those who loved Him and who loved other people back to life. He will take them to heaven to live with Him forever.

If your children ask questions about death, answer them as honestly and simply as you can. It's OK not to have all the answers, and it's OK not to tell them everything. But don't lie to them.

TALKING WITH A SPOUSE

Yesterday (as I write this) nearly 1,000 people in the United Kingdom died from the coronavirus. Many of them died in intensive care units without any relatives and friends to hold their hand. So my husband and I talked about dying alone in the hospital. Although we would want to be together if one of us was dying, we both understood that this would not be possible during the pandemic. I told Bernie that no one must ever feel guilty for not being there if I had to die alone. As long as I was able to, I would think about those I love, and that would comfort me.

Even before the pandemic, we had told each other about our wishes for organ donation, resuscitation options, and where we would prefer to die (at home, in the hospital, or in a hospice). We have also given each other permission to remarry if one of us dies so that neither of us needs to feel guilty if that's the choice we make.


TALKING ABOUT FUNERALS

This year we had a family funeral for an elderly relative. As we planned the service, we realized none of us knew his favorite hymns or which passage of Scripture he would have chosen. We weren't clear about all of his life story or what his wishes would be about the service.

My adult daughter was listening to the discussions. Later she asked me what I'd like to happen at my funeral. It wasn't a sad conversation at all. I told her the songs I would like and my favorite chapters in the Bible. I followed up by sending her an email with all the information in one place, and I attached the story of my life that I had written for a project. If it's too difficult to talk about funeral plans many years in advance, write your wishes in a letter that your family members can open at the appropriate time.

Wherever possible, let children come to the funerals and burials of those they love. Ask for a service outline in advance and explain everything that will happen so there are no surprises. Some children might like to read a Bible verse or share music, but give them the option to let someone else do it if they decide they don't want to at the last minute. Some children might like to gather flowers for the coffin or write a letter or poem for the person who has died.

GOD CARES

If it feels too scary to talk about death, pray about your concerns and ask yourself why you find it so hard. Because of sin, death is a natural part of life and being human. God cares about every aspect of our lives. He remembers that He made us out of dust and that we are fragile (Psalm 103:13-18). His love for us is everlasting, in death as much as in life. And best of all, one day He will personally wipe away every tear of grief from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). 

Karen Holford is a family therapist who has spent time working in hospice. She is currently the family ministries director of the Trans-European Division.

Things for Families To Do Together at a Church Family Day




Karen Holford

Karen Holford is the wife of Bernie Holford, the family life director of the South England Conference. Together they enjoy developing seminars on all aspects of family life. They have three children: Bethany, 10; Nathan, 7; and Joel, 4. Karen has written several books, including, Please, God, Make My Mummy Nice! a warm and humorous look at mothering and what it can teach us about God's love for our families. She also enjoys crafts of all kinds.

Church family days are special days. These days should be eagerly anticipated. Children and adults love to get together with other families. Organized games and skits can usually increase the pleasure of such family get-togethers. Following are some ideas to make your family days special.

1. Let each family design an imaginary machine to help them with a recurring problem. This can be a fun way to look at family needs. For example, a finding-things machine may have a comb (to comb through all the junk), a bin for all the rubbish you find when you're looking for other things, a magnifying glass (to find those really hidden things), etc. Talking about the problem by designing a funny machine is a lighthearted way to help families come up with better strategies for the everyday problems they face. Perhaps your family lacks organization, and things are always misplaced. Use your imaginary machine to help find lost items, and then use it to organize them.
2. Let each family draw a picture of themselves. Then have the families swap their pictures with the other families. Each family then writes something special about the other families. At the end of the game, each family will have a picture of themselves with several good things written about them that will make them feel special.
3. Give each family member a large piece of paper and some felt-tip markers and ask them to design their own coat of arms. Or let each family create a poster advertising the family or Jesus.
4. Outside activities are extra-special. On a sunny day, have each family plan a game to share with others. Bring a jar filled with cookies or beans and let everyone guess how many are in the jar. Let the winner take the jar home. Have a bucket throw to practice throwing skills. Make a clock-golf game (hit the ball from each number to the hole; the person with the lowest score wins). The ideas are endless. Charge a few pennies for each game, and give the money to ADRA or let each family keep what it makes to offset any expenses it may have incurred.
5. Cut heart shapes out of paper, and let each family member write a love note to each person in the family.
6. Provide materials for each family to make a kite together, then have a kite-flying contest. Kites can be made from a simple pattern, polythene bags, cellophane, and garden sticks. Find a library book to show you how.

Planning fun family days takes little effort, and the rewards are great. Memories are created, relationships are strengthened, and friendships are made. 

What Shall I Wear?



Karen Holford

Karen Holford is the wife of Bernie Holford, family life director of the South England Conference. Together they enjoy developing seminars on all aspects of family life. They have three children: Bethany, Nathan, and Joel. Karen has written several books, including *Please, God, Make My Mummy Nice!*, a warm and humorous look at mothering and what it can teach us about God's love for our families. She also enjoys crafts of all kinds.

There is a wonderful freedom in the twenty-first century. You can wear almost anything you like! Hems come in a variety of lengths, pants and skirts come in all shapes and sizes, and you can dress to suit your personality and lifestyle. You can be smart and chic, lacy and romantic, or cozy and comfortable. Sometimes, when I have the stamina, I shop with a friend who takes hours to choose one garment! It may be tedious, but when she's made her purchase, she knows it will see her through at least a decade! It will suit her wardrobe with no regrets, and she always avoids embarrassing or expensive blunders. These are some tips I have learned from her.

1. If you need a garment to last, don't buy the cheapest thing. Shop around and compare prices, but don't sacrifice quality.

2. Choose classic and traditional styles. They may seem more expensive at first, but you'll wear them for many years. I have had some things in my wardrobe for 13 years, and they are just as wearable today, because the styles are so timeless.

3. Learn which colors suit you best, and choose a small range of colors for your wardrobe. It can be fun to buy something bright and colorful, but if you keep your basic wardrobe in a limited range, you won't need so many jackets, shoes, purses, and accessories to match them.

4. Learn what to look for in well-made clothes. Are the seams smooth or puckered? Are the buttons sewn on well? If not, stitch them on securely from the start, to save last-minute panics. A drop of clear nail polish will help to strengthen the stitches. Is the hem straight and securely sewn? If you have to hem a garment, then every four inches, do a few stitches on top of each other. Then, if you ever rip your hem, it won't unravel enough to drop down and show. Does the garment need to be lined? Is it washable? Is the fabric comfortable to wear and easy to care for? Is there

plenty of room for movement? Kneel down, stand up, and stretch your arms over your head to check that the garment won't be restrictive. Lean forward in front of a mirror to check the modesty of the neckline. Rub a white candle up and down the zipper teeth to keep them running smoothly.

5. Ask yourself if you really need a new garment? Will it mean buying more accessories, or will it fit perfectly into your wardrobe? If you travel often, will it pack well and still look good?

6. Go to sales only if you know for sure what you really want, and go only for that item. Check out your favorite stores before sale time to see what might be available, and don't buy without a lot of careful thought. Make a list of your clothing needs and keep the list in your purse. If you find a bargain basement, you will know exactly what to look for. In sales, buy a year ahead. Winter coats are on sale in the spring, summer clothes in the fall, etc.

7. Keep your mending up to date, and make sure all your nylons are intact. Keep a spare pair in your purse or in the car, in case of accidents. Wash all your clothes according to the instructions on the label. Hang clothes on good-quality hangers of the correct size so that clothes are not stretched out of shape.

8. If you haven't worn an item for two or more years, ask yourself why. Was the color wrong or is it now outdated? Does it no longer fit well? Clear out your closets annually, and let ADRA or Dorcas benefit from your unwanted clothes.

9. Learn how to sew your own clothes well, so that you can make just what you want, to suit your budget.

10. Look forward to heaven when we won't have to worry about clothes anymore! No more shopping and laundry, just amazing robes of light, which never get dirty, and never, never go out of fashion!





WHY YOUR FAMILY MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

2019 is the centenary of family ministries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

DAVID LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW and blinked away his tears. “I’ve listened to my old ministerial colleagues. I’ve seen the pain our wives went through. I know why our children don’t come to church. We thought we were doing the right thing when we made ministry our priority, but we made a serious mistake. We neglected our important responsibility to our families.”

His fingers ruffled through the worn pages of his Bible. “Paul says when you choose a leader, ‘he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?’” (1 Timothy 3:4, 5, NIV).

“If I could live my life over again I would make sure my wife and children felt loved, happy, and supported,” David says. “I can see the pain I caused by my upside-down priorities. My wife left after 20 years. I rarely see my children and grandchildren. If I’d been

a better husband and father, I would have been a better pastor to my churches, and we might still be a family.”

He sighed. “Ellen White reminded us not to neglect our families. She said, ‘He who is engaged in the work of the gospel ministry must be faithful in his family life. . . . He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church’” (*Pastoral Ministry*, pp. 88, 89).

GOD FIRST . . .

Our relationship with God is our number-one priority. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The more we immerse ourselves in God’s love and grow our relationship with Him, the more He will inspire

and empower us to have healthy relationships with our families. Taking time to pray and experience God's love for you and others through His Word is foundational to all healthy relationships.

. . . THEN HEALTHY FAMILIES

God created humans to live together in marriages, families, and spiritual communities so they would learn how to be patient, kind, generous, and forgiving, and grow closer to His concept of unselfish love. When a pastor is intentional about nurturing loving relationships and is actively learning how to be the best spouse, parent, or friend, he or she will also be developing vital pastoral care skills. When pastors' marriages are healthy, the pastors are better able to help troubled couples. But when the pastor's family is unhappy, it is much harder to minister to struggling families. Pastors whose families are hurting are less likely to preach about the importance of healthy relationships and to organize seminars to support and enrich families. Without guidance and support, members may struggle to manage the challenges of family life, leading to broken relationships and a cycle of pain that spirals to the next generation.

Current research suggests that troubled family relationships, conflicts within the church, and a sense of not feeling cared for by the church community are the main causes of people leaving our church. Ellen White shares this insight into the important role of family relationships in creating loving churches: "The angels of God . . . will help you to make your family a model of the heavenly family. Let there be peace in the home, and there will be peace in the church. This precious experience brought into the church will be the means of creating a kindly affection one for another" (*Child Guidance*, p. 549).



SETTING AN EXAMPLE

It's easy to put family relationships at the bottom of our to-do list. We try to reassure ourselves that everyone will be OK because we're doing God's work and He'll take care of our family. But we have an important responsibility. "Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy," wrote Ellen White (*The Adventist Home*, p. 107). If aloneness wasn't good in a perfect world (Genesis 2:18), then it's much more painful in our world today. Loneliness, even in marriages, families, and churches, is a cause of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain that can be as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

When the pastor's family creates wise and loving boundaries around itself, it sets a positive example for other families. Organize church meetings so families can spend quality time together. Run marriage and parenting seminars during Pathfinders and other children's events to reduce the need for babysitters. Avoid meetings on Sundays and use video-conferencing to minimize time away from home.

"When I heard about the value of prioritizing my family's needs I was sceptical," said James. "So, I tried an experiment. I spent one-on-one time with each of my two kids and my wife every day for a couple of weeks. I thought it would be time-consuming and add to my stress. But it didn't. I was happier; they were happier; we had fewer arguments and better worship times. I felt more energized after I had focused on their needs for a while, and I returned to my ministry stronger and refreshed."

TIPS FOR STRENGTHENING YOUR FAMILY

- Spend time with God, focusing on His love for you and your family. Ask Him to show you and your spouse His vision for your family.
- Talk with your family about your family strengths, as well as the areas where you could do more growing. Listen to everyone's ideas and work to implement them.

Why Your Family Matters More Than You Think



- Be intentional about learning how to have a strong, Christ-centered marriage and how to parent your children with love. Be there for your family at the important events in their lives and at times of stress, sadness, and illness.
- Aim for several warm connections with each person in your family every day. Make a list of the ways you could connect with each person. Plan regular dates with your spouse and children. It doesn't cost anything to take a picnic lunch and walk in a beautiful place, but it can refresh your relationships.
- Do chores together and make them fun, so everyone feels connected and supported. Offer to help each other for 10-15 minutes a day.
- Family mealtimes are a good way to connect with each other, share your faith journeys, and talk about important values. Download and print colorful placemats with family worship suggestions (go to www.ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources, and scroll down the page). Have four or five meals together as a family each week. Or use video calls to join them at the table.
- Ask yourself, "Does my wife/husband/child/parent/friend/family member feel less alone or more alone in our relationship than they did last year? What can I do to reduce their sense of aloneness? How can I be a channel of God's amazing love into their life?" **J**

Karen Holford is director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division.

Resources to Enrich Your Family

Toucan Together—This app is a free marriage seminar in your pocket! Explore bite-sized quizzes and videos and then share your ideas with each other.

Couple Checkup—Take a Couple Checkup online to assess your relationship and get great ideas for making it even better! Go to www.couplecheckup.com.

Spiritual Parent Coaching—This app, created by Pastor Daron Pratt, a family and children's ministries leader in Australia, is designed to help you grow your child's faith and strengthen your whole family. It's filled with ideas for parents, couples, and churches.

Igniter Media has created a short and powerful video to highlight the importance of church leaders caring for their family relationships. You can find it at www.ignitermedia.com/products/7320-change-the-world.

The North American Division has produced some excellent materials to support pastoral families through their different life experiences and challenges. You can find these at the following websites:

- <http://www.nadministerial.com/2q15>
- <http://www.nadministerial.com/videos-2/>
- <http://www.nadministerial.com/spouses-resources/>



WORSHIPING TOGETHER: EVERY-WEEK EVANGELISM

WHETHER WE HAVE CHILDREN, grandchildren, or no children, it's important to create a church where children feel welcomed and included in the worship service. If we want children to join our church when they are older, we need to make sure they're happy in church today. Each time a child experiences a church service they will either enjoy it and feel increasingly positive toward church, or they will not enjoy it and will feel increasingly negative toward church.

Throughout the Bible, worship included people of all ages. It took place in a garden, in a tent, by an altar, on the side of a mountain, in the temple, in synagogues, and in homes. God also gave His people a calendar of amazing feasts and celebrations that included all the senses (such as in the tabernacle) and different hands-on activities, such as building temporary tabernacles together. No one in the Bible ever worshiped the way most Christians have worshiped for the last few centuries.

INVOLVEMENT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Whenever a younger person is involved in the worship service, the other children and teens are more likely to pay attention. Churches that are intentional about creatively involving children are more likely to attract more children and families. When a child is involved in the service, unchurched relatives might be more willing to come along too.

Here are some simple ideas for involving young people in your church services:

YOU'RE WELCOME!

- Train your children and young people as volunteer greeters. Let them take turns welcoming other young people who visit your church.
- Help children assemble welcome packs for visitors, especially children. Ask them what they would like to receive in a welcome pack if they visited a church.

LET'S PRAY

- Invite a family to offer prayer as a group. They can each offer part of the prayer, such as adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and requests.

- Invite children to bring something that they're thankful for and place it on a table at the front of the church as part of your prayer of thanksgiving.
- Give children cards on which they can write short prayers. Gather them up during the offering time and choose a few to read each week during the prayer.

READING GOD'S WORD

- Invite a child or teen to present the Bible reading during the service. Ask them a month in advance so they can study the passage with a parent or a safe mentor and then deliver it with meaning and understanding. Give them the space to be creative. They could act out the passage or they could draw pictures or take photos and create a PowerPoint to illustrate the verses. They might even dress as a Bible character to present the words.
- Invite a young person to read the scripture and then interview them about what the verses mean to them personally.
- Ask a family to present the scripture passage in whatever way they would like. Find a dramatized Bible version to inspire ideas.

THE JOY OF GIVING

- Invite young people to design tithe and offering envelopes for your church.
- Ask them to create or decorate different containers for special offerings and events.

VISUAL DISPLAY

- Invite children and teens to create artwork for your church services. In one church an artist worked with the children to make beautiful wall hangings illustrated with Bible verses.
- Ask children to bring to church one flower in a specific color, such as red for a Communion service. A skilled florist can help them create a display for your church. Even a row of red flowers cut to the same height and placed in small bottles or drinking glasses can look amazing. Or they can make informal arrangements in jars for the tables at a potluck.
- Invite artistic children and teens to design church bulletin covers or PowerPoint backgrounds.

SING YOUR HEART OUT!


- Plan to include a contemporary children's song in your service; it can follow the children's story.
- Invite a young person to choose a hymn or song on the theme of the service. Let them introduce the hymn and explain why they chose it. Shy children can write out their ideas for someone else to read or make a video of their introduction to show before the song.

- Encourage young musicians. Invite a music teacher to mentor them and help them prepare a simple accompaniment that is well within their ability. Or let them play with a small group, where mistakes might be less obvious.

SERMON TIME

- It's important to help children to enjoy the sermon time in whatever way is comfortable and enjoyable for them. Most sermons last much longer than a child can endure sitting still in an adult-sized chair!
- Tell the children's story in the middle of the sermon, as a sermon illustration.
- Find practical sermon illustrations, such as simple science experiments, and involve children in the process.
- Invite teens to make a short video on the sermon theme or to interview other church members about a sermon-related topic.
- Hide an image related to the sermon on some of the PowerPoint slides. Ask children to count how many of these images—such as animals, words, people, or objects—are hiding on the slides.
- Make a collection of story bags for younger children to borrow during church. A story bag has felt shapes for creating a scene on the floor, soft items that can be used to tell a story, such as plush or knitted animals, knitted Bible characters, and other quiet components related to a story. The bags also contain a simple storybook so that a child can use the pictures to tell their own Bible story and act it out with the soft props.

INTERGENERATIONAL WORSHIP

Ideally, worship services include a variety of activities to suit everyone in the congregation. Why not explore intergenerational worship? Search the Internet for books and resources to help you grow intergenerational worship in your church. 

*Karen Holford is the Family Ministries director for the Trans-European Division, and she is passionate about the every-week evangelistic opportunities of intergenerational worship services. She is the author of the book *Altogether Wonderful* available from AdventSource.*

After an Affair

MOST OF US KNOW SOMEONE WHOSE MARRIAGE HAS BEEN TORN APART BY THE TRAUMA OF AN AFFAIR. WE'VE STOOD BY, NOT KNOWING QUITE WHAT TO DO OR SAY. OR MAYBE OUR OWN HEARTS HAVE BEEN RIPPED AND SHREDDED BY OUR SPOUSE'S BETRAYAL.

IN ALL THE SHOCK AND THE PAIN, HERE ARE A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND, EITHER FOR YOURSELF OR FOR SUPPORTING SOMEONE IN YOUR SPHERE WHO IS FACING MARITAL HEARTBREAK.



EMERGENCY SUPPORT

One of the first things to do when you discover your partner's affair is to take time out to think, pray, and take care of yourself. You might need to stay with a trusted and confidential friend until the initial pain subsides. Knowing that your husband or wife is having an intimate relationship with someone else is one of the most traumatic emotional experiences that humans can encounter. It may also be a good idea to arrange for a few days off work.

If you have children, it's especially important to do your best to stay together and rebuild your relationship (if it's safe to do so) because a separation and divorce can be deeply troubling for them, sometimes throughout their entire lives.

LEAVE YOUR OPTIONS OPEN

Plan your responses carefully. It's natural to be angry and yell at your guilty spouse, but this may cause even more damage to your relationship.

Think about your future hopes for your relationship. Write these hopes down and use them as your guideposts. If your goal is to *keep*

your partner and build a *stronger* relationship, then choose to respond in ways that are more likely to attract them, while avoiding behavior that may push them away.

It's important for you to tell your partner exactly how they've hurt you, but you can choose to do so in a calm, honest, and simple way (see ideas below). By behaving in ways that your partner will find attractive, wise, considerate, and respectful, you may help them to decide that you're the best person for their happiness after all.

EXPLAINING YOUR PAINFUL EMOTIONS

It may be helpful to write down what you want to say and then read it aloud to your partner. This helps you to stay calm and in control so that your anger doesn't cause further damage to the relationship. Use these as possible sentence starters:

- I am committed to staying with you if you want to stay with me.
- But I feel sad because . . .
- I feel hurt because . . .
- I feel angry because . . .
- I feel betrayed because . . .
- I am afraid that . . .
- I would like to learn how I can build a closer relationship with you.
- Some goals I have for our relationships are . . .
- What would you like from our relationship?
- Some things I would like from our relationship are . . .
- Some things you could do to help me rebuild trust in you are . . .

After you've expressed yourself calmly, give your partner a chance to think about what you've said. Say something like, "I'll give you some space to think about this and get back to me."

BE CAREFUL WHOM YOU TELL

What are your long-term goals for your relationship? Use these to guide you as you make careful choices about what to say and whom to tell. Your friends and relatives might put pressure on you to end the relationship even though you want to stay, or they might turn against your partner.

Or your spouse could be so embarrassed by the things you've told other people that it's easier to leave you than to deal with all those difficult relationships and conversations.

TOO MUCH INFORMATION?

How much do you really need to know about the affair? Too much information can be a dangerous thing. Instead of helping to heal the relationship, the details can fuel your imagination and cause even more pain.

Whenever your thoughts start to dwell on the painful thoughts and imaginings,

replace them with something peaceful, happy, and positive, such as comforting Bible verses or prayer.

IF YOU'RE THE PARTNER WHO'S HAD AN AFFAIR . . .

- Take time to listen to how much you have hurt your partner and know that what you have done has hurt God even more. Spend time in prayer. Experience God's compassion for your partner and let that break your heart. Focus on Psalm 51 and travel with David along the pathway of repentance and forgiveness.
- Don't expect your partner to forgive you quickly and move on, even though you'd like them to. You've hurt them deeply, so expect your partner to be very distressed. They will have good days and bad days. Ask how you can comfort and reassure them, and then do whatever they say.
- How did the affair start, and how could it have been prevented? Were you stressed out or lonely? Did you find the affair comforting during a difficult period in your life? Was something missing from your marriage? Identify a root cause and deal with it effectively. Talking with your partner, having counseling, and reading useful books can protect your marriage from future affairs.
- Do anything that rebuilds your partner's trust. It may be really frustrating to keep having your e-mails and mobile phone checked regularly. But this may be the only way to create a secure foundation for your relationship.
- Work very hard to help your partner feel loved and special again.
- Imagine you're having a new romance with your husband or wife! Invest the energy, money, time, fun, and careful planning that you put into your affair back into your marriage.



REBUILD YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Good relationships don't just happen. Be prepared to invest time and effort in your marriage. Read books, search for help on the Internet, etc. Try these resources:
www.divorcebusting.com
www.2-in-2-1.co.uk
www.marriagepartnership.com

Remember a few other things that can make a very big difference:

- Avoid being alone with someone you find attractive.
- If you find yourself attracted to someone else, imagine they have a contagious terminal illness.
- Listen to each other and be interested in your spouse's life.
- Soothe each other when life is stressful, sad, or painful.
- Talk positively about your partner and your relationship as often as you can.
- Strengthen your relationship by having fun together, listening to each other's hopes and dreams, and doing what helps the other person to feel special and loved. **7**


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Discover a safe place to fellowship, share support and explore the journey of ministry life.



Married to a pastor?

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BECAUSE HE LOVED US... 1ST

by Karen Holford

THE JOURNAL
4
THIRD QUARTER 2011

Perhaps God's most important reason for giving us the gift of marriage was to give us a tangible way to experience His incredible love for us. All the love in the universe starts in God's heart. God is love, and all our love comes from Him. When we truly experience His love for us, we can truly learn what it means to love each other.

My husband and I work with couples, and we have noticed that the amount of love they experience in their human relationship is closely related to the amount of love each person experiences from God. So we have explored ways to help people experience more of God's love so that their marriages and families can be transformed.

Here are some ideas to help you experience more of God's love for yourself, which will allow you to share His love with your spouse.

EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE FOR YOURSELF

You are the most important channel of God's love into the life of your spouse or your child. What an awesome and wonderful responsibility! God wants to use *you* to show your family how much He loves each one of them! But first, He wants to show you how much He loves you. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19, NIV).

My love-line: Draw a timeline of your life. Along the line, describe the different times in your life when you especially experienced God's love. Perhaps someone cared for you in a generous and unexpected way. Maybe God answered your prayers in a way that touched your heart. Maybe

you read a scripture passage that helped you understand how much God loved you. Include as many examples as possible to build up a lifelong story of God's love for you.

Psalm study: Read Psalm 103 or 145 and list all the aspects of God's love that have been woven into these verses. Then match each aspect to an experience in your own life. For example, Psalm 103:8 speaks of God's patience, so think of a specific time when God was patient with you.

Absorbing God's love: Sit in a comfortable chair and wrap yourself in something that feels warm and comforting. Sit quietly and breathe slowly. As you inhale deeply, remind yourself how much God loves you. Then exhale slowly. If a thought pops into your head that challenges the idea that God loves you completely and deeply, say, "I know the truth, and the truth is that God loves me." Let the experience of God's love soak into your heart like sunshine on a summer's day. Imagine yourself all curled up in God's lap, your head on His chest, listening to His heart beating with love for you. Imagine Him gently stroking your hair until you feel soothed and at peace.

Love-journaling: Create a "God's Love Journal" and write down each time you notice any evidence of God's love for you. Write down at least three things each day. Reread this journal whenever you need a reminder of God's love.

Secret love plans: Do at least one thing—however small—each day to show God's love to someone else. As you think, pray, and carry out your special plan, your heart will come closer to God's loving



heart for the people around you, and you'll become more aware of His loving heart for you.

Love letter from God: Read “The Father’s Love Letter” (www.fathersloveletter.com), a beautiful letter from God to you, paraphrased from many different Bible verses and available in many languages. Read it as often as you can, focusing on one of the phrases that speaks to you of God’s love. Rewrite the letter, personalizing it with your spouse’s name, and give the letter to him or her to keep in the Bible.

WHENEVER YOUR HEART FEELS LOW ON LOVE, COME AND DRINK DEEPLY.

Love-hunt: Go through your home and gather a bowl of things that remind you of God’s love. I’ve collected dozens of hearts that remind me of different aspects of God’s love. I look at the hearts and choose the one that best expresses the kind of love I need from God at that moment. Sometimes I place that heart on my desk or in my purse to remind me of God’s love for me.

Discover what helps you to experience God’s love in the best way possible. Whenever your heart feels low on love, come and drink deeply, again and again, until your heart overflows with His love. When we’re topped up with God’s love, we’ll have plenty of love to share with others. When our hearts feel empty of love, we will often feel full of other

emotions—fear, hurt, anger, resentment, guilt, pain—which can easily spill out onto the people closest to us, preventing them from experiencing the fullness of God’s love in their own lives.

HELPING EACH OTHER EXPERIENCE MORE OF GOD’S LOVE

Explore 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Break down each phrase and reword it as a positive attribute (for example, “love keeps no record of wrongs” could be rewritten as “love is forgiving”). Then draw a line for each love quality, marking it on a scale of 1-10 (1 being very low in that quality and 10 being very high).

1	5	10

For example, rate your patience with your spouse on a scale of 1-10. Then think of what you can do to raise your patience score to the next number on the scale. Prayerfully ask God to help you be more patient with your spouse. Examine your own heart to uncover the attitudes, values, and misbeliefs you have that prevent you from being as patient as you want to be with your spouse. You could even say to your spouse, “I recognize that I’m not as patient as I’d like to be. I want to be more patient with you. Help me to understand the effect my impatience is having on you. Please forgive me for my impatience. Please pray for me that my patience will grow. And please help me to find ways to show my love for you through my growing patience.”

Love list. Make a list of 20 instances when your spouse helped you to feel especially loved. If this is difficult, ask God to bring these times back into your memory. When you have 20, look at them and see if there are any common threads. Was it a kind word, a helpful action, a thoughtful gift, a warm touch, or a special time together? Or was it when your spouse made you laugh, showed you respect, inspired you, comforted you, or encouraged you? Review your lists together so that you can each learn the best ways to show love to your spouse. Or make a list of three things that would help each of you to feel especially loved right now. Word these things as polite requests rather than complaints or nags, and give your spouse the freedom to choose how to fulfill your request. "I'd really feel loved if I came home one day and didn't have to make dinner." Or, "I'd feel especially loved if we could work together on tidying our garage."

Love letters. You might already be familiar with the ACTS model for prayer (A = Adoration, C = Confession, T = Thanksgiving, S = Supplication). This format can also be used to shape an encouraging love letter to your spouse:

A – Appreciate specific things your husband or wife has done or is doing. Praise your spouse for the way he or she has used wisdom, love, and spiritual gifts to bless you and other people. Tell your spouse how much you admire the way he or

she is parenting your children. It is important for us to be built up and encouraged by those who love us. Jesus praised Nathaniel for his faith and Mary for her act of pouring perfume on His feet.

C – Confess one or two specific things you have done that may have hurt your spouse or prevented him or her from experiencing the fullness of love from God and from you. Include at least one promise that you'll try to do something different that will help your spouse feel more of your love.

T – Thank your spouse for at least three specific times when he or she helped you to feel especially loved. When you know what helps each of you to feel especially loved, you may be encouraged to do it more often.

S – End with a short prayer of supplication, mentioning positive and specific prayer requests for your spouse. Ask God to bless your marriage and family, to enrich your spouse's personal relationship with God, and to bless his or her unique ministry and mission. Conclude by telling your spouse about something you love about him or her, and share a dream you have for your relationship.

Talk about God's love. Use some of the discussion starters below to help you talk more with your spouse about God's love:

- What does God's love look like to you?
- Which verses in the Bible best express God's love for you?
 - Describe three different times when you felt especially loved by God.
 - What do I do that helps you feel especially loved by God?
 - When are you most likely to feel low on God's love, and what can I do to help you feel topped up again?
 - What can we do together to help each other experience more of God's love? What difference might that make in our marriage?
 - Today I felt most loved by God when . . .

Finally, we can look at each other through God's loving eyes and ask ourselves, "I wonder how God wants to use me today to show His amazing love to my spouse?" The more we show God's love to our spouse, the more likely it is that we'll experience God's love through him or her, too.



KAREN HOLFORD is a family therapist and freelance writer living in Scotland, where her husband, Bernie, is the president of the Scottish Mission. Together they have been exploring what God's love means in their own lives, in their marriage, in their family, in their church, and in their community. It's an endless and wondrous journey of discovery that they hope will last for eternity.

BON VOYAGE!

by Karen Holford



THE JOURNAL
22
THIRD QUARTER 2010

After 26 years, my husband Bernie and I are finally grasping the gravity of those innocent promises we made at our wedding. Five words—“for better or for worse”—cover a vast range of marital experiences! Some of our best (and worst) experiences have happened when we’ve been traveling around the world on ministry assignments, gathering a collection of souvenirs, memories, photos, and never-to-be-forgotten (and hopefully not-to-be-repeated) learning experiences.

This year the General Conference Session may have inspired some of us to accompany our husbands on the global Adventist pilgrimage. So let’s explore how traveling together as a couple can provide some of our “better” couple experiences instead of our “worst.” We may have no control over ocean waves, roadwork, accidents, air-traffic controllers, immigration officers, lost luggage, hotel cleaners, and the indefinable vegetarian menu served by the cabin crew. But we can still plan to make the most of the special couple-time we can have when we travel together.

PACK FOR SUCCESS

Organize your packing in advance and make sure you have clothing for every occasion. Katy packs each day’s outfit in a different bag, including her undergarments, hosiery, and scarves. Then she packs one pair of smart, comfortable shoes that go with all her dressy outfits and wears a pair of comfortable walking shoes for the journey.

Expect the unexpected. Take clothes for warm days, cold days, and wet days, even if you think you know the climate. Weather happens! And squeeze in some fitness clothes (bathing suit, jogging apparel, gymwear); exercise is especially important after a long day sitting around.

Wear layers for traveling so you can add and subtract according to changing temperatures. I once wore a warm woolen dress and thermal pantyhose when flying to teach in a hot country. It was cold when I left home and I was arriving in the middle of the night,

so my outfit made sense. But my luggage didn’t arrive until the last day! I had no adjustable layers and no time or money to buy anything new, so I had to wear the same hot clothes all week.

Fill your toiletry bag well ahead of time, and pack essentials in smaller plastic bottles or buy travel sizes. Include two new toothbrushes. I’ve lost count of the times my husband or I forgot our toothbrush because we planned to pack them at the last minute. Having two brushes means you can each have one if someone forgets their brush or if your luggage is lost or delayed.

Take first-aid items—your favorite pain relief, Band-Aids, antiseptic wipes, cystitis treatment (we’re much more vulnerable to this when we’re sitting still and not drinking enough fluids!), and supplies for stomach upsets, bites, etc. It’s very stressful and time-consuming to track these items down in a strange place in the middle of the night. Pack enough of your regular medications to last through the trip. Find out whether you need a doctor’s note to carry your medical supplies through certain security and immigration checks. Add sunscreen, sunglasses, lip balm, water-purifying tablets, mosquito nets, thermal underwear, and so on, to suit your destination.

Pack non-perishable healthy snacks like dried fruit or crackers, instant soups and drinks, nuts, etc. Unexpected delays and time schedules can prevent you from finding food. If you like hot drinks or soups, take a mini travel kettle with you for boiling water. Check any food import restrictions for the countries through which you’ll be traveling.

Take something (like needlework) that you’ll enjoy doing on your own if your husband has to work, study, attend meetings, or sleep.

If you’re flying, mix up your packing so that you have one outfit and half your underwear in your spouse’s suitcase. Pack essentials (such as contact lens supplies or diabetes medication) and valuables in your hand luggage. Check the security requirements for carrying fluids in carry-on luggage.

PLAN ROMANCE

Slip something in your suitcase to make your hotel room feel special. Try battery-operated candles for safety. Pack a pretty pillowcase from home or your favorite room fragrance. Find a book on massage skills and some fragrant massage oil and treat each other to a do-it-yourself spa experience. Add your favorite bubble bath and play relaxing music. Pack interesting nightwear that your husband hasn't seen.

PLAN ENTERTAINMENT

Find a travel version of a game you enjoy playing together or a pack of discussion-starter cards for couples; these items are great for long drives. Take two copies of a book you've been promising to read together so you can read in your own time. Download audio books and listen to them together. Ask each other:

- What did you like best about the story?
- What was the most important part of the story for you, or the most important theme or message?
- Which character in the story is most like you, or most like the person you'd like to be?
- What difference will this book make to your faith or the way you relate to others?

Travel can be tiring and stressful, so choose positive things to discuss. Talk about encouraging and happy things—your dreams for your life together and your ministry; how God is gently helping you to grow; plans for your career, home, and family, etc.

Visit airport shops and choose three things you'd like to give your spouse (if you had the money) and show them to each other; after all, it's the thought that counts! Play a subtle hide-and-seek game within a specific area. Agree on where to meet after 15 minutes if you haven't found each other. Discover kind and helpful things to do for fellow travelers to make their journeys easier. Open a box of chocolates and pass it around the waiting area.

Find a peaceful cafe in the airport and share one slow drink together. Need a quiet place to sit and the main lounge is crowded? Check out empty departure gates and set an alarm to make sure you don't miss your own flight.

PLAN ADVENTURES!

Find fun for free! Check out city Web sites and tourist offices for helpful insider information, discount visitor vouchers, free places of interest (churches, museums, galleries, markets, parks, specialty stores) and city travel passes. Borrow guidebooks from a library or purchase them from thrift stores. We've even downloaded clues for inexpensive "treasure hunts" as a creative way to discover an old town.

Take pictures of each other and ask people to take pictures of you, too. Make an album that tells the story of your travels; collect menus, tickets, and other souvenirs to add extra dimension to the pages. Choose a theme for your photos or capture sunsets, famous sites, places of worship, native flowers, people doing local activities, pictures of interesting doorways, or the meals you ate.

Do something you couldn't do in your own country. Eat different kinds of (safe) food. Discover where you can experience local traditions and music.

Choose small, simple, unbreakable souvenirs. Or start a collection on a theme—local fabrics to sew into your own crafts,

stones, shells, teaspoons, candles, candlesticks, books, pictures, ties, scarves, etc. I collect different hearts from around the world and use them to illustrate various aspects of God's love. Foodie gifts are great for friends back home; they say "we were thinking of you" without adding extra clutter.

If you're going to be with old friends, protect your couple time, too. It's so easy to socialize with your friends and leave your spouse feeling lonely. Aim to make the most of being together.

PLAN PICNICS

Save money with do-it-yourself meals. Buy sandwich ingredients, fruit, and local treats. Wash fresh food well in cooled boiled or bottled water. Buy disposable salad bowls, plates, flatware, and cups. Bring your own peeler, can opener, and vegetable knife.

Be creative! We once tossed a salad in a large plastic carrier and then ate it straight out of the bag (in the privacy of our hotel room)! Find interesting places to eat: by a fountain, under a tree, at a lunchtime concert, etc. Take plastic bags so you can sit on damp ground or suspicious-looking benches. Tablecloths can make picnic tables feel more welcoming.

PLAN FOR INSPIRATION


Take time to grow closer spiritually. Choose a book that will inspire you both. Pray together or hold hands and pray silently for each other. Look for inspiration all around you: evidence of God's protection and guidance, the hidden delights of nature, etc. Create your own mini-retreat. Look for ways to minister to others. Leave tips for those who serve you or a thank-you flower for the maid.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

If you get lost, agree to meet at the last place you specifically remember speaking to each other; it usually works! Or make a Plan B: "If we get separated, we'll meet at 1:00 p.m. by the information desk."

Above all, be honest with each other and consider each other's needs, especially as you're out of your regular routines. It's okay to say, "I need to stop and have a drink," "I need to sleep," or "It's lovely to meet up with old friends, but let's take this afternoon to do something with just the two of us."

Even with the best planning in the world, travel disasters happen. Don't blame each other. Make the best of the situation, see the funny side, focus on Philippians 4:8, and remember that one day, this disaster will be useful for a sermon illustration!

The most important thing is to enjoy your time away from housework, bills, emails, and endless phone calls and to use the gift of traveling time to bring you both closer together. 



KAREN HOLFORD has been traveling and ministering alongside her husband Bernie for over 26 years. One of their special memories is of getting hopelessly lost in Venice in the middle of the night after popping out of their hotel for a breath of fresh air. Lessons learned: Always travel with a map and enough money for a river bus home. And you're never really lost if you're together; you're just looking for new places to love each other!

CLOSER . . .

LEANING INTO HABITS THAT PROMOTE TOGETHERNESS



SCAN FOR AUDIO

ANNA STEPPED CAREFULLY over the tree roots. She took a deep breath of the forest air. She could smell the trees, the soft mustiness of decaying leaves, and the faint fragrance of a woodland flower. Each day, before meeting the children from school, she wandered among the ancient oaks and slender silver birch trees, talking with God, reflecting on her life, and looking for something that filled her with wonder at God's magnificent creation.

A JOURNEY WITH GOD

She reflected on her spiritual walk with God. She had always loved Him, but now her relationship with God was more peaceful and joyful than ever before. Many years ago, when the death of her son broke her heart into a thousand pieces, she imagined that God was holding her on His lap. She sat there and poured out her raw emotions of grief, anger, agony, and confusion. There were no words for some of her pain, but she knew He understood what she could not say. Afterward, she wondered if her outpouring to God was somehow irreverent or disrespectful. But, as she read David's psalms, Hannah's story of praying to God in the temple, and Paul's description of God wanting to comfort us in all our troubles so we can comfort others, her heart was settled (Psalm 34; Psalm 56:8; 1 Samuel 1; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). God wanted to hear everything about her pain and help to heal her broken heart.

Slowly her relationship with God grew. Her experience of being comforted by Him helped her to understand that she was completely accepted and beloved. She journaled where and how she experienced God's love each day (Lamentations 3:32, 33). Each realization of His love brought peace to her heart and comfort to her soul. She understood how God's perfect love of her, even in her mess, dissolved all her fears (Psalm 103; Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:18). She still faced pain and struggles in her life, but as she gave them to God to take care of, she experienced an indescribable peace in her heart (John 14:27; Philippians 4:7). Her joyful love for Him grew and overflowed from her heart as she looked for small ways to show God's love to everyone she met. She wanted to be light and salt in her world, showing people God's character through her imperfect character, and mingling with them to show His extravagant love for them (Matthew 5:13–16).

God wanted to hear everything about her pain and help to heal her broken heart.



They were realistic enough to know they wouldn't always manage to fulfill their dreams, but they would keep working toward them.

COUNTING THE WAYS

Anna smiled as she thought about all the ways God loved her. He was in front of her to lead the way, over her to protect her, underneath her to give her trustworthy foundations, behind her to “watch her back,” and beside her all the time (Ephesians 3:14–21). And she was never alone (Isaiah 41:10). Her intimacy with God had grown as she experienced His unconditional love and grace. Slowly she had learned to trust Him, feel safe with Him, communicate with Him, and love Him, and now she felt like a little piece of heaven glowed in her heart.

She thought about her marriage to James. They had always loved each other, but after 12 years, their love was deeper than ever before. They still had a long way to go before their relationship was like James’s parents. Now in their seventies, everyone could see how much they loved each other. They were safe in the unshakeable love that had grown over the years. Anna could sense their deep bond in the loving, respectful ways they spoke to each other and in how each of them considered the other’s needs and wishes. Anna dreamt that her marriage would be like theirs, not like her parents’, who had divorced when she was a teenager.

Anna and James had experienced many challenges together in ministry. After they lost their son, they drifted apart as they managed their grief in different ways. Eventually they found a wise old friend who helped them listen to each other carefully and comfort each other’s grief. As they learned to grieve together, they discovered other ways to strengthen their relationship and grow closer.

THREE QUESTIONS

Anna and James realized that, like many other marriages, their relationship fluctuated. Sometimes they felt incredibly close, and their relationship was amazing. Sometimes they felt distant, especially when work and family commitments were overwhelming. One day they went to a café to reflect on their relationship. They asked themselves three questions, and they wrote their answers on a large piece of paper.

The first question was: **What helps us feel closer together?** Taking time to listen to each other. Accepting each other warmly and graciously when mistakes happen. Considering each other’s feelings and working together on difficult jobs. Showing appreciation to each other every day. Caring for each other with encouragement, affection, and support. Touching each other affectionately and helping each other to feel safe in the relationship.


Anna and James realized that, like many other marriages, their relationship fluctuated.

The second question was: **What hopes do we have for our relationship?** Anna hoped for more time together as a couple, going for walks, taking an hour a week to go to a café, or taking lunch to a park. She wanted more time enjoying their shared hobbies of gardening and playing music. She suggested they could start a small ministry doing something that they both enjoyed, so that their time together could bless others. James wanted to nurture their spiritual life by spending 15 minutes a day with Anna, listening to a devotional podcast and praying together. He also wanted to discover how to bring greater pleasure to Anna when they were physically intimate.

The third question was: **What three things would each of us like to do to strengthen the relationship and help the other person to feel even more loved?** James wanted to spend 15 minutes listening to Anna talking about her day so that he could celebrate the good things and comfort her in the sadnesses and challenges (Romans 12:15). He would spend one hour on Thursday evening helping Anna prepare for Sabbath (Galatians 6:2). And he would thank her specifically, every evening, for the ways that she had blessed him and supported him (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

James' promises warmed Anna's heart. She would strengthen their relationship by initiating physical intimacy, joining him when he was gardening, inviting him to talk about the joys and struggles of his ministry, and discussing the devotional podcast with him, so that they could grow spiritually closer. They closed their meeting with a short prayer for each other.

The café meeting helped them to grow closer as a couple, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. They were realistic enough to know they wouldn't always manage to fulfill their dreams, but they would keep working toward them. As they drove home, they decided to schedule a café meeting every six months, like a garage check-up for their relationship. Their relationship was far more important than a car, and investing in their marriage was the best thing they could do for God, each other, their family, their church, and their community.

The Christian organization Prepare/Enrich provides online check-ups for your relationship: www.couplecheckup.com. The survey gives you instant feedback on your relationship and suggestions for growing closer. 

Karen Holford has been married to Pastor Bernie Holford for 42 years. They have their ups and downs, but with God's help and everyday effort, their marriage is still improving in every dimension!



DISAGREEING WITHOUT FALLING APART

by Karen Holford



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When Benjamin Franklin said that nothing can be certain in this life “except death and taxes,” he forgot the third inevitability—conflict. Whenever two or more people live and work together, they will have differences of opinion and disagreements about innumerable things. It is actually healthy for two people in a close relationship to disagree on a few things! A. P. Herbert, the English humorist, once said that “the idea that people can live closely together, without ever having a serious argument, suggests a lack of spirit that is only to be admired in sheep!”

Well-managed conflicts can actually bring people closer together. It encourages them to listen to each other’s needs, opinions, perspectives, hopes, and feelings. Without conflict, couples may not be motivated to deepen their relationship by enriching their understanding of one another.

But most of us don’t like conflict. We avoid it. We’d rather put up with frustration, hurt, self-denial, or depression than work through an area of disagreement with another person, even our spouse.

Let’s look at some healthy ways to handle the conflicts and differences in marriage.

IDENTIFY THE EMOTION THAT’S FUELING THE ANGER

When we’re angry, it’s usually because a feeling has overwhelmed us

WELL-MANAGED CONFLICTS CAN ACTUALLY BRING PEOPLE CLOSER TOGETHER.

and we’re finding it hard to deal with that emotion. Think about the last time you felt angry. Which emotion sparked your anger? Perhaps it was fear, frustration, disappointment, em-

barrassment, being overloaded, feeling misunderstood, sadness, or just being tired. When we can identify these emotions, we can begin to address the real feelings behind our anger.

It’s also helpful to consider the emotion that’s fuelling your husband’s anger during an argument. Try relating to him as someone who is afraid, sad, disappointed, frustrated, etc., rather than as someone who is angry.

IDENTIFY YOUR CONFLICT PATTERN (EPH. 4:26)

If you and your husband have regular arguments, try to notice when they happen, how they start, and what they’re about. For example, if you tend to argue when you’re both tired or in the car, perhaps you can plan to talk about difficult topics at some other time, do a relaxing activity when you’re tired, or listen to something uplifting when you travel. If your arguments are mostly about in-laws or finances, you may want to wait till you’re both feeling refreshed and relaxed, and then sit down together and have a deeper discussion about the issue.

IT’S ALSO IMPORTANT TO TREAT CONFLICTS LIKE DIRTY DISHES.

It's also important to treat conflicts like dirty dishes—it's best to clean them as soon as they've been used (definitely the same day), or they'll be much nastier to deal with later!

Jake and Louisa promised to have all their challenging discussions sitting at the table while holding hands and looking into each other's eyes. They found it helpful to see each other's emotions and to be holding each other gently. These simple actions created an unspoken promise to stick with the discussion and stay committed to each other.

ASSESS YOUR CONFLICT SKILLS

Ask yourself what happens when you manage a disagreement well. If you have conflicts at work or with friends, maybe you cope better with those conflicts than with conflicts at home. What are you doing and saying in these situations away from home that you aren't saying when you're with family? Do you treat the other person differently when conflicts are more peaceful and respectful? If you manage these other disagreements better than you manage arguments with your spouse, what can you learn that can help you to disagree more respectfully at home?

LISTEN WELL (JAMES 1:19)

When I talk with couples who struggle with verbal fighting, I give each person a large sheet of paper and ask them to focus on one specific conflict issue. Each spouse writes the issue in one sentence in the middle of their sheet of paper. Then they draw a circle around their sentence and five lines radiating out from the central shape to the edge of the paper. In each of the five sections, they write one of the following sentence starters:

- This issue is important to me because...
- My biggest fear, concern, or worry about this issue is...
- Some possible positive outcomes for this issue might be...
- In my family, we dealt with similar issues by...
- A significant experience I have had with this issue in the past is...

From his or her own perspective, each spouse fills out the sections with as much useful information as possible. Then I ask them to swap their sheets of paper and read what the other person has written. This simple activity helps couples begin to listen to each other and understand each other without

WHAT DO WE GAIN IF WE WIN ALL THE ARGUMENTS BUT LOSE OUR RELATIONSHIPS?

getting into the familiar arguments that tend to spiral out of control.

SHARE THE PROBLEM (MATT. 19:5-6)

In a marriage, every problem is a shared problem. When you're "one flesh," anything that affects one of you affects both of you. It isn't helpful for me to think that something is my husband's problem and that he needs to sort it out alone, or that something is my problem for me to sort out by myself. When a problem affects both of us and our relationship, we can share the responsibility for working on it. This is a wise and cooperative approach that can bring us closer together, rather than resorting to blame and fault-finding that pushes us further apart. We both need to think about what we can do differently to improve the situation.

MAKING A REQUEST INSTEAD OF A COMPLAINT (ROM. 12:16)

Whenever we nag and complain, we're being negative and critical of each other. Nagging and complaining may cause our spouses to defend themselves, which just adds fuel to the fire of an argument.

Instead of nagging or complaining, try making a simple request: "Will you please take out the garbage today?" Or try a specific, nonjudgmental statement based around the following structure:

- In this specific situation...
- When this specific thing happens...
- I feel this emotion... because I want or need...
- And it would really help me if you would do...

And, if relevant...

- Because then I would be able to help you by doing...

For example:

- When you come home late for dinner
- Without letting me know you're going to be late
- I feel frustrated because I want your dinner to be fresh, and because I need to know how to plan my time in the evening.
- It would really help me if you would let me know when you're going to be late
- Because then I could make sure your meal is nice and hot, and I can also make better use of my time.

FIGHT FOR YOUR RELATIONSHIP (ROM. 12:18, 19)

Fighting for our relationship means finding respectful ways to discuss our differences. Fighting fairly means avoiding dangerous ways of arguing that hurt each other verbally, emotionally, spiritually, or physically, such as:

- Generalizing (“You always..” or “You never..”), which invites the other person to look for exceptions in his or her behavior, to become defensive, and to generalize about you, too
- Exaggerating or making something seem worse than it is to add weight to your side of the argument
- Blaming the other person
- Yelling at the other person
- Being violent or threatening violence
- Criticizing the other person or his/her family members
- Saying cruel things
- Digging up past offenses and problems
- Walking away from the argument before it has been resolved

AIM FOR WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS (MATT. 5:9; ROM. 12:18)

What do we gain if we win all the arguments but lose our relationships? When one person wins, the other person can feel belittled, resentful, bitter, sad, rejected, misunderstood, unheard, and alone. In time these feelings can crack a Grand Canyon through a relationship. It’s more loving to look for cooperative solutions where you both feel good about yourselves and each other.

STOP ARGUMENTS BEFORE THEY HAPPEN

Couples argue most frequently about finances, in-laws, how to discipline their children, sexual intimacy, and household chores. If you can find ways to talk about these potentially challenging areas before they become major conflicts, you can minimize your arguments.

Couples often avoid these difficult topics until they become so big that they’re overwhelming. Finding safe ways to talk regularly about what is going well in these areas—and discussing some of the minor challenges you’re facing—will mean that you may be able to extinguish the fire of an argument before it burns out of control.

INVITE YOUR SPOUSE TO HELP YOU (GAL. 6:2)

Early in our marriage, another ministry couple taught us the phrase that saved their marriage: “I have a problem I think you can help me with...”

This phrase has helped us, too! Whenever I was

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troubled by Bernie’s responses or behaviors, I would stop and ask myself why it bothered me so much. He was quite happy doing it his way, and I realized that the problem was usually my selfish attitude toward his behavior. So I would try to reshape my re-


sponse to him by admitting I had a problem and inviting him to help me. I might say, “Bernie, I have a problem I think you can help me with. When I need to do the laundry in a hurry, it slows me down when your clothes are inside out. So I was wondering if you could help me by making sure your socks and shirts are right side out when you put them in the laundry bag.”

Using this sentence starter always makes us laugh, and humor can be a helpful way to pour oil on the stormy waters of a difficult conversation. We like being asked to help each other—it makes us feel useful and capable, and it’s much easier for us to respond positively to this kind of suggestion.

SOOTHE EACH OTHER (PROV. 15:1; 1 COR. 4:4-8)

Discover how you can soothe each other with your words, humor, warmth, generous responses, comfort, and understanding. Couples who learn how to soothe each other’s ruffled feathers can help to heal their relationship after challenging conflicts.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRACE AND GROWTH

Every conflict in our marriage is an opportunity to show our deep and mature love. We can look at each other through God’s loving eyes and show each other God’s love and grace as we manage our differences. When we learn how to be patient, unselfish, thoughtful, forgiving, and understanding, we mature in our spiritual lives and in our ability to love each other in the way that God loves us. 



KAREN HOLFORD is a freelance writer and family therapist living in Auchtermuchty, Scotland. Her husband, Bernie Holford, is the president of the Scottish Mission. They attended three marriage retreats in the first three months of marriage and thought they would never need to know all the stuff they were being taught about conflict, but over the past 27 years, they’ve had plenty of opportunities to practice what they learned—and they’re still learning!

Great Expectations

ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS BRINGING YOU CLOSER TO YOUR SPOUSE OR PUSHING YOU FURTHER APART?



WE'D BEEN MARRIED only two months when Bernie handed me a potato in the grocery store. "Karen, do you know what this is?"

"Of course I do!" I responded. "It's a potato!" *That was a strange question, I thought. Maybe it was some kind of joke.*

"Why don't we eat potatoes?" He looked puzzled.

"Because . . . well . . . because I don't like them. They're icky! I've not eaten potatoes since I left home."

"But I love them! It's not a proper dinner without potatoes!" Bernie has a strong German heritage.

So we bought a sack of potatoes. And I learned how to cook them. But I'll never learn to love them like Bernie does.

When we get married we bring a shedload of expectations into our new relationship, including little details such as how often we'll eat potatoes, dessert, or pizza, as well as bigger details, such as how we'll cope with our conflicts and manage our cash. The challenge is that we're not aware of our expectations . . . until they go unmet.

Most of them seem so obvious to us that we can't even describe what they are. Our expectations have been strengthened by years of watching our

parents and grandparents, reading books, and consuming TV shows. Patterns form in our thoughts, slowly shaping how we expect people to behave, including our spouses.

We rarely discuss our expectations because we just assume that our husband or wife will behave a certain way or do certain jobs around the house because that's what we saw when we grew up. For instance, our garden was almost overrun by weeds because I expected Bernie to do the gardening, and he expected me to do it.

Now we know how difficult it can be to manage our expectations and how complicated it can be to talk about them. It's painful to realize that Bernie may not be living up to my expectations, or that I'm not living up to his (which is why it took us two months to talk about potatoes).

When relationships don't turn out the way we expected, we can feel disappointed, rejected, frustrated, hurt, and sad, without really understanding why. We're just aware that something's missing. At other times we know exactly what our expectations are, and we fully understand what our partner is not doing, or what they're doing differently from what we expected.

It's useful to reflect on our expectations and to ask whether our expectations are bringing us closer together or pushing us further apart. If they're hurting us and our marriage, then maybe we need to let go of our unrealistic expectations and find some different ones.

EXPLORING EXPECTATIONS

Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you useful insights into your relationship and give you the courage to talk lovingly about these expectations.

- What different expectations do you have for husbands and wives?
- What expectations do you have for marriage?

For each expectation, ask yourself:

- Where did this expectation come from (my parents' or grandparents' relationship, books, culture, traditions, fantasies, hopes, etc.)?
- How valid is this expectation for *our* marriage, in *our* life situation, *today*?
- How might this expectation be more challenging to fulfill in a ministry marriage?
- Have I discussed these expectations with my husband or wife, or have I just assumed that they'll "know" what I expect?
- When/why might my husband or wife find it difficult to meet my expectations (due to time, health, different personality, different priorities, different family experiences, etc.)?



- What effect would it have on our relationship if I didn't have these expectations?
- Which of my expectations might I need to modify or release so that I no longer feel disappointed and hurt?
- What effect does it have on my partner and our marriage when I don't fulfill his or her expectations?

We're not aware of our expectations . . . until they go unmet.



- How can I ask my partner for forgiveness for the effect that my unrealistic or unexpressed expectation has had on our relationship?

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Loving, humble, and forgiving conversations can take away our fear of talking about sensitive subjects (see 1 John 4:18).

- “I realize that when we got married, I expected you to _____ because _____. When this unspoken expectation wasn’t met, I felt _____ and showed it by _____. I now see that my expectation wasn’t very considerate because _____ and I may have hurt you by _____. I am very sorry. Please forgive me.”
- “We all bring different expectations into our marriage. That’s normal. Now that I understand more about your expectation and where it comes from, maybe I can learn how to meet it better. Tell me what you would like me to do and why, and I’ll try to be more considerate.”

GREATER EXPECTATIONS?

After a few years Bernie and I started to develop healthier and more realistic expectations for our ministry marriage. Here are some of ours. What would you include on your list of realistic expectations?

- Every marriage, especially a ministry marriage, needs plenty of prayer, love,

patience, understanding, and flexibility. (Rom. 12:9-18; 1 Cor. 13)

- There will be times when life will be amazingly happy. We need to remember these special moments. (Rom. 12:15; Phil. 4:8)
- There will be times when life will be sad and challenging. We need to learn how to comfort each other effectively. (Rom. 12:15)
- There will be times when we will let our partner down. We need to ask for forgiveness and do something special to show them our love. (Eph. 4:32)
- There will be times when we will be let down. We need to be flexible, forgiving, and graceful. (1 Cor. 13:5)
- There will be times when we need to juggle the complex needs of church members with the complex needs of our own family. We need to pray for loving wisdom when we have these dilemmas. (James 1:5)
- We are different people with different personalities, skills, ways of doing things, emotions, and hopes and fears. We will not think, feel, or do the same things. Our differences are just differences. They make life interesting, and they bring different strengths and perspectives to the relationship. (Rom. 15:7)
- We will both change and grow throughout our marriage. So we need to keep listening, talking, and learning together. 7

Karen Holford is a family therapist and family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.



Healing Conflicts From the Inside Out

“WHAT JUST HAPPENED THERE?” I was bewildered and confused. A conversation that started with “Dinner’s ready, Darling!” had thrown us into a verbally vicious battlefield. And it was all about potatoes!

Bernie had bought a bargain sack of potatoes. But they were beginning to sprout, and I was trying to use them up quickly. They had been the basis of nearly every meal for three days. I was fed up with scrubbing and preparing them, and Bernie was fed up with eating them. So the innocent potatoes became a recipe for disaster.

We moved furiously from fighting about the potatoes to fighting about money, blaming each other’s family, adding extra fuel from a fight we had three years ago, and turning a minor conflict into a total catastrophe. A bowl of potato soup had ripped open our hearts and exposed our frustrations, our fears, and our insecurities.

Most couples have disagreements. That’s normal. We grow closer through our conflicts when they help us to understand each other’s feelings, needs, hopes, and hurts. Conflicts become opportunities to understand each other better when we learn how to discuss our differences in loving and respectful ways.

Innocent potatoes became a recipe for disaster.

PANIC PATTERNS

Dr. Sue Johnson is a couples therapist who has studied arguing couples for many years. Eventually she found some patterns in their behavior and language, which has enabled her to help many couples all over the world.

Dr. Johnson noticed that when one or both partners feel unsafe, they are more likely to panic and escalate a relatively simple discussion into a catastrophic conflict. Search for the video “Still Face Experiment” on YouTube and watch what happens when a baby experiences a similar kind of attachment panic. You can read about these patterns in the excellent book that Dr. Johnson wrote with Kenneth Sandefer, *Created for Connection*.¹

THE REALLY BIG QUESTIONS

Dr. Johnson noticed that underneath couples’ panic patterns were several deep and basic questions about the relationship:

- Do you really love me and care about me?
- Can you empathize with my feelings?
- Do you care about my struggles, and are you willing to help me?
- Can I depend on you? Will you always be there for me?

God knows we have these BIG questions, and He sets us a powerful example by answering them before we even ask them:

- I love you and care about you (Jeremiah 31:3).
- I am compassionate toward your feelings (Psalm 103:8, 13, 14).
- I am always available to help you (Isaiah 41:10).
- I will always be with you (Joshua 1:9).

DEBRIEFING THE POTATOES

When we debriefed our potato episode we realized that some of these BIG questions were fueling our reactions to each other.

When I was upset about the potatoes, I was really asking questions like these: Do you care about me? Do you know how much of my time and effort it takes to scrub and prepare the potatoes? Do you care that I feel alone and unsupported in the kitchen? Do you care that making all these potato dishes takes extra time when I’m already busy? Do you care that I have taken an hour to make you a meal? Do you appreciate what I’m doing for you? Do you appreciate how much effort I’m exerting to save money in every area of our life?

When Bernie was upset about the potatoes he was asking similar questions. Do you appreciate how hard I’m working to provide for us? Do you appreciate my efforts to manage our budget by buying good-value potatoes?

UNDERSTANDING POWERFUL EMOTIONS

We used to argue, make up, and then forget about our disagreements. Now we take time to reflect on them together and to see what we can learn from them. Whenever one of us feels very strongly about something in a way that seems disproportionate to the current situation, we start wondering, “When have I been in a similar situation?” or “When have I felt like this before?” We usually trace these powerful emotions back to something that happened when we were children, or a time when we felt very vulnerable. For example, I noticed that some everyday conversations would leave me feeling unsafe and distressed. We looked for the pattern and discovered that I had a highly sensitive “shame radar.” If I detected the slightest hint that I was being shamed, laughed at, or put down, it would trigger my defense shield, and I would be more likely to overreact to the current situation.

Oh, love me—and right now!— Hold me tight! Just the way you promised. Now comfort me so I can live, really live.

Psalm 119:76, 77,
Message

I wondered where this strong shame reaction came from. Then I remembered that my first-grade teacher humiliated me in front of the whole class almost every week. I began to tell Bernie about those painful stories. He listened to me, comforted me, and began to understand why and where I hurt. I learned to recognize that these strong emotions were connected with the stories from my past, and then it was easier to recalibrate my emotional response to the here and now.

ANSWERING THE BIG QUESTIONS

Arguments are much less likely to happen when a couple feels close and secure. These simple things will help reduce conflicts and negative interactions:

- Be kind to each other every day. This is one of the most powerful ways to nurture a relationship (Ephesians 4:32).

- Show or declare your love in different and creative ways at least once a day (1 John 4:7-19).
- Be specifically thankful and appreciative at least once a day (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- Ask about each other's high and low points in the day. Celebrate the good points and comfort the low points: "I am so sorry that you had to go through that. It must have been so sad/difficult/frustrating/lonely, etc." (Romans 12:15).
- It's surprising how often the sense of being alone and unsupported fuels many conflicts between couples. Offer to help each other at least five minutes a day (Galatians 6:2).
- Affirm your husband or wife regularly and talk about your commitment to each other (Matthew 19:6). 1

¹ Sue Johnson and Kenneth Sanderfer, *Created for Connection* (New York, NY: Little, Brown and Company), 2016.

Karen Holford is a family therapist and director of the Family Ministries Department for the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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Helping a Friend's Marriage

WHAT TO SAY AND DO WHEN YOUR FRIEND'S MARRIAGE IS HURTING.

HELEN WAS CLEARING the kitchen after dinner when Lucy called. "Helen, can we please meet up? I really need to talk."

"Hi, Lucy. Yes, of course! I can see you tomorrow evening for an hour. Is anything the matter?"

There was a long pause. "Yes . . . It's Mike and me. We're going through a tough time, and I don't know what to do."

"Well, I'm not a marriage counselor. I don't know if I can help. But I can listen and pray." Helen felt the anxiety prickle through her body.

If only she'd known before they went into ministry that people would come and talk to her about their problems. If only she'd taken that course in pastoral counseling when Steve was in seminary. If only she knew where to start and how to be more helpful.

WHEN YOUR FRIEND NEEDS TO TALK

It takes courage to admit that a marriage is hurting. If someone comes to you, it's probably because they know that you care, that you won't be judgmental, and that your marriage has inspired them in some way.



“We’re going through a tough time, and I don’t know what to do.”


Yet listening to other people’s challenges can be overwhelming, especially if you think it’s your responsibility to “fix” their life or their marriage. But that’s not your job.

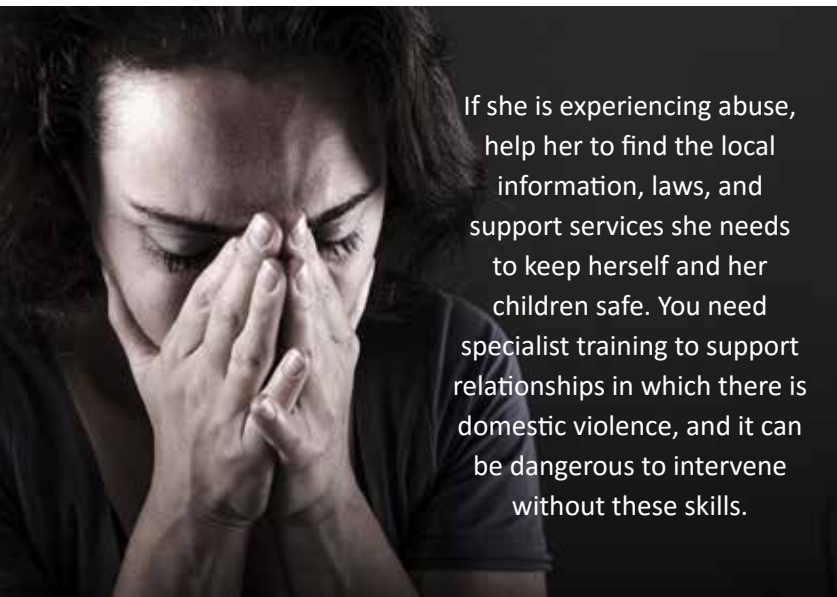
Here are a few ideas that may help you have those difficult conversations:

- Agree on the best time to talk, and limit the conversation to an hour so that you don’t get too tired and overwhelmed.
- Before you meet, pray that the Holy Spirit will open your friend’s eyes to the grains of hope in her marriage. Pray that the Holy Spirit will use your conversation to bless her, inspire her, and guide her.
- Keep the conversation confidential— unless she tells you that anyone, including herself, may be at risk. If she shares this information, you may have a responsibility to inform the relevant authorities in order to keep people safe. It’s important to talk with her about the best way to do this.
- Give full eye contact when you are listening, and reflect back what she tells you by summarizing what she has said. This shows that you have been listening carefully, and your summaries can help her to untangle her complicated thoughts.
- Comfort her sadness and hurts by saying such things as, “I am so sorry that you are experiencing this.”
- Start by asking about her *hopes* for the marriage. If you ask, “What are your problems?” you can both end up feeling discouraged and overwhelmed. Asking about her hopes will help to clarify her goals for the marriage.
- Ask what she would like to take away from your conversation together so you understand her goals for your discussion.
- Stay neutral, don’t take sides, don’t agree with her negative comments about her husband, and don’t blame him. This isn’t always easy to do, but if she goes home and tells her husband what you said about him, then you may do more harm to the relationship, and he will lose trust in you.
- Help her to identify the roadblocks preventing them from achieving their hopes for the marriage.
- Identify which roadblocks are long-term fixtures that may need to be accepted and which ones may need some creative solutions.
- Help her identify her healthy relational needs, as well as the needs of her spouse. These are things such as heartfelt appreciation, uncritical acceptance, quality attention, being valued, warm affection, comfort, encouragement, respect, feeling safe and secure, and being supported. Ask her which three she would most like and what her husband could do to meet these needs. Wonder about his needs too. Meeting each other’s needs helps to strengthen hurting relationships.
- Ask about a time when things have gone well, and look for strengths and possibilities in these moments: the “discussion” that didn’t end in a door-slaming argument, the time they were tender together, a moment when her husband put her needs first, etc. What did each of them do differently to help that moment be more loving?
- Ask her to notice the tiny things in the relationship that are working well and to list three positive signs in a notebook every evening, however small they are. This will help her to refocus on the healthy aspects of the relationship rather than on the difficulties.

Helping a Friend's Marriage

It takes courage to admit that a marriage is hurting.

- Be curious about her husband. Ask: "What do you think your husband is experiencing at the moment? What are his challenges, hurts, and expectations? What do you think he would want to say and do if he heard our conversation today?"
- Avoid giving advice and instructions. Help her to make a list of possible solutions to her problems and to make her own choice about which ones might work best.
- Help her to turn her complaints against her husband into polite and loving requests for his help and affection: "Please, can you help me by _____?"
- Another useful question for your friend to consider: "When I do or say this, will it bring me closer to my husband or push us further apart?" If she wants a closer relationship with her partner, she needs to make choices that help to strengthen the relationship.
- Ask for her specific prayer requests, and pray with her.
- If she wants to talk longer than an hour, agree to meet again at another time.
- Offer to help with a possible solution that she has identified: babysitting, sponsoring their place on a marriage retreat, befriending them, mentoring them as a couple,* etc.
- Suggest a book such as *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* by John Gottman, or *The Divorce Remedy* by Michele Weiner Davis.
- Take care of yourself. If the conversation has left you feeling drained or distressed, make sure that you can speak confidentially to someone about your experience, preferably a professional person who is skilled in counseling supervision or health psychology. Or invite someone to pray for you. You are important too.
- Keep working on your own marriage. This is one of the best things you can do as a ministry couple. It strengthens you and gives you lots of ideas and experiences that you can use to bless the many hurting people and marriages around you. 



If she is experiencing abuse, help her to find the local information, laws, and support services she needs to keep herself and her children safe. You need specialist training to support relationships in which there is domestic violence, and it can be dangerous to intervene without these skills.

- Help her to identify suitable marriage counselors. Marriage counselors are much cheaper than divorce lawyers.
- Some marriages can be transformed when one person does one loving, kind, and helpful thing every day for the other person, whether they feel like it or not and whether the other person notices or not. Encourage her to try this experiment for a month and see what happens.

* If you would like to learn more about the ministry of mentoring marriages as a couple, read *Mentoring Marriages: Use Your Experience of the Ups and Downs of Married Life to Support Other Couples* by Harry Benson, 2005.

Karen Holford has been married to Bernie Holford for more than 33 years. He is a pastor in the South England Conference. Karen is a qualified couple and family therapist and the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division.

LET'S BE FRIENDS!

by Karen Holford



Pippa finally settled the last child into bed, poured herself a glass of water, and slumped down on the sofa. She felt so alone. Jakob was out again at some church meeting or other; she had lost track of all the board meetings and business meetings and elders' meetings and prayer meetings. Except for the church banquet, they hadn't been out together for at least five months. She was exhausted from looking after the children and managing the chores by herself. She thought back to the time when her mother had come for a week; Pippa and Jakob had booked a table for two at their favorite restaurant, but Jakob had been called to the hospital because Mrs. Landers had been rushed in for emergency heart surgery.

When Pippa married Jakob, they'd been best friends for five years. But since they had moved to this new church district, they'd hardly had any time to talk unless it was in bed when they were both exhausted or while they were trying to feed breakfast to the twins. Jakob played golf once a week with another young pastor; they spent 3-4 hours on the greens every Monday and then had lunch together—networking, they called it. But he hadn't spent three hours doing anything with Pippa except sleeping or driving to camp meeting. Her mind began spiraling through other thoughts. Why doesn't Jakob want to spend time with me? What's wrong with me? Maybe he doesn't love me anymore. Why is everything about the church more important than me and my needs and our marriage? Can I cope with a lifetime of this intense loneliness?

Ministry marriages can easily suffer from friendship-hunger. Regular working hours are often opposite of pastoral working hours. Maybe you have small children who need care and attention, so it's hard to go out alone without paying for a babysitter. The weekend is crammed with activities, meetings, and other events, and even Sabbaths can be packed full of pressure and people who want a piece of the pastor!

FRIENDS AND LOVERS

Being friends with your spouse is not just a contemporary or "Western" idea; it's been happening for thousands of years and across different cultures. In the Song of Songs, the lovers are friends. Their exquisite poetry overflows with descriptions of their friendship. They long to be with each other (Song of Solomon 1:14; 3:1); they openly admire each other (2:9); they tease each other (5:2-6); they play games of hide-and-seek (3:1-4); they enjoy each other's bodies (4:1-5); they spend time in the countryside together (7:11-13); they pick flowers for each other (6:2); they have dinner together (2:4); and they sing and write each other love poetry (read the whole book!).

TAKE A FRIENDSHIP AUDIT

List the activities that each of you have done with your friends in the past month; maybe you shared lunch, played a sport, went shopping, took a walk, watched a film, exercised, sang together, worked on a charity project together, chatted on the phone, wrote a letter, sent a card, made a gift, etc. Then make a list of the non-routine friendship activities you've done

with your spouse in the last month. Compare the list of things you've done with your friends with the list of things you've done with your spouse. Don't be hard on yourselves—or each other—if you haven't written anything on this list! Be delighted about any small thing you've managed to do together, and remember that if you plan just one special friendship time in the next month, you'll have improved 100 percent!

Being friends isn't just about going on dates and spending special time together. Being friends is something that needs to happen every day. A sprinkling of friendship moments throughout the day will help you stay warmly connected, even when your lives are busy.

Friends speak kind and loving words. Send a text message or an email. Make a short phone call. Put a note in your spouse's lunch box. Send a greeting card or love letter. Whisper a special message into your spouse's ear. Say something appreciative and encouraging. Tell your spouse why you're glad you married him/her.

Friends give little gifts. Pick a few wildflowers and arrange them in a vase or jug. Hide a tiny treat in your spouse's bag or place it under his/her pillow. Slip a gift voucher for a favorite store into his wallet or her purse. Buy a magazine he/she enjoys. Borrow a book from the library that he/she would like to read. Driving together? When you stop for gas, buy a bottle of his/her favorite drink or an ice cream to share.

Friends help each other. Do a chore that your partner hates doing or pay someone else to do it. Offer to help with a task for an hour or run an errand that your spouse would normally run. Pick up a prepared meal so your partner doesn't have to cook. Make sure the car has a full tank of gas. Pick up after yourself. Take the children to the park for an hour or two.

GATHERING THE SCRAPS

Peter was a youth pastor, and Lynne worked full-time. Their lives were hectic, and there wasn't much time to be together. Peter was out in the evenings and busy during the weekends when Lynne was free. After a few months, they realized that all their time together was spent trying to sort out chores, bills, household repairs, and other mundane things. And they spent an increasing amount of time arguing or having rushed and inadequate conversations about important things.

One day Peter was preparing a sermon about feeding the 5,000. As he worked on his conclusion, he realized that it was very important to gather up the "scraps." He thought about the scraps of time that he and Lynne had together and decided to make the most

of them. He took a sheet of paper and divided it into four rectangles; he labeled the rectangles "5 minutes," "15 minutes," "30 minutes," and "1 hour." Then he listed different things he could do with Lynne if he had that much time to be with her.

Under the "5 minute" heading were suggestions like: "make her hot chocolate; give her a lingering kiss; share a joke together; send a romantic text message; read her a poem or psalm; tell her how much I love her; share one chocolate." Under "15 minutes" he wrote: "make pancakes for breakfast; let her sit and chat to me while I iron a shirt (or two); write her a letter; ask about her day and listen to her; walk around the garden together; take a photo of her looking beautiful; give her a hand massage." In the "30 minute" rectangle he wrote: "give her a back massage; have a long cuddle and chat about hopes and dreams; take a bath together; read a chapter aloud to her." In the "1 hour" section he wrote: "go for a walk in the park; watch a nature video together; take her out for lunch when she's at work; go to a short concert together; visit a beautiful place nearby; go to a free museum; go cycling; lie on a blanket and look for shooting stars; play a game together."

He showed his list to Lynne, and she added some more ideas. They made a poster and stuck it on the kitchen door. They made the best use of their scraps of time and spent one of the 30-minute sessions each week planning a special date for the following week.

HAVING FUN IS A SERIOUS MATTER!

Friendship deprivation can have serious consequences for ministry couples. Being friends is not just about having fun together. It's not a frivolous waste of time. It is seriously important! It can save your marriage by protecting both of you from the danger of an extramarital affair. It can even save your ministry. If you're having fun together, there's less room for you to feel bored or lonely, and you're less likely to be attracted to other people who make you feel loved, special, and happy.

When we have a warm, caring, and enjoyable relationship with our spouse, it helps to protect us from depression, addictions, and other negative experiences that can harm us and our relationships. Solomon wisely said that "a cheerful heart is good medicine" (Prov. 17:22, KJV). And cheerful hearts are grown when we work on building friendly and supportive relationships with our spouse.

When God created Adam, He said, "It is not good for the man [or woman] to be alone" (Gen. 2:18, NLT). We need each other. When a couple is united spiritually,

sexually, and as friends, they are much more likely to be resilient and able to manage the challenges of life that ministry families often face.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT OR DISCUSS:

- What did we do for fun before we were married?
- How can I spend time doing what my spouse most enjoys?
- What's the most fun we've had as a couple?
- What fun things have we always wanted to try but never had the chance?
- What could we write on our "scraps of time" list?
- How can I help my spouse feel less lonely?
- What can I do each day to be friends with my spouse?
- How does our friendship as a couple protect our marriage, our home, and our ministry?

FRIENDSHIP FUN THAT'S ALMOST FREE

- Register for free email updates or newsletters about events in your area.
- Find the most beautiful walks in your area.
- Go out and share one delicious drink together.
- Buy one pastry and eat it together in the park.
- Walk on a beach together and find a special shell or stone to give to each other.

- Paddle in safe water.
- Watch a sunset and then watch the stars come out.
- Feed each other slices of fresh fruit.
- Find a free concert or listen to rehearsals.
- Do something practical together—plant a garden, cook a meal, refinish a piece of furniture, etc.
- Read to each other.
- Watch a funny movie together.
- Learn how to give each other back, foot, or hand massages.
- Find a way to join in with each other's favorite hobbies.
- Watch each other play sports.
- Go to a zoo together.
- Visit tourist attractions in your local area.



KAREN HOLFORD, a family therapist and freelance writer, is married to Bernie, president of the Scottish Mission. Together they lead out in marriage retreats for ministry couples. They live in the ancient town of Auchtermuchty, and their home is next to fields where the Romans once camped. They have three grown children. For fun they like to walk in the Scottish countryside, sail on the local loch, and share a single chocolate together (affectionately known as The Chocolate Moment).

LITTLE TIME, LOTS OF LOVE

BUILDING CONNECTION WITH BRIEF MOMENTS



SCAN FOR AUDIO



PETER FRAENKEL WORKED as a marriage and family therapist in downtown New York. Day after day he saw distressed couples who worked very long hours. They were bickering, not communicating well, and not spending much time together. As he listened to the couples, he noticed a pattern. The less time they spent together, the less warm, close, and loved they felt. They started to feel anxious about the well-being of their relationship, and this made them feel grumpy and argumentative.

TEN SIMPLE CONNECTIONS

Fraenkel realized that their lifestyles often had irregular schedules, heavy stress loads, and long hours or days away from each other. He came up with a very simple idea that can also be a blessing for ministerial couples and families. He discovered that if couples connected for sixty-second caring interactions ten times a day, with the loving moments scattered from morning until night, they could keep their love fueled and alive.

It only takes about ten minutes a day to nurture warm connections. The best way to scatter these loving moments throughout the day is to have two in the morning, one when you lovingly part for work, one when you reunite in the evening, two before bedtime, and the rest scattered throughout the day.¹

However busy you are, you can probably spend ten minutes connecting with those you love, whether it's your spouse, kids, or special friends. Each time we connect warmly, a burst of oxytocin hormone showers our brain, helping us to feel loved, loving, and happy. Making time for regular brief connections helps us feel connected all day long.

SPIRITUAL CONNECTION FIRST

Another way of using Fraenkel's idea to bless your life is by connecting with God for at least one minute every hour. Of course, it's good to spend focused time with God for more than one minute. But we can also pause each hour to be filled with His love for us, to pray for help, to thank Him for the gifts of the past hour, and to be filled with wonder at something He has made. The more often we connect with God, the stronger our love connection with Him, and the easier it is for us to pause and love others.



*It only takes
about ten
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Love flourishes when it's watered regularly, especially when it is drip-fed.

A SIMPLE PRESCRIPTION FOR LOVE

Love flourishes when it's watered regularly, especially when it is drip-fed. This keeps the plant of love alive much better than an annual soaking. Our human relationships are one of the most significant investments in our lives. The more we invest in our relationship, the more likely we are to be happy and the less likely we are to have conflicts. A little warm and intentional effort can go a very long way.

ONE-MINUTE CONNECTIONS

Some of these ideas focus on loving moments with your spouse but can be adapted for children. The more often your child experiences a love connection, the easier it is for them to manage their behavior.

Give focused attention.

- Share the happiest moment in your day.
- Listen attentively as the other person shares the happiest moment in their day.
- Gaze into each other's eyes for a minute.
- Run into each other's arms when you meet.

Appreciate each other.

(Appreciation lowers conflicts!)

- Tell them, "I really appreciate you because . . ."
- Say, "Thank you so much for doing . . ."
- Tuck notes in their lunch box, send a text message, and surprise them with a small gift or a flower.

Convey how precious they are to you.

- Verbally express that you value them:
 - "I'm so glad that you are in my life!"
 - "Being your partner gives me so much joy!"
 - "You are the best thing that ever happened to me!"
- Create photos, gifts, and other tangible signs to show that you value your relationship.
- Celebrate their special moments!

Be kind.

- Do small, kind things for the other person as often as possible.
- Offer water, juice, fruit tea, treats, smiles, hand massage—whatever they enjoy.
- Say, "When you did . . . that was so kind! Thank you!"
- Tell them, "The affection I enjoy the most is . . ." (for example, hugs, kind words, thoughtful gifts, caring acts, or special time together).

Offer help.

- Anticipate when help is needed.
- Be ready and willing to help cheerfully.
- Clear the table, put things away, and take laundry to the bedroom.
- Each time you leave a room, do one thing to make it tidier.

Laugh together.

- Watch a funny social media clip—animals can be crazy!
- Buy amusing cards for each other—or photograph them in the shop.
- Play hide and seek. Have a lingering kiss when you find each other.
- Take turns naming an animal and then kissing each other as if you were that animal (for example, monkeys, lions, crocodiles, butterflies, giraffes).
- Explore *Minute to Win It* games on the internet for quick and funny challenges.

Soothe each other.

- Make time for a lingering hug or kiss.
- Rub your partner or child's back.
- Light a candle together.
- Share a chocolate and see who can make their piece last the longest.
- Hold hands and pray silently for each other.
- Know what comforts each other (hugs, talking, favorite food, walks, fun, distractions).
- Make their favorite drink or food and enjoy it with them.

Express joy.

- Sing loudly to a lively song.
- Celebrate something—anything!
- Give your partner an imaginary award for something they do well.
- Share a happy memory or exchange a happy photo in your messaging system.

Share wonder.

- Name star constellations or gaze at the moon.
- Find something in nature that fills you with wonder and show it to each other.
- Watch a short nature video clip of a sea otter, dolphin, or butterfly.
- Drive to a viewpoint and watch the sunset.

Make a one-minute love kit.

Include your favorite ways to make special moments with your spouse. You may also adapt these ideas for use with your children.

- Candles and matches
- Prayer journal and pen
- Special chocolates or dried fruits
- Hot chocolate packets or herb teas
- Massage oil or perfumes
- Sticky notes
- Bubble wand and solution
- Book of love quotes
- Bible with bookmarks at your favorite texts
- Favorite treats
- Funny cartoons or greeting cards that make you smile
- Paper and pens for special messages
- Playlist of favorite music
- Couple question card set—or write your own questions
- A word puzzle or game you enjoy
- Cookie baking kit



¹ Fraenkel, Peter. "Time and Couples, Part II: The Sixty-Second Pleasure Point." *101 More Interventions in Family Therapy*. Edited by T.S. Nelson & T. S. Trepper. New York: The Haworth Press, 1998.

Karen Holford works for the Trans-European Division, which means she travels many days a year. She connects with her pastor-husband through shared online devotions, prayer, text messages, and enjoying a treat over Zoom each evening as they talk about their day.

A little warm and intentional effort can go a very long way.



LOVE IS... MEETING EACH OTHER'S NEEDS

by Karen Holford



THE JOURNAL

12

FIRST QUARTER 2012

Lori was on the phone to her mother, Rachel. “But Andy should know exactly what I need because he loves me!”

Rachel was quiet for a moment. Then she said, “When Tyrell cries, do you always know what he needs?”

“No, of course not, but he’s just a baby!”

“Maybe, but you love him, so doesn’t that mean you know *exactly* what he needs *all* the time?”

Lori thought for a moment. “OK, I get what you’re saying!” Rachel could sense the unseen smile on Lori’s face as she realized her expectations were unrealistic.

“It would really help if Tyrell could tell me what he needed. My life would be so much easier. Maybe it would help if I explained to Andy what I need from him. And maybe I should ask him what he needs from me?”

Believing that those who love us will automatically *know* what we need, *and* be able to provide it for us whenever we *want* it, is completely unrealistic. The more intimately we know each other, the more we may understand each other’s needs. But it’s much more effective if we can talk to each other about our needs and discover the best ways to meet them.

UNRAVELING MUDDLED MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Understanding what love is really all about was a bit of a mystery during the first few years of our marriage. We loved each other, and we tried to care for each other, but we’d often mess up or find ourselves in a muddle of misunderstandings and disappointed expectations.

So it was a great relief to us when we met Dr. David Ferguson from Intimate Life Ministries and his wife, Teresa, who taught us about relational needs. They gave us a whole new way of looking at our relationship and talking about how we could love each other

in deeper and more practical ways. This perspective has also helped us in our relationships with our children, our colleagues, our church members, and even the strangers we meet in the street.

The Fergusons explained that, just as there are ten important life commandments in Exodus 20, there are at least ten important relationship instructions that Paul mentions in the New Testament. But unfortunately he didn’t put them all in one chapter and explain how important they were for strengthening our relationships! If we re-described Paul’s instructions as relational needs that we all have to some degree, we could name them as needs for acceptance, affection, appreciation, approval, attention, comfort, encouragement, respect, security, and support. We find these described in different ways in different Bibles and languages, but they are all vital for building strong and healthy relationships. Ellen White

also describes these needs and stressed their importance in creating an attractive atmosphere of love and happiness.

These relational needs are also relationship-strengtheners—different actions that help us to feel loved. Without these basic building blocks in a relationship we can soon feel unloved, unappreciated, and uncared for. When we feel safe, respected, and loved, we usually feel much freer to talk

THERE ARE AT LEAST TEN IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP INSTRUCTIONS THAT PAUL MENTIONS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

WHEN WE FEEL SAFE, RESPECTED, AND LOVED, WE USUALLY FEEL FREER TO TALK AND DEVELOP SPIRITUALLY.



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about the things that we really need to talk about as a couple, and even freer to develop spiritually, as we understand more about the way God meets our relational and spiritual needs.

INSIGHTS IN THE KITCHEN

One day, before we understood the concept of relational needs, I was cooking alone in the kitchen. I was feeling emotionally out of sorts after a difficult day. I wanted Bernie to “connect” with me, but I wasn’t sure what I needed or how to ask for it. So I was grumpy and miserable, and as I cooked I banged the pots and pans and cupboard doors and didn’t care how much noise I made. Bernie heard me crashing around and decided, understandably, that it was better to leave me alone. Of course, that didn’t help, because what I really needed was Bernie!

A few weeks after learning about relational needs I was in the kitchen again, feeling tired and discouraged. As I stood at the sink I ran through the list of relational needs, wondering which ones I needed the most. I felt as if I needed all of them, but the ones I needed most were support, encouragement, and comfort. Put into practical terms, I needed Bernie to come and make

INSTEAD, WE ASK OURSELVES THE QUESTION, “WHICH RELATIONAL NEEDS AREN’T BEING MET, AND WHAT CAN I DO TO MEET THEM?”

supper with me, talk together about how our day had been, say one encouraging thing, and give me a hug.

Bernie was also looking out for my relational needs. When he heard me struggling in the kitchen he realized that I probably needed support, so he came and made a salad. As we chatted together I was able to tell him that I needed some

encouragement, and I asked him for a hug. When Bernie talked about his day, it sounded as if he needed some comfort too. He’d been on a difficult committee, so he needed the comfort of a shoulder rub, a refreshing walk together, and some chamomile tea.

A GOOD QUESTION

These days, when either of us behaves in an unexpected or frustrated way, we no longer think our spouse is overreacting. Instead, we ask ourselves the question, “Which relational needs aren’t being met, and what can I do to meet them?” It also works well with our children and with our church members. I realize that when my colleague seems angry, he might really be feeling unsafe or disrespected in some way, and when my friend sounds discouraged she might need some support as well as encouragement.

Why is “relational need-meeting” important?

- **We need to know that God loves us.** God works hard to provide for our needs—physically, spiritually, and relationally, and God’s love becomes more real when another human being tries to minister to us in the way God ministers to us. *My God shall supply all your need (Phil. 4:19, KJV).*
- **We need to know that other people love us and care for us.** *It is not good for the man to be alone (Gen. 2:18).*
- **When others take the time to meet our needs** it builds our self-worth in a positive way and we start believing we are valuable. We believe that we’re worth loving, not only by another human being but also by God. *Build each other up (1 Thess. 5:11).*
- **When we feel loved and valued** we have healthier thoughts about ourselves. We feel more hopeful, happier, less alone, and more able to meet other people’s needs and minister to them. *As I have loved you, so you must love one another (John 13:34).*
- **We grow spiritually as we understand** and experience more about God’s love for us and how we can share that love with others. *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thess. 3:12).*

THREE BARRIERS TO MEETING EACH OTHER’S NEEDS

Ideally we learn how to recognize our own needs, and we discover the best ways to ask each other to meet those needs if the other person hasn’t been aware of them. We can also learn how to discover



what our partners need and how to ask them what we can do to help.

But there are three unhelpful and unhealthy barriers to meeting each other's needs:

1. We think our needs are more important than theirs (selfishness and greed).
2. We think we can meet all our needs all by ourselves (self-sufficiency and pride).
3. We feel guilty if other people try to meet our needs because we believe we should be the one who meets everyone else's needs (overly self-sacrificial).

If other people don't meet our needs we soon become self-sufficient. "Well, if no one's going to meet my needs, I'll just do it myself!" But in the world of relationships, this doesn't work very well. Try comforting yourself when you need a hug, or paying attention to yourself, or helping yourself feel secure. These are all hollow experiences when our needs aren't being met by other caring human beings.

THE DANGER FOR MINISTRY MARRIAGES

Ministry couples often find themselves in relational tangles or in a hurtful experience of aloneness. Ministers can easily and unintentionally give the message that their work is super-important because it's God's work, and everything else in the home and family is less important. This can leave the minister's wife feeling hurt and insignificant because she has to put her needs lower than her husband's needs. Everyone in the congregation seems to be more important than she is. Everyone else's needs are greater than hers. Eventually she feels lonely, overwhelmed, and uncared for because she *does* have needs that *do* need to be met by others for her own relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Neglecting the importance of each other's relational needs can quickly damage a marriage.

OUR TOP TEN RELATIONAL NEEDS

So what are some of these relational needs? Here's what the Bible and *Adventist Home* have to say:

Acceptance – willingly and warmly welcoming a person who has made a mistake

- "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Rom. 15:7).
- "Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude, the atmosphere that surrounds ourselves, which determines what will be revealed to us in another" (*Adventist Home*, p. 105).

Affection – expressing care through warm and gentle touching

- "And he took the children in his arms" (Mark 10:16).
- "Let the husband aid his wife by his sympathy and unfailing affection" (*Adventist Home*, p. 218).
- "Love cannot long exist without expression" (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Appreciation – expressing thanks or praise to each other

- "I praise you for remembering me" (1 Cor. 11:2).
- "The husband should let his wife know that he appreciates her work" (*Adventist Home*, p. 114).
- "Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness" (*Adventist Home*, p. 16).

ASKING YOUR SPOUSE TO MEET YOUR NEEDS

ATTENTION

I'd really like you to come for a walk with me, even though I know you have other things to do.

RESPECT

Please let me tell you some of my thoughts and ideas.

ACCEPTANCE

I need to know that you still care about me, even when I get things wrong and make mistakes.

AFFECTION

Please can I have a hug?

ENCOURAGEMENT

I feel as if this project is taking forever! Your encouragement would mean so much to me!

APPRECIATION

I washed your car for you because I know you like to drive a clean car.

SUPPORT

Please can you help me for a few minutes?

COMFORT

I'm feeling really sad. Can you just hold me for a while?

SECURITY

Can I trust you not to tell anyone?

APPROVAL

Tell me three reasons why you're glad you married me!

Approval – blessing, building up, or affirming each other

- “Building others up according to their needs” (Eph. 4:29).
- “Watch well your words, for they have a powerful influence for good or for ill” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Attention – being interested in each other and focusing on each other

- “There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other” (1 Cor. 12:25).
- “Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions” (*Adventist Home*, p. 106).

OFFERING TO MEET YOUR SPOUSE’S NEEDS

ATTENTION

I want to spend time with you, doing whatever you’d like to do.

RESPECT

I really value your opinions and ideas.

ACCEPTANCE

It doesn’t matter that you made a mistake. It’s only human! Nothing you could do would ever stop me from caring for you!

AFFECTION

What can I do to help you feel especially loved?

ENCOURAGEMENT

I know it’s hard work, but you’re doing such a great job! I’m so proud of you!

APPRECIATION

Thank you for washing my car and filling it up with petrol!

SUPPORT

What’s the best thing I could do to help you right now?

COMFORT

I can see how upset you are. What can I do to comfort you?

SECURITY

You can trust me. I won’t let you down.

APPROVAL

I’m so glad I married you! I couldn’t have a better husband/wife!

Comfort – responding sensitively to each other’s pain with words, feelings, and touch

- “Who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Cor. 1:4).
- “Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Encouragement – helping each other to persevere toward their goals

- “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11).
- “His kindness and loving courtesy will be to her a precious encouragement, and the happiness he imparts will bring joy and peace to his own heart” (*Adventist Home*, p. 218).

Respect – valuing each other highly

- “Honor one another above yourselves” (Rom. 12:10).
- “Never should either party indulge in a joke at the expense of the other’s feelings. Never should either the husband or wife in sport or in any other manner complain of each other to others” (*Adventist Home*, p. 177).
- “Do not try to compel each other to do as you wish” (*Adventist Home*, p. 107).

Security – enabling each other to feel peaceful and safe in the relationship

- “Live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18).
- “Anything that would mar the peace and unity of the family should be firmly repressed, and kindness and love should be cherished” (*Adventist Home*, p. 120).
- “Let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union is a mistake or a disappointment” (*Adventist Home*, p. 106).

Support – coming alongside and helping each other

- “Carry each other’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2).
- “Let the wife feel that she can lean upon the large affections of her husband—that his arms will strengthen and uphold her through all her toils and cares, that his influence will sustain hers—and her burden will lose half its weight” (*Adventist Home*, p. 216).



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION READ:

Never Alone, by David and Teresa Ferguson

Never Alone Devotions for Couples, by David and Teresa Ferguson

Making (1 Corinthians 13) Love

GOD GAVE YOU AN AMAZING WEDDING GIFT!

AFTER MORE THAN 30 YEARS of marriage, three children, three grandchildren, 12 years serving in family ministries, and two master's degrees in family therapy, Bernie and I can honestly say that one of the most challenging aspects of our marriage has been our physical intimacy. All around us there are distorted messages about our sexuality and extremely unhelpful "advice" and role models. So it's not surprising that we feel bewildered, vulnerable, and confused about our sexual intimacy.

Over the years we've read books, attended marriage retreats, and even answered

challenging questions about sexuality in our own seminars. For a while we thought the Bible was relatively quiet on the subject, apart from the exuberant poetry of the Song of Songs. Then one day we were inspired to apply the concepts of love in 1 Corinthians 13 to our sexual intimacy. We soon discovered that this famous love chapter is packed with amazing principles that can infuse our human lovemaking and make it the amazing wedding gift that God designed for us.



LOVE IS PATIENT.

It's interesting that Paul chooses patience as the first principle in his poetic description of love. At first glance, patience seems like an odd choice; why not kindness, or forgiveness? But patience blends together a whole collection of loving virtues.

Patience with our partner comes from a deep respect for their needs and preferences. Patience is a way to be kind, thoughtful, humble, unselfish, and self-controlled. When someone is impatient with us, we often feel sad, lonely, frustrated, misunderstood, embarrassed, pressured, and inadequate. Instead of drawing us closer to each other, those negative feelings push us further apart.

Patience is an important ingredient of lovemaking. Patience is about putting the other person's needs before our own and waiting warmly and patiently for the other person to be ready. Patience keeps us from being irritated or frustrated with each other, especially when our relationship is facing challenges.

LOVE CARES MORE FOR OTHERS THAN FOR SELF.

Lovemaking works best when the husband and wife are both focused on giving each other a loving, comfortable, and happy experience. What makes my partner feel happy and loved is more important than what makes me feel good. Everyday unselfishness—doing things to support, encourage, and appreciate each other—naturally helps us to feel more loving and close to each other.

LOVE DOESN'T WANT WHAT IT DOESN'T HAVE.

Love is content with what it has. Love is faithful. Love doesn't fantasize about other partners, or desire experiences that our partner finds unappealing or uncomfortable. Love focuses on making the marriage relationship the best it can be so that both of you are content with the love you share together.

LOVE ISN'T PROUD OR PUFFED UP.

Love isn't bossy or boastful about its achievements. Love has a humble and serving heart. It doesn't make love to enhance its own ego, but aims to make love in ways that build up the other person.

LOVE DOESN'T FORCE ITSELF ON OTHERS.

If there's one thing that's definitely incompatible with love, it's using force, guilt, abuse, or pressure to make your partner do whatever you want—especially when they are reluctant, or they just don't want to.

Sometimes it helps if you both make a list of the things that you enjoy sexually. Then swap your lists and let your husband or wife choose the things on your list that they'd most like to do for you. That way you can make your preferences clear, and still leave space for your partner to choose what they feel most comfortable doing for you.

LOVE ISN'T "ME FIRST."

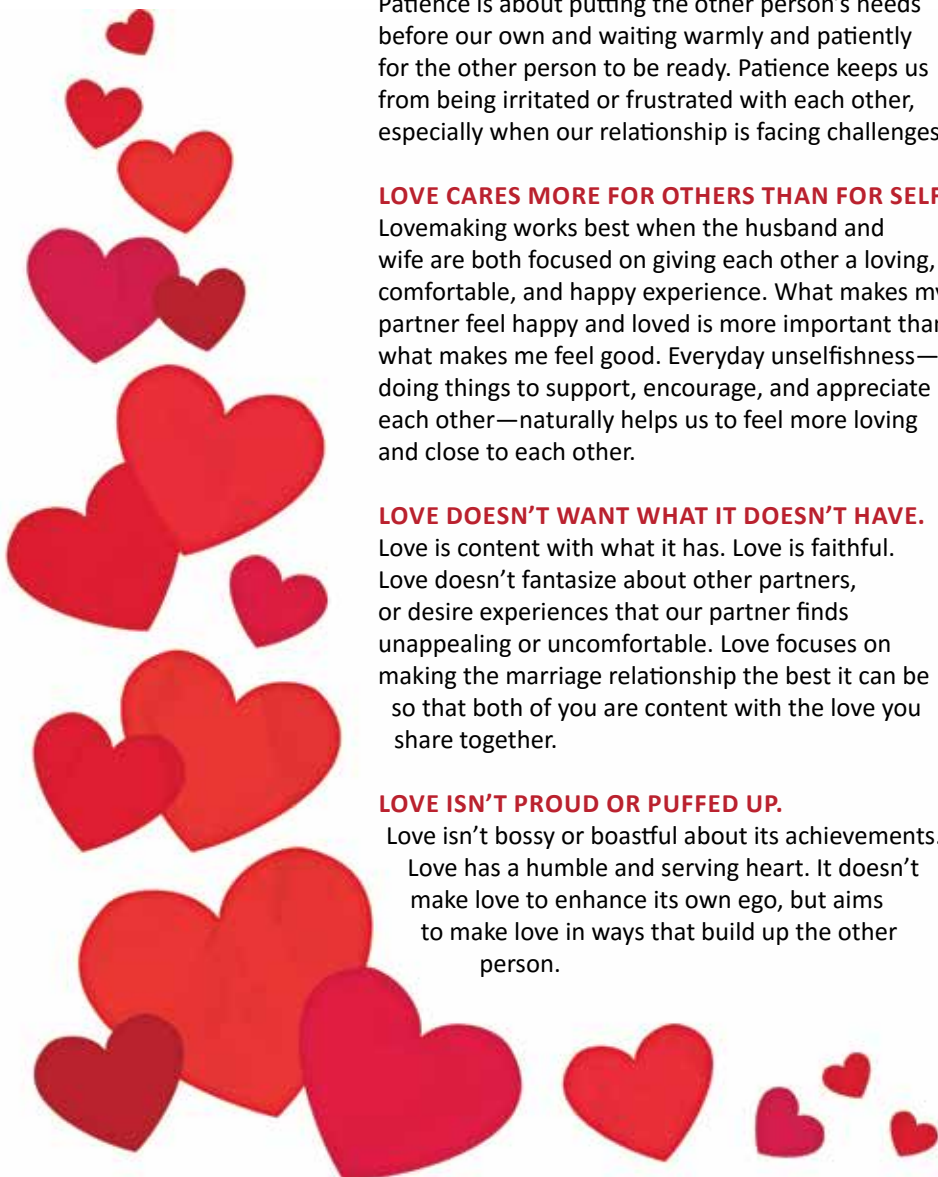
In true lovemaking the other person's pleasure is more important than our own. When each partner's goal is to make the other person feel special and loved, then the whole experience tends to work better.

Author and speaker Mark Gungor's secret for successful lovemaking is being kind to his wife. He discovered that the kinder and more helpful he is, the closer she feels to him. His thoughtful care invites her loving response. Everyday kindness and loving attention paves the way for deeper sexual intimacy.

LOVE DOESN'T FLY OFF THE HANDLE.

Lovemaking doesn't always go according to plan. It's a complicated process, especially for women, whose bodies can respond in completely different ways each time.

When things don't work out, try exploring other ways to soothe and pleasure each other, rather than getting angry or rejecting each other. Try a gentle back massage, a



close cuddle, or kissing each other's bodies. Or look at the funny side and have a tickle and a giggle to help you both relax again.

LOVE DOESN'T KEEP SCORE OF THE SINS OF OTHERS.

Love doesn't hold back to punish the other person. Lovemaking is a powerful way to be a channel of God's love and grace to your partner. When forgiveness is difficult, and trust has been broken in painful ways, pray for the Holy Spirit to heal the pain and bring you close again.

LOVE DOESN'T REVEL WHEN OTHERS GROVEL.

Loving intimacy is something that lifts you both up. It doesn't humiliate or debase the other person, and it doesn't beg or manipulate. Love enjoys celebrating and honoring each other. What could you do to celebrate and honor your spouse?

LOVE TAKES PLEASURE IN THE FLOWERING OF TRUTH.

It isn't always easy to be lovingly honest with each other about our lovemaking experiences, because it's such a sensitive and vulnerable area of our relationship. But it can be helpful to tell each other, "I really like it when you . . ." or "It feels nice when you . . ."

LOVE PUTS UP WITH ANYTHING.

All kinds of life experiences and health challenges can have a profound effect on our intimate relationships. Pregnancy, tiredness, small children, illness, feeling sad, or being overwhelmed by work are just a few of the things that can disrupt our lovemaking. But love patiently and kindly supports each other through the challenges and looks for fresh ways to show care and be intimate with each other.

LOVE MEANS TRUSTING GOD ALWAYS.

God cares about your marriage and wants it to be the best it can be. He wants to bless you both through your sexual intimacy. But sometimes we hit roadblocks and challenges, and then it's worth going for help as soon as you can. Or try reading a book such as *Rekindling Desire* by Barry and Emily McCarthy.

LOVE ALWAYS LOOKS FOR THE BEST.

If something doesn't work out as you hoped, believe the best about your partner and yourself. And after you make love, don't forget to thank each other. Find a way to tell each other the best part of the experience for you so that you can learn about each other's preferences and grow into deeper intimacy.

LOVE NEVER LOOKS BACK.

Rather than regretting the mistakes of the past, or yearning for what used to be, love looks forward to new possibilities for intimacy. Take time to list and share three hopes for your intimate relationship, and work together to make them happen. Try some of the free printables and ideas at www.thedatingdivas.com, a Web site run by Christian women who are devoted to improving marriages with creative ideas for dates and intimate experiences.

LOVE KEEPS GOING TO THE END.

Love finds ways to pleasure the other person, even when your bodies are transformed into silvery seniority. Many older couples continue to enjoy their ever-changing journey into their God-given and mutually delightful intimacy.

LOVE NEVER DIES.

But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that moment: trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love. ■

Karen Holford is the director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division. She has been married to Bernie for nearly 33 years.



MARRIAGE MAKEOVER

by Karen Holford

Kate and Paul had been married for two years. At first everything was rosy and fun. But Paul's ministry meant working long hours during evenings and weekends when Kate was home from her teaching job. He was overtired and stressed. She was lonely and frustrated. Together they argued and complained. What started as a dream was disintegrating into disaster. They took a vacation to refocus on their marriage. They read books, listened to each other's needs and hopes, and began their up-and-down adventure into a new way of living with a deeper way of loving.

Marriages tend to follow a natural growth pattern. We start with the honeymoon buzz of fresh excitement. Everything glows. We do our best to please each other, even when we want to do something else.

This dreamy, romantic phase can't last forever. We need to live in the real world. Soon we settle into routines, relax our guard, and let our imperfections drive wedges between us. We may have hopeless arguments that go 'round in circles. We may feel misunderstood and unloved. The fun disappears. We wonder how we can stay in a relationship where there are so many problems and difficulties. But the challenges are there to nudge us toward discovering a more mature relationship where we learn to live the love described in 1 Corinthians 13. Every marriage needs to work through these challenging

stages if the couple is to experience the "becoming one" kind of love that God intends for them, the kind of love that He wants us to experience with Him.

The developmental stages of a marriage follow a rough sequence:

The dream stage (Solomon and his bride). This is an exciting, passionate, fun stage of marriage. But we often hide our true thoughts, ideas, feelings, and preferences. We may secretly be afraid that if the other person knows what we are really like, he or she won't love us anymore. Love is like a beautiful flower, but it needs to grow deeper roots to survive the reality of life.

The disillusionment stage (Samson and Delilah). We see flaws in one another. Even the things that once attracted us have become irritations. We argue with each other and feel misunderstood, unsupported, unappreciated, disrespected, lonely, hopeless, trapped, or isolated. A ministry marriage can be even more at risk during this stage because of the pressures of work, the long hours away from home, and the expectation that a minister ought to be a more caring spouse.

The discovery stage (maybe Abraham and Sarah, or Joseph and Mary). Here we take the time to relearn who we really are in our marriage and how to love each other well. This is where we can help each other explore the adventurous and varied territory of our hearts, minds, and lives. We learn

to talk openly and lovingly, listen carefully, and respect and appreciate each other's differences and strengths. We learn to forgive each other and comfort each other through life's hurts. We discover how each of us likes to be loved and how to strengthen our marriage relationship by investing time and energy in it.

The depth/delight stage (maybe Zechariah and Elizabeth or Jesus and us). This is where we know each other deeply and honestly. We cherish our differences as strengths and see them as gifts that God has given to enrich our relationship. We believe the best about our spouse and focus on what is good and lovely about him or

her. We also believe our spouse is doing his or her best to love us. We feel at peace in the relationship because any hurts are quickly discussed and forgiven, and there is no chance that our spouse would ever betray us or leave us.

These stages are general guidelines which overlap as we move from one stage to the next. Sometimes we have to backtrack. Life throws us challenges, and we need to rediscover each other in new places, different work situations, as new parents, or in sickness and disability.

This way of looking at your marriage gives hope. If you're in the dream stage, you will know how to identify disillusionment and tackle it before it gets out of hand. If you're disillusioned, it can be a stimulus to rediscover each other and enter a richer phase of your relationship. If you are in the discovery stage, keep going; there are always new things to discover about each other. Keep looking for fresh ways to show love to your spouse. If you manage to reach the depth stage, enjoy the warmth of its mature love and be open to discovering even more.

Where do you think your marriage is on the line below?

Dream Disillusionment Discovery Depth




LOVE DOES NOT
DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT
REJOICES WITH THE
TRUTH. IT ALWAYS
PROTECTS, ALWAYS
TRUSTS, ALWAYS HOPES,
ALWAYS PERSEVERES.

1 Corinthians 13:6, 7



and look for fresh ways to show patience, forgiveness, respect, etc., to each other in your marriage. Ask yourself: "What difference might it make to our marriage if I were to be more patient, kind, forgiving, etc.?"

- Pray that God will help your marriage grow. He's on your side and wants your marriage to be the best it can be because that is good for you, your family, your friends, your church, and His mission in the world.

Note: Watch for future articles in this series, which has been designed to help you rediscover each other in your ministry marriage and grow your love into a place of deeper peace and joy. 

What one thing could you do to move your marriage toward an even deeper love? Here are a few ideas:


- Every day, do something, however small, as a love-gift for your marriage, something that will bless your relationship or your spouse. Record these actions in a notebook and note the effect they have on your spouse and your marriage.

- Notice at least one thing each day that your husband or wife does that you really like. Then tell him or her how much you appreciate it. Positive affirmation is much more powerful and effective than negative nagging! Write these examples in your notebook, too.

- Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. List the different qualities of love

and look for fresh ways to show patience, forgiveness, respect, etc., to each other in your marriage. Ask yourself: "What difference might it make to our marriage if I were to be more patient, kind, forgiving, etc.?"

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KAREN HOLFORD has been married to Bernie for over 26 years, and they have three young-adult children. Karen and Bernie are both family therapists, and one of the highlights of their ministry is leading out in marriage retreats for ministerial couples. They live in Auchtermuchty, Scotland, where Bernie is the mission president and pastor of the Crieff SDA Church on the edge of the Scottish Highlands. Karen has worked alongside Bernie in family ministries, and she has also been a children's ministries director. She is currently a freelance writer and has written more than a dozen books and over 200 articles. When she has any moments left in her day, she loves to sew quilts!

Money, Money, Money . . .

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE AT ODDS WITH YOUR SPOUSE ON THIS TOUGH TOPIC

MOLLY STARED AT THE credit card statement in her hands. How come they were more than \$10,000 in debt? Why hadn't Bill spoken about it before? And how could they ever pay it all back?

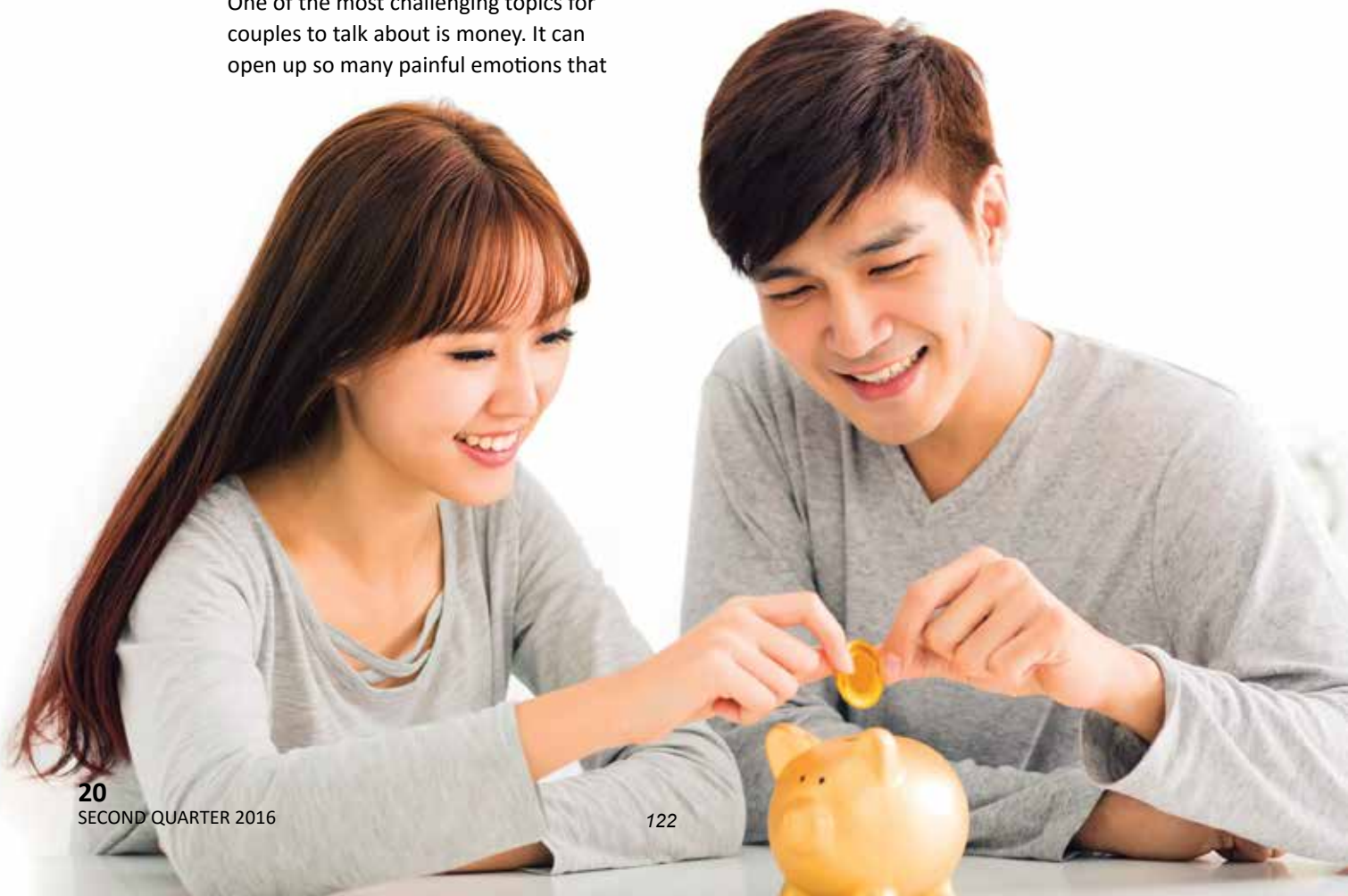
Hannah hid the blouse under the groceries when she carried them into the house. She didn't know how to tell James that she'd bought something new.

One of the most challenging topics for couples to talk about is money. It can open up so many painful emotions that

it's easier to stuff them all in a garbage can and sit on the lid. Money is not just about paper and coins; it comes all tangled up with concepts of ownership, power, identity, and entitlement.

THE MEANING OF MONEY

What does money mean to you? Here are some tips to keep in mind as you answer that question.



- Instead of thinking about money as “my money” or “our money,” think about it as “God’s money entrusted to us.”
- Try pausing before you purchase and ask yourself, “Why am I buying this? Is it what I really need—or am I trying to fill an empty space in my heart?” Sometimes we buy things because we think they will make us feel better. It could be anything from a doughnut to a designer handbag. But maybe what you really need is a hug, some special time with your spouse, or some appreciation, comfort, encouragement, understanding, or support.
- Pray about your use of money. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where you can make changes and grow.
- Talk about your finances together. Make it feel safer by telling each other three things you appreciate about your spouse’s use of money, at least one thing you would like to do better in relation to money, and one financial goal you’d like to work toward together. Avoid blaming each other, because that will push you further apart and make it harder to talk honestly and openly.
- If you have any debts, work out a manageable plan to reduce them. Aim to owe less at the end of each month rather than more.
- Set short, medium, and long-term financial goals together. Determine how much you want to save each month and how you plan to save for a long-term project, such as buying a home.
- Give each other an allowance that can be used freely without question. Agree what can be spent on household purchases with, and without, the other person’s consent.
- If talking about money becomes emotional or difficult, take a break and consider why you feel sad, ashamed, embarrassed, angry, guilty, afraid, etc. When do your financial choices make you feel truly happy, hopeful, peaceful, loved, and loving? What are the relational needs that you need your partner to meet in order to help you feel loved and safe again, such as respect, forgiveness, understanding, time with each other, physical closeness, acceptance, comfort, and encouragement?

FINANCIAL PLANNING

Every marriage needs a balance of wise saving, wise spending, and wise sharing or giving. All of this complexity needs careful planning. Here are some strategies for achieving that.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS

You and your spouse will come to a greater understanding of each other (and yourselves) as you talk over these questions.

- How did my family talk about money and use their money?
- What wisdom did I learn from my family about saving money?
- What wisdom did I learn from my family about spending money?
- What have I learned from my own mistakes and successes about saving, spending, and using money?
- When it comes to finances, what are my strengths, and what are my challenges?
- When it comes to talking about money, I often feel (sad, angry, afraid, frustrated, etc.), and it would really help me if you could . . .
- Three things I appreciate about how you help to manage the family budget are . . .
- One thing I would like to do differently to help our finances is . . .

Money, Money, Money . . .

- Don't be afraid to go for financial counseling if your money is in a muddle. The sooner you start to address the problems, the easier it will be to solve them.


FINANCIAL VALUES

It's important to establish a value system in your approach to money. Here are some ways to do that.

- Make a list of five to six values relating to your finances, and list them in order of priority. Encourage your spouse to do the same. Then share your lists, explaining what your values mean to you, where they've come from, and why you placed them in that order. Next develop a shared financial value list, discussing how you want to blend and prioritize your values as a couple. Use this value list to help you evaluate your spending and financial planning.
- Study biblical values connected to finances. Consider the ones below:
 - *Prayer*: Asking God to help you use His money wisely, and asking Him to heal the hurts and struggles connected with your use of money (Philippians 4:6, 7).
 - *Faith*: Believing that God will provide the things you need (Philippians 4:19).
 - *Trust*: Trusting Him with your tithe (Malachi 3:10).

- *Gratitude*: Thanking God for your money, recognizing that every penny comes from His generous provision to you (1 Thessalonians 5:18).
- *Stewardship*: Providing wisely for the current and future needs of your family (Luke 16:10-12).
- *Generosity*: Giving generously to those who are in need or to bring joy to others (2 Corinthians 9:6-15).
- *Honesty*: Being open and transparent with each other about your financial challenges and spending (Matthew 5:37, Proverbs 19:1).
- *Hospitality*: Sharing the gifts of your food and home with others so that they can experience God's love and your care for them (Romans 12:13).
- *Forgiveness*: Forgiving yourself, and others, for past financial mistakes (Colossians 3:13).
- *Patience*: Being patient with each other when financial mistakes are made (1 Corinthians 13:4).
- *Economy and resourcefulness*: Using your resources wisely, including reusing and mending things rather than discarding and wasting them (John 6:12).
- *Saving*: Being willing to save and invest money wisely rather than spend it immediately (Proverbs 13:11, Matthew 25:27).
- *Hard work*: Doing your best at whatever you do, as though you're working for God (Colossians 3:23, 24).
- *Sharing and lending*: Helping others to save money by lending them the things they need and letting those things go (generously) if you don't get them back (Luke 6:35, 1 Timothy 6:17-19).

For more ideas and help, visit:

<http://www.nadministerial.org/article/1089/family/sacred-family-circle/resources/at-home-resources/living-within-your-means> 

Karen Holford is a pastor's wife and family therapist living in Scotland.

No Need to Nag

“How many times do I have to ask you to fix the bathroom tap?”

“Why do you always wait until the last minute to tell me you need a packed lunch?”

“This is the third time this week my dinner has been cold! What’s your problem?”

“I can’t believe you forgot the bread . . . again. Don’t you ever listen?”

“Nag, nag, nag. All you ever do is nag!”



NAGGING DOUBTS

Nagging . . . probably we've all done it, at least once or twice. Especially when we feel stressed, overloaded, and unsupported. Nagging could be defined as "offering repeated reminders with ever-increasing frustration and urgency." But the problem isn't just frequency. Our tone of voice may be sarcastic, irritated, frustrated, resigned, or angry. Nagging puts the other person down. The implied message:

"I'm better than you are."

"I'm more self-controlled/more thoughtful/more careful than you."

"I think you're just stupid/incompetent/rude/inconsiderate."

"You'll never get it right/be good enough."

BETTER TO LIVE ON THE ROOF

Nagging negative comments grind away at the love and joy in our relationships. When we use our words carelessly, we end up tearing each other down rather than building each other up (Eph. 4:29).

Even the wise and powerful King Solomon apparently got nagged occasionally! It clearly wasn't good for his relationships either, since he thought it was better to live on the roof than with a nagging wife (Prov. 21:9)!

THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY?

Nagging and criticizing are some of the *least* effective ways to encourage someone to change behavior or do something we want. Nagging can imply that the other person is lazy, inadequate, or unhelpful. Being nagged can make our loved ones feel rebellious, stubborn, and even *less* like helping. Or they may help reluctantly and resentfully.

Appreciation can be much more effective. The power of kindness works like a sculptor, with each stroke gently smoothing the clay toward the desired shape. When you appreciate someone for the tiniest thing, they are more likely to want to do it again, and to do it cheerfully and willingly. Try it and see!

TURN COMPLAINTS INTO REQUESTS

Write your nag down. Read it carefully and then rewrite it as a simple, clear, and polite request. "Would you stop walking all over my clean kitchen floor with your dirty shoes!" might become, "Please take your shoes off and leave them at the doorstep so we can keep the kitchen floor clean."

Ask yourself how you might make the same request to a guest who was visiting your home. The polite version is likely to leave everyone feeling happier.

SCALE IT DOWN

Make a task list, then draw three columns beside it.

In the first column rate *how urgent* the task is on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is "very urgent."

In the second column, rate *how important* the task is on a scale of 1-5, where 5 is "very important."

Use the third column to add the two scores together. The highest scores are the things that need to be done first.

How important is it to fill the car with gas each week, tidy the kitchen by bedtime, or have a perfect home by sunset on Friday night? If one of you thinks a task is very important and rates it as a 5, but the other person thinks it's not so important and rates it as a 2, it will be helpful to talk about your different priorities in a calm, non-judgmental way.

WRITE IT DOWN

Make a shared "To Do" list. Agree on how often you'll each check the list, do a task, and cross it



Having a written list means that you don't have to remind each other so often.

off. Having a written list means that you don't have to remind each other so often. The list does the nagging for you in a much nicer way—as long as you don't nag each other to check the list!

ONCE IS ENOUGH

"I just ask once," says Paula. "I choose a good time to talk to Mark, make sure I have his full attention, and then tell him I have a problem and need his help. I show him what needs to be done, and then he decides how and when he'll fix it. Asking once like this means I don't have to nag, and it gives him the freedom to choose the best time in his schedule."

"TO DO" DATE

"We have 'To Do' dates!" says Tim. "We sit down together on a Sunday evening, share dessert, and make a list of everything that needs to be done in the week ahead. We decide who's going to do what, and then we spend the evening tackling the list and doing the worst jobs together so neither one feels so bad!"

BE CREATIVE

Find enjoyable, respectful, and caring ways to remind each other. "We found these crazy kids' toys," says Sandra. "You can write messages on them with washable markers and toss them in the laundry to wipe them clean. So we have one each and we write our 'requests' on them. Then we hide them for the other person to find. I know it sounds crazy, but it makes us laugh!"

DO IT YOURSELF

Are you nagging your husband to paint the bedroom, or your wife to iron your pants? Why not learn how to do it yourself?

Ella realized that learning to decorate a home was going to be useful because they moved so often. She attended a free class at the local home-decorating store and soon had the confidence to try painting a bedroom.

Tom and Lily decided to teach each other useful skills so they could both cook a meal, unplug the sink, fix the washing machine, iron a shirt and pants, check the car's oil, mow the lawn, etc. This helped them become more efficient as a couple and spend their energy getting jobs done rather than being frustrated at each other.

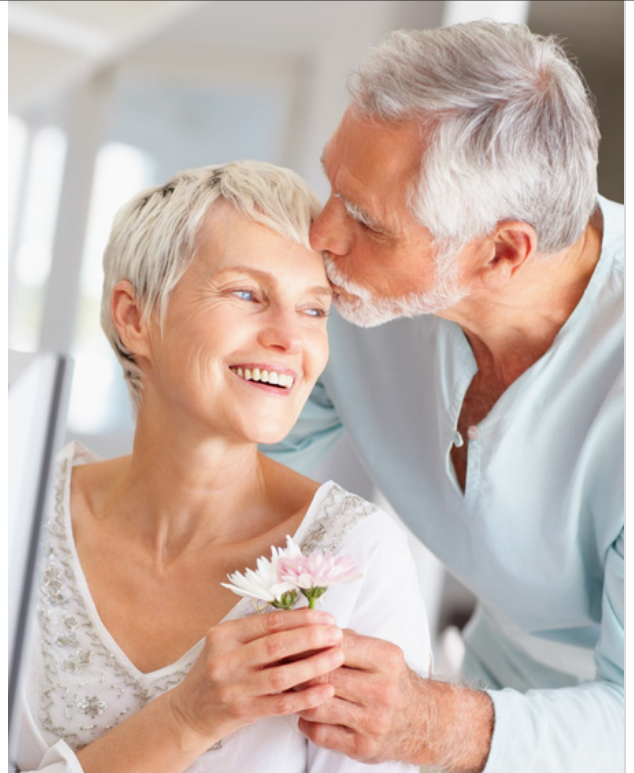
Think about your relationship:

- What do you remind your spouse about most frequently?
- Why do you think you're most likely to focus on this area?
- What do you think would invite your spouse to help you more often or more cheerfully?
- Which ideas listed above do you think might work best for you? **J**

Karen Holford is a family and couples therapist. Sometimes she and Bernie stick big smiley faces on the things that need to be done around their house!

NOT JUST LITTLE THINGS

by Karen Holford



I was running late, rushing around the house, picking up last minute things. Finally I had everything I needed. I closed the door and quickly turned my key in the lock. As I did, the key broke in two, and there I was, “imprisoned” outside my own home. My husband and youngest son had the other two keys. My husband was away for a few days, and my son wouldn’t be home from school until early evening. I needed to work on my computer. I had deadlines. But I was on the wrong side of the door. A little thing, a tiny crack in a key, but it made a massive difference to my life! Fortunately, a local locksmith cut me a new key from the broken pieces in just a few moments.

We’re surrounded by small things that make a big difference. Jesus noticed them too—a seed grows into a mustard bush; a small crumb of yeast works through a whole batch of bread dough; and a tiny teaspoon of faith moves a mountain. A man sells everything he has to buy a small but precious pearl because of the difference it will make to his life.

Little things make a big difference in our marriages too, much more than we realize.

I often assign homework for the troubled couples I see as a family therapist. Each partner is to do one loving thing for the other person every day, just something small and simple, without attracting any attention to it or making any comment. Each person is to keep one diary of the loving things they have

done for their partner and a separate diary of the loving things they notice their partner doing for them. This is where we start, helping them to show loving care in the little details of their lives. They may not feel like doing loving things. They may blame their spouse for all the pain in their relationship. They may feel too tired or too hurt to think of something kind to do. But this is an important task. Each of them needs to know their partner cares enough to try. If they don’t see signs of love, they may withdraw and give up working on the relationship.

When they do this homework two things happen—each person spends time thinking of loving things to do for their partner, and each person has to look out for evidence that their partner is being loving toward them. These two things can change their perspective on their marriage and help to build some of the love back into their relationship. Unless someone feels loved, accepted, hopeful, and safe, they’re unlikely

Unless someone feels loved, accepted, hopeful, and safe, they’re unlikely to risk talking about what’s really bothering their relationship.

“Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy.”

to risk talking about what’s really bothering their relationship. They may also be less likely to work on projects together, be supportive or helpful, encourage each other toward their goals, or be generous with each other—all vital ingredients of a successful and happy marriage.

John Gottman is famous for his research into what makes a successful marriage. In

his book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*,¹ he describes the things couples do and say that help him to predict the long-term well-being of their relationship. He’s discovered that it’s the very little things that matter, like responding warmly and thoughtfully to the most insignificant comment the other person makes:

“Oh look, it’s raining again!”

“Oh dear, that means you’ll get wet walking to work. Let me drive you.”

Successful couples turn to each other like sunflowers turning toward the sun. They seek each other out for companionship, comfort, and connection in the smallest aspects of their lives. These snippets of relationship may seem unimportant and mundane, but they are like tiny threads. Twist lots of those threads together, and you’ll have a strong rope. Carelessly let some fray, and the rope that binds you will weaken.

We see Jesus doing many little things to build connections with those He meets. We see Him turning toward those who need His love and forgiveness, not away from them. Like inviting himself to Zacchaeus’ house for supper, asking a woman at a well for a drink of water, or touching a leper. His thoughtful kindness opens their hearts to His love.

Our marriages are like bank accounts. The more we invest in our relationships—a penny of thoughtfulness here and a dime of helpfulness there—the more love, generosity, and goodwill we’ll have in our banks. Then we can draw on these valuable resources when we face challenges together.

But what if your partner isn’t investing in the relationship? What if it feels like your relational bank account is already hugely overdrawn? Just as one person doing little bits of damage can quickly destroy a happy relationship, one person doing little bits of love can transform a marriage into a place of

Simple things that can make a **big difference** to your marriage:

- Ask if you can pick up something from the store on the way home.
- Send a short text, note, or e-mail with a loving message.
- Work together on a household chore.
- Offer to make your spouse’s favorite drink.
- Speak kindly with a gentle voice.
- Smile warmly.

love, peace, and joy. It’s still an experiment worth trying because it’s how God treats us.

Ellen White expressed this beautifully: “Love cannot long exist without expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy. . . . Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. . . . Study to advance the happiness of each other. Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love. The warmth of true friendship, the love that binds heart to heart, is a foretaste of the joys of heaven” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 360).

Dear Loving Father in Heaven, Thank You for showing Your love to us in a million different ways each day, even though we’re not aware of them all. Please take away our selfishness and give us the desire, inspiration, and courage to invest our best love and thoughtfulness in the marriage You have given us. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

¹ John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work* (New York: Orion Books, 1999).



KAREN HOLFORD writes from Scotland, where she is a freelance writer and family therapist. Her husband, Bernie, is president of the Scottish Mission and pastor of the Crieff SDA Church. Every evening they sit and share one tiny piece of organic, fair-trade chocolate and chat about their day.

Praying Together



Karen Holford

Karen Holford and her husband, Bernie, serve in the South England Conference Family and Children's Ministry Departments. They will celebrate their silver wedding anniversary in December 2008. They are qualified family therapists and have two adult children and a teenager. Karen loves to quilt and Bernie loves to fly kites. Karen is the author of 100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids—and Grown Ups Too! which has been published by Pacific Press.

Bernie was still a seminary student when we were first married. I had led out in student ministries, and we had both served in all kinds of public ministries, speaking, praying, and even singing. We had also prayed together from the start of our friendship. But soon after we were married, we found it harder and harder to pray together as a couple. We soon discovered that praying as a couple is quite different from praying in front of a congregation or praying privately. We struggled and felt guilty that it was so hard at times, especially since we were a ministry couple. But as we talked to mature ministry couples, we discovered that ours was a fairly common experience.

Praying together is challenging for most couples, and ministry couples are no exception. Before marriage, prayer has often been a private and personal experience; learning to pray together as a couple can feel strange at first. And because most of us have never seen another married couple pray together, we have no role models to follow. But persistence will help you find the best way to pray together. Prayer helps you stay close to your spouse, as well as to God, and invites you into a deeper level of love and intimacy. God's Holy Spirit helps you to know what to

pray for and how to pray together. Be open to listening to how the Spirit wants to work with you both as you develop your relationship with each other and with God.

Questions to think about and discuss together:

- ♥ What are my concerns about praying together?
- ♥ What might be my spouse's concerns about praying together?
- ♥ What might help make it easier for me to pray with my spouse?
- ♥ What might make it easier for my spouse to pray with me?
- ♥ How might God use prayer to help us grow closer to Him and to each other?

If your spouse doesn't feel ready to pray with you yet:

- ♥ Show him/her gentle kindness; it is the Holy Spirit's job to prompt, not ours to push.
- ♥ Prayer is a way of showing concern for others. Ask your spouse what he/she would most like you to pray for, and then only pray out loud about what he/she has requested.



- ♥ Avoid behavior which could leave your spouse feeling discouraged or spiritually inferior, as this can distance you from each other. Remember that the aim of your prayer time is spiritual intimacy with God and with each other.

Ideas To Enrich Your Couple Prayer Experience

Silent hands prayer

This is one of the simplest of all prayers. Talk together for a few minutes about your prayer concerns, praises, and thanks. Then hold hands and silently pray for your spouse. Squeeze hands after a few moments and say “Amen” together. It can feel so good to know that someone else is praying for you, even if you can’t hear the words.

Praise

Praise is so central to our relationship with God. It changes our perspective on God, our lives, and our experiences. Praising God together is one of the easiest ways to strengthen your spiritual connection with each other. Take turns praising God for different things until you have listed at least 10 praises.

Sentence prayers

Prayer should be simple. Try praying one sentence at a time, and then let your spouse pray one sentence. You might follow the ACTS (Adoration, Confession, Thankfulness, Supplication) model of prayer and pray one or two sentences each for each section of your prayer together. As you get used to the idea, you can pray one sentence at a time but increase the number of sentences you pray under each section.

Prayer book

Keep a journal of thankfulness to God. At the end of each day, think of everything you want to thank God for and write these items in a small diary. In the morning, sit down together and write down the concerns you each have for the day. Promise to keep praying for each other through the day. If you get up at different times, take time

the night before to write a card for your spouse with your personal prayer requests for the day. When you get up and start your day, take your spouse’s prayer card and pray for him/her as often as you can.

Prayer notice-board

Use a bulletin board or magnet board (even a fridge door will do!) to create a prayer notice-board, with a collage of prayer requests, praising thoughts, thanks, cards, photos, texts, answers to prayer, and any other clippings. If you like being creative, make a beautiful prayer scrapbook together.

Conversational prayer

In conversational prayer, each person prays a few sentences and then stops to let the other person pray. Try to follow each other’s ideas and link your prayers together as if you were having a conversation with each other and with God.

Prayer cards

Buy some index cards in four different colors. Assign one aspect of prayer to each color (for example, yellow = praise, blue = confession, green = thanks, and pink = prayer requests).

Each of you can take a few cards of each color and write different sentence prayers according to the color-coded theme of the card. Lay the cards out together on the floor in rows of different colors and take turns reading the cards aloud as you pray together. Alternatively, lay the cards out and read them silently together while holding hands. Or shuffle the cards and deal them into two piles. Take a pile each and arrange them into a prayer sequence. Read each prayer aloud to each other.

Blessing each other

Try praying a simple blessing on each other when you part and meet and get up and go to bed. Create your own words and traditions for doing this, such as kissing each other on the forehead or hand before you say the words. Or create a special blessing gesture or signal so that you can secretly bless each other in public or show that you are praying for each other. Try Numbers 6:25; 2 Corinthians 13:14; or 1 Thessalonians 5:23 as simple blessings.

Be specific

Be as specific as possible when you pray for each other, and rejoice together when prayers are answered, even if the answers are not what you hoped they would be. It can be helpful to take a broad and eternal perspective on answers to prayer, remembering that God works all kinds of things into His plans even though situations sometimes look quite messy to us.

Confession

Prayers of confession may be best prayed in private until you feel ready to share together. If you’ve upset your

spouse in any way, then praying for forgiveness from God in your spouse's presence may be quite healing. Be careful that your prayers are not used to hurt your spouse, and be aware of the importance of praying humbly, so as not to spiritually intimidate the other person. There may also be a place for confessing to each other the wrongs you've done to others and for being accountable to each other and to God in finding ways to handle difficult relationships.

Prayer reminders

Carry a small item that will remind you to pray for your spouse when you are apart, such as a button, piece of ribbon, or small significant and symbolic item.

Daily prayer menus

Instead of praying for your entire prayer-request list every day, try grouping your prayer lists in some way, and pray for one category at a time. One day you may pray for your family members; another, colleagues and work issues; the next day, overseas issues and workers; the next day, local church and community issues, etc.

Prayer times

Pray for each other at a specific time every day. Set an alarm on your watch, mobile phone, or electronic diary. Perhaps you could text or e-mail your prayers, or pray together as an online MSN conversation if you are apart.

Prayer consequences

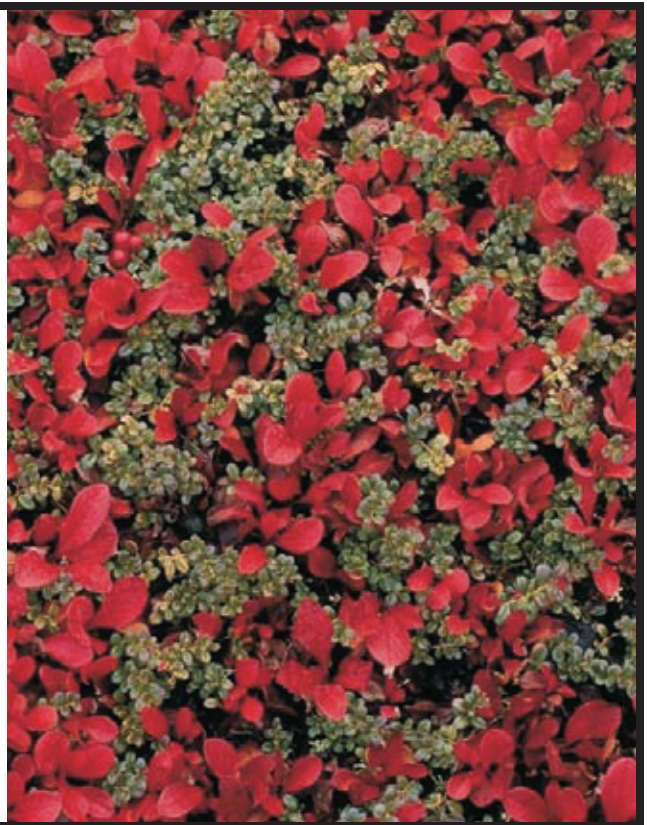
Write out your prayers on pieces of paper and pass them back and forth, adding a sentence at a time and folding over the top of the page. Follow the same sequence of themes and prayer requests and then read each prayer aloud as you pray together. Each prayer has then been created by both of you.

Depending on their unique styles of expression, their interests, their culture, and their spiritual experiences, couples can find different ways to pray. Take time to discover the best way to pray together. The Holy Spirit longs to help you develop this special relationship with each other and with God.



“We should study the Saviour’s parables where He spoke them, in the fields and groves, under the open sky, among the grass and flowers. As we come close to the heart of nature, Christ makes His presence real to us, and speaks to our hearts of His peace and love.”

—Christ’s Object Lessons,
page 25



PROTECTING YOUR FAMILY FROM PORN

PORNOGRAPHY IS NOT AN EASY topic to talk about. It would be nicer to pretend it isn't an issue and never appears in Christian homes, especially in the homes of pastoral families. But it does—and more often than we might imagine. In one study, 57 percent of pastors admitted to struggling with pornography currently or in the past.*

Porn has the power to destroy relationships, lives, marriages, and families. Some people believe it's not harmful, arguing that it's not real intimacy, that the people involved are doing it willingly, and, because they are watching it for free, they are not contributing financially to the industry. Some say they are using it for "educational" purposes, or even that it helps them to unwind after a stressful day. But it slowly and insidiously rewires the brain; destroys people's ability to focus on important matters; lowers the threshold of acceptable violence in intimate relationships; creates highly unrealistic expectations about the kinds of intimacy that their spouses, or future partners, will be happy to engage in; and often reinforces ideas of male dominance and control over women.

I have seen porn tear marriages apart as one partner demands more extreme acts of intimacy and their spouse feels that they are constantly being compared with the airbrushed and highly experimental, or dominated, actors in the videos. The more vulnerable partner begins to feel unacceptable and unattractive and that their wishes are not valued.

The internet has given everyone easy access to porn. It is being seen by younger and younger children. Many of them accidentally encounter it when playing on an adult's phone or when searching for something on the internet. And it can be extremely distressing for them. We have powerful internet filters on in our home, but the only time I have ever seen porn was when I was researching Adventist children's websites. I discovered that an innocent website of children's Bible studies had been hacked so that clicking on the site took unsuspecting visitors straight to porn.



Children and teenagers are naturally curious when they see something startling and unusual.

Children and teenagers are naturally curious when they see something startling and unusual. They may watch, often in horror, and then feel so ashamed that they dare not talk to their parents about it. Some children might keep on watching and see all kinds of inappropriate content and even develop an addiction. They are often exposed to increasingly extreme content, which quickly becomes “normalized” in their minds. This can lead to the abuse of others and distorted thinking about their own sexuality.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You must work together as parents to protect your family from the dangers of porn. The North American Division has created a series of excellent resources to help people understand the dangers of porn addiction at www.newfreedomtolove.org. The more you understand the issues around porn, the better equipped you will be to protect your family.

Besides staying informed, be a good example. Model healthy attitudes to sexuality and mutual respect, kindness, and acceptance of each other as a couple. Set good boundaries on the use of devices and the internet in your home. Help your children develop positive hobbies and habits, and talk to them about the issues of porn and addiction. Pray for your family and ask God for wisdom as you deal with this delicate area.

TALKING TO YOUNG CHILDREN

Porn may not be something you really want to discuss with your young child. But it’s vital that you talk about it before they access porn by themselves. Even if you manage and minimize their use of the internet, they can still be exposed in other ways, and they need to understand the issues before they ever glimpse it on a screen. When we simply explain what it is and what the dangers are, we give our children a much better chance of making positive choices.

Good Pictures Bad Pictures is an excellent book to help you talk about porn with your child (ages 3-9) in a warm, easy, and sensitive way. The book teaches children why porn can be damaging, how we become addicted, and what children CAN DO to prevent being affected by porn:

- **C** Close my eyes and look away to minimize the effect.
- **A** Always tell a trusted adult what happened—they want to help keep me safe.
- **N** Name porn when I see it so that I know to leave it alone.
- **D** Distract myself by doing something fun that takes all my attention for a while.
- **O** Order my thinking brain by choosing not to view porn, rather than letting my curious and feeling brain take over.

TALKING TO TEENS

One of the best ways to talk about porn with teens is to look for a natural discussion starter. This could be a news item or the latest research on the dangers of porn. It’s best if you are sitting or walking side by side so that you don’t have to make eye contact during the conversation. Or talk when you are working on a project together so that you both have something to look at and something to do with your hands. Another way to open up the topic is to forward a useful article or comment in a private message on their phone, and then ask them what they think about it.

Porn is not the easiest thing to discuss with anyone, especially your teenager. It’s OK to say that you feel a bit awkward about bringing up the topic but that it’s really important to you. Use tasteful humor to help you both relax. Make sure everything about your body language and tone of voice lets your teen know that you accept them, whatever experiences they have already had with porn, and that you are not going to blame or shame them. They need to feel that they can be open and honest with you. Try a “little and often” approach rather than having a big, intense conversation. Make it normal to share things you have learned about porn, or watch a helpful video together.

The internet has given everyone easy access to porn.

Many teens are curious about porn, and it's easy for them to have a look and see what it's all about. When researchers wanted to find some college-age boys who had never watched porn to create a control group, they couldn't find enough non-watchers, and they had to change the structure of their research project. Focus on the long-term goals your teenagers have for their life and explore how becoming addicted to porn can seriously affect their brains, their ability to concentrate on their studies and work, their mental health, and their relationships, especially their future marriage and family life. Watch the series "Brain, Heart, World" together, or watch it separately and then discuss the issues together (see resource list for website).

Work together with your teen on an accountability plan, in which you can both be honest with each other about your challenges and set up safe systems to help protect each other from temptations and addictions. Use systems that show each other which websites you have been to and pixelated screenshots of any adult sites that have been visited. Set up boundaries about the use of devices in private spaces and during the night, or make compliance with safety rules a condition of owning their own device.

If you discover that your children are struggling with porn, be kind, accepting, and forgiving. Being critical and judgmental can encourage them to become even more secretive. Buy Ben Dyer's book *Applying the Handbrake*. This resource will help them discover practical, Christian advice for living safely and wisely in the world today. Teens need warm, healthy, loving relationships with their parents, and they need to know that their loving Father in heaven will always forgive them and love them too.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

www.newfreedomtolove.org – North American Division website with a five-part series to explore the issues around porn. It is designed to use with the whole church.

www.protectyoungminds.org – A website to help you prepare and protect your children, help them heal if they have been exposed or addicted, and help you both speak about the issues in your community.

www.thenakedtruthproject.com – A British website designed to educate people about the dangers of porn.

www.brainheartworld.org – A series of three 30-minute videos exploring how porn addiction affects the brain, relationships, and the vulnerable people who are caught up in the industry.

www.axis.org – Discussion guides for Christian parents and their teens on key issues of life and faith.

Ben Dyer, *Applying the Handbrake: A Teenage Boy's Honest Account About God and Porn* (Naked Truth Resources, 2018).

Kristen A. Jenson, *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids* (Kennewick, WA: Glen Cove Press, 2014). J

* www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist and the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division. She has heard many stories of the devastating effect that pornography has had on marriages, families, relationships, and lives.



PROTECTING YOUR MINISTRY MARRIAGE

by Karen Holford



“HUSBANDS, LOVE YOUR WIVES, JUST AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH AND GAVE HIMSELF UP FOR HER.”

Eph. 5:25, NIV

I looked at the leftovers in the fridge. Each evening I would come home from work, heat the leftovers of the dinner Bernie had eaten at lunchtime, and then cook our dinner for the next day. He would eat it at lunchtime and I would eat it alone in the evening. By the time I came home at 6:00 p.m., Bernie had already gone out to help with a local evangelistic campaign. I knew the members wanted me to be there, too, but there was no way I could work all day, go straight to church and stay there till 10:00 p.m., arrive home at 10:45, go to bed at midnight (after doing the housework and preparing for work the next day), and still remain sane.

So I spent my evenings alone in the apartment—in bed before Bernie came home and out of the house almost before he was up. I realized then that ministry was going to have a profound impact on our marriage. I was free in the evenings and on weekends when he was busy, and Bernie was free during the week when I was at work. And that wasn't all. There were phone calls to take, messages to convey, dinners to cook, children's stories to research, visual aids to create, and a multitude of assorted requirements (such as making 200 flour bombs for a youth retreat when we had three young children sick with influenza at home) that suddenly appeared on my job description as a pastor's wife! We tried to plan at least one day off together every month, but something would almost always disrupt the day, or Bernie's cell phone would ring with an urgent call . . .

There's no doubt that life in a ministry family can seriously challenge your marriage. Sometimes ministry cou-

ples become utterly disheartened with their relationship because it seems that ministry, the needs of the church, the plans of the administrators, large evangelistic projects, meetings, social events, and local members' emergencies all come before your own personal needs and the needs of your marriage. I have seen many ministry marriages fall apart because the non-church-employed spouse felt so alone, so neglected, and so worthless.

One pastor's wife told me, "My husband spends an hour a week visiting an elderly housebound lady in our church. People think it's wonderful that he's so dedicated, but it's been years since he spent an hour a week totally focused on me." Another said, "Somehow I always feel that I'm at the bottom of the list—the last person to get a visit, be ministered to, or thought about. I feel as if I'm the only person in the church who isn't allowed to have needs. My minister-husband chats to members, takes them flowers, plays with their children, and mows their lawns. But he hardly ever does any of these things for us." Another wife said, "My husband is always doing God's work. What right do I have to ask my husband to spend time with me when he needs to write a sermon or visit someone seriously ill in the hospital? There's always something more important and urgent for him to do than to be with me. How can I compete with God's work?"

These are real issues and attitudes that many of us face. They can seriously undermine our worth as a spouse and as a human being and can quickly erode our marriage. I remember one pastor's wife telling me, "Many pastors seem

to be married to their churches! So we have a choice—we can nag them till they run deeper into ministry to avoid us, or we can seduce our husbands with love, admiration, and delight back into a wonderful marriage!” Then she pointed out Ephesians 5:25 and said, “Christ has already given Himself up for the church! That’s not the pastor’s job! It’s his job to love his wife!”

The closer a minister is to his or her spouse, the happier they are both likely to be, and this happiness will shine through their marriage to their family and their congregation. A minister who takes care of his own wife’s needs for love, closeness, appreciation, and spiritual companionship sets a positive example to the other men in his congregation and protects his own marriage. When a minister’s home is happy, he is better equipped emotionally and relationally to help those in his church who are struggling with unhappy marriages and families.

So what can we do to invite our spouses into warm and energizing relationships? Be positive and make a list of all the gifts and good things that ministry offers your marriage. Often your spouse can pick up children or be home to receive deliveries. Sometimes you are able to travel together to interesting places and conferences. You may have a secure income. What else do you enjoy about being a ministry spouse? Sometimes we can be so resentful of the time that ministry takes our spouse away from us that our negative feelings become a barrier to our closeness.

Explore ways in which ministry work might put your marriage at risk. Identify the challenges: which are the riskiest and what can you do to protect your marriage from these dangers? What effect is ministry having on you as a couple: your spiritual life, your sexual relationship, your experience of love, your communication, your family, your vacations, your ability to have fun together, etc.? Once you identify the ways in which ministry work may come between you as a couple, you can also find creative ways to counteract the effects of not eating together in the evening, your spouse coming home tired at 11:00 p.m., and not seeing each other as often as you would like.

Take care of yourself and find something you enjoy doing when your spouse isn’t around. View this time as an opportunity to build yourself up spiritually, get some exercise, socialize, do housework, enjoy a hobby, etc. This may help you to feel less resentful of the time your spouse spends on his or her work.

When do you and your spouse feel closest? When you feel close, who usually initiates the contact? What do you both do and say that helps you to feel close, and how can you make sure that this happens more often? What else would you like to do that would help you to feel even closer to your spouse?

On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 is not close at all and 10 is as close as you can imagine), how close do you feel as a couple? What could you do as a couple to score your closeness one number higher? Make a list of things you

can do to show your closeness at every level up to 10. This will give you a “road map” to help you know what to do next to increase your spiritual, relational, and sexual intimacy as a couple.

Tell each other how much you appreciated the last time you were really close. Be positive and only say what you enjoyed. Appreciation does far more to encourage someone to be close to you than nagging or criticizing. Try saying something like, “I love it when we have time to be close. I really feel very close to you when we ____ (describe something that you know your spouse enjoys, too). Let’s make time to do that again today or some other time this week.”

SIMPLE IDEAS FOR COUPLE CLOSENESS

- Praying together
- Taking a bath or shower together
- Reading a book together
- Eating out together
- Driving together and talking about something important or special
- Giving each other a back massage
- Finding a tiny gift for the other person
- Going for a walk together in a beautiful place
- Cooking together or making something creative together
- Soothing each other after a busy or troubling day
- Going away for a weekend or midweek break together
- Holding each other close
- Planning a surprise for the other person
- Messaging or emailing each other
- Meeting together for a lunchtime picnic
- Visiting a historic place, a church, a museum, or a gallery together
- Gardening together
- Cycling, sailing, or boating together
- Spending an evening doing different peaceful, non-work things in the same room as your spouse
- Watching a positive, funny, or inspiring movie together (download interesting discussion guides and read movie reviews at www.christianitytoday.com)

Surprise your spouse. Find a free slot in the calendar and whisk him or her away for a special time of closeness. Book a one-hour weekly cafe appointment to talk together as husband and wife without any church issues—and agree to turn off your cell phones. Both of you deserve the other’s undivided attention! It can be disappointing to go to a cafe together and then have to listen for half an hour while your partner deals with a church/work issue over the phone.

Try a short experiment. Spend at least 15 minutes a day doing something simple together. If you are stuck for ideas, see the list of ideas for couple closeness. Then spend one block of three hours per week and two blocks of one hour per week doing something you enjoy doing together—and don’t talk about work or ministry or church members (this can be quite difficult). Better still if you can manage to spend one whole day together relaxing and doing things that bring you closer as a couple or that help you create positive memories of your relationship. Do this for at least two weeks. Then ask yourselves what effect your times of closeness have had on your marriage. What effect did they have on your pastoral ministry?

Couples often find that their times of closeness strengthen them for the other things they need to do. When couples feel topped up with love and the good feelings that come from spending time with someone who cares for them, they can often face challenges with greater courage and optimism, and they will have more emotional and spiritual resources to help others.

One church we know is passionate about protecting the families of their pastoral staff. They insist that staff members spend at least three complete days and at least four other evenings at home with their families—with no work contact—during each two-week period. They know the devastating effects of a ministerial marriage breakdown, both on the family itself and on a church, a congregation, and a community.

We experience God’s love through each other. When we feel loved and close to another human being, it is easier for us to believe that God loves us and cares about us, too. When we feel neglected by those we love, it is harder to experience God’s love in our lives. When we keep each other topped up with love, God’s love has a greater opportunity to flow through our lives and into the lives of those around us. Nurturing our “couple closeness” is one of the best investments we can make to strengthen our relationships with each other and with God.



KAREN HOLFORD is a freelance writer and family therapist living in the tiny village of Auchtermuchty, in the tiny Kingdom of Fife. Her husband, Bernie, is the president of the Scottish Mission. When they do have time to be together, they enjoy walking, exploring local farmshops and cafes, visiting historic buildings, and eating tiny pieces of very good chocolate.

Releasing Resentment

“LINDY, MRS. THOMPSON’S SICK, and she can’t do the food for the youth social tonight. So I told her you’d be happy to do it instead.”

“But you know I need to focus on my presentation for work tomorrow! My department’s funding depends on it!”

“I know, darling, but surely this is more important. It may be the turning point in these teens’ lives. It’s God’s work. You know I can’t do this without your help! And I’ll pray that your presentation will go well tomorrow.”

However dedicated we are to our spouse’s ministry, and no

matter how supportive we wish to be, living in a ministry family involves all kinds of conflicting expectations. We’re expected to attend church events, conferences, and camp meetings, no matter how inconvenient it is for our family. We have to absorb the impact and stress of the pastor’s heavy workload, last-minute emergencies, and other people’s lack of planning. We may have to drop our own plans and needs—however important—to rescue a ministry situation. And there’s an unspoken expectation that we can always do this cheerfully . . . because it’s all for God.

THE COMPLEXITY OF RESENTMENT

Resentment isn’t a simple response. The effect of small resentments can build up over time. The pressure to put your own needs aside for the sake of the ministry can



It's hard to talk about these feelings, or even admit them to ourselves, because it feels selfish to prioritize our own needs or those of our family over God's work.

lead to sadness, frustration, anger, disappointment, hopelessness, and an internal message that "I'm not important" or "I can never be as important as my spouse's ministry and the needs of other church members."

It's hard to talk about these feelings, or even admit them to ourselves, because it feels selfish to prioritize our own needs or those of our family over God's work. If we fuss about being taken for granted, we feel that we're ultimately complaining about God. We feel frustrated when we say "yes" to requests we'd rather say "no" to, and we can even feel angry about giving up our plans to help with a church emergency.

Pastors can also feel resentful if their spouse isn't willing and able to provide hospitality when expected and to be 100 percent supportive in every situation. Sometimes there is an unspoken sense that the pastor has a greater "right" to their spouse's help and understanding, whenever needed, because they are doing God's work.

HARD TO ADMIT

Resentment begins when one person feels that a relationship is

out of balance. They're giving up their time, hopes, goals, dreams, and energy to support the other person, but they aren't receiving the same amount of support in return.

It can be hard to admit resentment: we're afraid of sounding petty and selfish. But it can destroy our happiness and our marriages if we don't address feelings openly, in an atmosphere of love and understanding.

REFLECTING ON RESENTMENT

- Is there an unspoken message in our family that ministry always takes the top priority?
- Do I offer to help my spouse with their workload and responsibilities as much as I ask them to help me with mine? How can we share our workload more evenly?
- Am I asking my partner to do this primarily because I didn't plan ahead?
- Could someone else in the church do this? Why aren't I asking them instead?
- If my spouse regularly asked me to help them do their job, how would I feel? How would I respond?
- Have I just *assumed* my partner can help? Have I taken away their freedom to make the choice for themselves?
- What effect is my resentment having on:
 - My relationship with God?
 - My feelings towards ministry?
 - My own calling as a spiritually-gifted Christian?
 - Our marriage and family life?
 - My well-being?
- How do I respond when my partner is obviously stressed or unhappy about being asked to help? Do I make them feel guilty, or do I accept their "no" with compassion?

PRAYING ABOUT RESENTMENT

Read: 1 Peter 5:7

- Pray that you'll recognize the effect that resentment is having in your life and on your relationships.
- Ask God to help you heal the pain of resentment in your relationship by listening openly to each other's pain, comforting each other, and forgiving each other.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern when and how to draw loving boundaries in your relationship.
- Focus on the blessings of ministry life. Thank God for them.

Releasing Resentment

HEALING RESENTMENT

Read: Romans 12:15; 14:13; 1 John 4:18

- Recognize the hurt that resentments are bringing to your relationship.
 - Be respectful and tender about each person's pain.
 - Accept each other's hurts without judging or criticizing.
 - Talk respectfully and openly about your feelings: "When this happens, in this situation, I feel resentful because. . . . It would help me if you could do this instead. . . ."
 - Talk about assumptions and expectations as soon as you are aware of them. Don't let resentments build up. Take the time to debrief after ministry emergencies have hurt your relationship. Commit to being more considerate in the future.
 - When you get stuck, work through the four places of forgiveness. (See "The Gift of Forgiveness," *The Journal*, 3rd qtr. 2012, p. 15; available in online *Journal* archive: www.ministerialassociation.org/spouses/.)
- "demand," or "expectation" so that helpful conversations are not silenced.
 - Create a shared agreement about the boundaries and expectations in your ministry marriage.
 - Agree to manage your own workload and responsibilities as well as you can.
 - Discuss your calendars in advance. Notice the times when each of you may need extra support.
 - Plan ahead and delegate responsibilities to other people rather than to each other.
 - When asked for more help than you can provide, set clear boundaries: "I can't cater for the whole meal, but I can make soup / set up the room, etc."
 - Choose to give your help as a gift, not as an obligation.
 - It's better to cancel an event than harm your relationship.
 - Offer support in return for support, so there's a sense of balance.
 - Appreciate your partner generously when they help you.

PREVENTING RESENTMENT

Read: Galatians 6:2

- Make it "OK" to talk about your negative feelings related to a ministry "need,"

Karen Holford writes from Scotland, where she still (sometimes) struggles with ministry resentment and how to manage it.



Still Best Friends

“STILL BEST FRIENDS!” wrote my friend on her Facebook page. Lisa and her husband were celebrating their silver wedding anniversary.

My cursor hovered over the “Like” button. Then I changed my mind and clicked on the “Message” tab. “Congratulations!” I typed. “That’s amazing! If you have a moment, I’d love to hear what’s kept your friendship so vibrant and alive.”

“Good question!” wrote Lisa. “Let me think . . . Lots of love, having a laugh together, being kind to each other, not saying everything we think, forgiving each other, learning to appreciate our differences, trying to solve our problems respectfully . . .”

As we messaged back and forth, we noticed that many of the secrets of their friendship were similar to the fruits of the Spirit: being loving, joyful, kind, self-controlled, patient, and peace-loving.

Friendship brings us together at the beginning of a relationship. It helps us to be more resilient when we face the different challenges of life. And it warms our hearts with happy memories when we grow older and look back on years of companionship. When we’re married to our best friend, it reassures our children, it inspires young people to choose marriage, and it blesses our communities.



How do you nurture the friendship “fruits” in your marriage?

Here are some ideas for nurturing the friendship “fruits” in your marriage.

PRAYER

- Pray that the Holy Spirit will grow the fruit of God’s love in your life so that it can infuse and transform the friendship in your marriage.

LOVE

- You are the best channel God has for expressing His love to your spouse. Which aspects of God’s love are flowing through your life into theirs?
- Discover each other’s “love languages” so that your love can be more effective. You can take a free quiz at: 5lovelanguages.com.
- Try the free “7 Days of Love” program (thedatingdivas.com) to help you discover how your spouse prefers to be loved. The Dating Divas website is run by Christians who have loaded it with beautiful and inexpensive materials to nurture the adventure and friendship in your marriage.
- Ask yourself: What’s the most loving thing I can do for my spouse today?

JOY

- List some of the things that have brought you joy as a couple. Which ones can you do more of in this season of your marriage?
- Joy is a deeper sense of happiness that comes through your gratitude for each other. Make a list of at least 20 things you appreciate about your spouse. Find a quiet and cozy time to read them aloud.

- Keep looking for fun and creative ways to delight each other.
- At the end of your day, share your happiest moments together and thank God for them (Philippians 4:4).
- Ask yourself: What do I do that makes my spouse’s heart sing with joy? How can I do that more often?

PEACE

- Make at least one room in your home a haven of peace and tranquility where you can both relax. Use soft lighting or candles, play soft worship music, scatter some pillows and throws, stack inspiring books, and create a collection of beautiful natural objects that fill you with wonder (Philippians 4:6, 7).
- Find ways to relax together: go for a walk, have a warm bath, read, share a hobby, work in your garden, pray for each other, etc.
- Ask yourself: What can I do to help my spouse relax and let go of their stresses and concerns? What can I do to reduce the level of conflict and stress in our marriage? See Romans 12:16.



“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Galatians 5:22, 23

PATIENCE

- Paul listed “patience” as the first quality of love in 1 Corinthians 13:4. Patience encourages us to slow our pace to match the other person so that they feel safe and comfortable. Realize that patience shows respect and care for the other person.
- What changes could you make to your schedule and planning so that you have more unhurried time for each other?
- Ask yourself: When am I most likely to be impatient with my spouse? How can I give them the gift of my patience, let go of my need to rush, and lovingly put their needs ahead of mine?

KINDNESS

- Kindness is a vital ingredient of any friendship, and especially a marriage. Read Ephesians 4:32.
- Being kind and helpful every day, even when you don’t feel like it, is one of the easiest ways to strengthen your marriage. Even small kindnesses can make a big difference. Offer to spend 10 to 15 minutes doing the most helpful thing for your husband or wife.

GOODNESS

- Make a list of your personal values. Describe how you are living out each value in your marriage. How do these lived values bless your spouse? Read Romans 12:9-21.
- Ask yourself: Which character strengths am I working on with God that will also bless my spouse and strengthen our marriage?

FAITHFULNESS


- Find ways to increase the spiritual connection in your marriage. Agree to pray for each other throughout the day. Read Psalms to each other. Attend a couples’ retreat. Find a ministry you can do together.
- Ask yourself: How can I show my spouse that I am committed to making our marriage the best it can be? See Ephesians 5:21-33.

GENTLENESS

- Speak warmly and softly to each other. Touch each other gently. Do things that increase each other’s comfort (Philippians 4:5).
- Anticipate each other’s needs by offering to make a drink, pack a lunch, or send an encouraging text during a challenging day.
- Ask yourself: How can I be gentler toward my husband or wife today? How can I increase their sense of comfort and well-being?

SELF-CONTROL

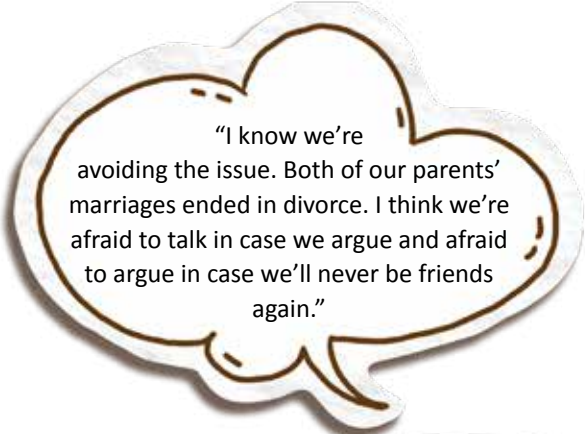
- Filter your words before saying them. Ask yourself: If I say this, will it bring us closer together, or will it push my spouse away? See Ephesians 4:29.
- Plan regular friendship times together and prioritize them, no matter how busy you are. Use self-control to manage your time and workload so that you can protect your precious couple time.
- Ask yourself: How can I use my self-control to protect my spouse from pain, fear, and distress? 7



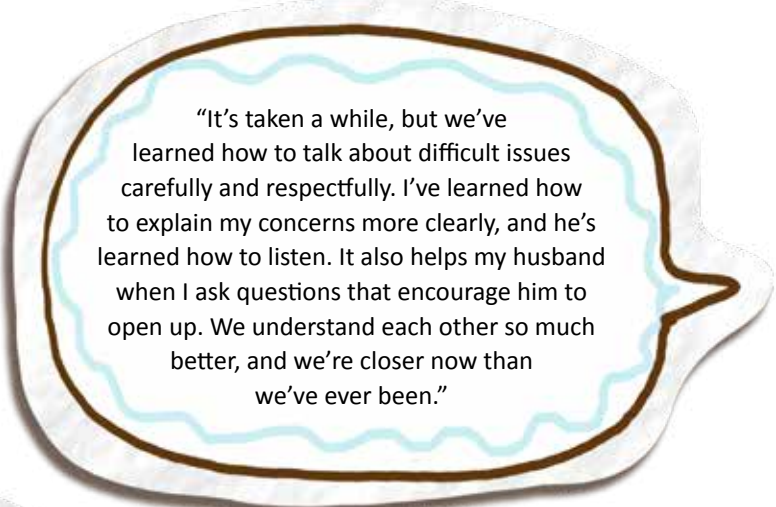
Ask yourself: How can I surprise my spouse with kindness today?

Karen Holford is a marriage and family therapist and director of the Family Ministries Department for the Trans-European Division.


Talking Grows Togetherness



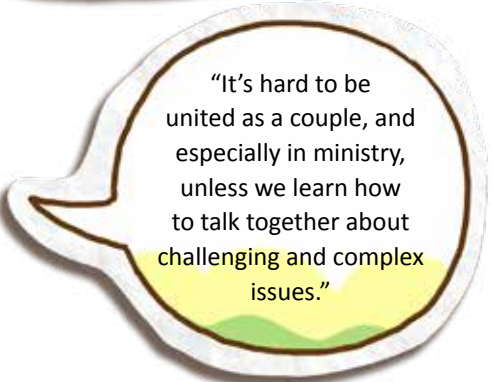
"I know we're avoiding the issue. Both of our parents' marriages ended in divorce. I think we're afraid to talk in case we argue and afraid to argue in case we'll never be friends again."



"It's taken a while, but we've learned how to talk about difficult issues carefully and respectfully. I've learned how to explain my concerns more clearly, and he's learned how to listen. It also helps my husband when I ask questions that encourage him to open up. We understand each other so much better, and we're closer now than we've ever been."



"Almost every time we talk about this, we fight. So we've stopped talking, but now I feel angry instead."



"It's hard to be united as a couple, and especially in ministry, unless we learn how to talk together about challenging and complex issues."

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO TALK?

Dozens of factors make it hard to talk about the things that matter to us. Sometimes we can't find the right words.

Perhaps our past experiences prevent us from talking openly. Maybe we're afraid that talking will make matters worse or that we'll say the wrong thing. Maybe it's hard to talk because our powerful emotions obscure what we really want to say, or we're afraid that we'll be misunderstood. Maybe we never saw people having deep and constructive conversations about their differences, so we have no idea how to talk about the difficult stuff. Or maybe it's just hard to find the space to talk because our lives are so busy.

GOD CARES

When you need to talk about something difficult together, pray that God will help you to understand the other person, to feel His love for them, and to find the best words to share your thoughts with them (Prov. 25:11; James 1:5, 19). Take time to sit quietly with God and listen to the helpful thoughts and wisdom He brings to your mind. Then explore a few of the following ideas.

NOT SURE WHERE TO START

When something is bothering you, and you're not sure how to talk about it, try this: Pull out a sheet of paper and pen. Draw a small oval in the middle of the page. Inside the oval write a rough sentence describing what you think you're most concerned about. Then divide the paper into six sections radiating out from the oval. In each section write one of the following sentence starters:

- The effect this concern is having on me right now is . . .
- The feelings I have in relation to this issue are . . . (I feel angry because . . . I feel sad because . . . I feel frustrated because . . . I feel disappointed because . . . I feel afraid because . . . I feel anxious because . . .)
- My past experiences, which may be coloring how I'm feeling about this concern today, are . . .
- On a scale of 0-10, where 0 means that I am not at all concerned and where 10 means that I am extremely concerned, I would rate this current issue at . . .
- My hopes for talking about this issue together are . . .
- The best possible outcome for me is . . . Other possible options are . . .

Writing things down in this structured way will help you to sort out your thoughts and feelings so you can talk about them more confidently. Keep the sheet of paper in front of you during the conversation so you don't forget any important



information. Or rewrite what you want to say, once you've captured all your ideas, and give it to your husband or wife to read.

Try having both partners fill out these sheets. Writing can be simpler than talking because it helps prevent us from getting stuck in unhelpful patterns of conversation. Swap your sheets and read them carefully with prayerful hearts. Write any questions on sticky notes, attach them to the paper, and pass the sheet back to your partner for more explanation if needed.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Or think about your conversation this way:

- What's the most important thing I need my partner to understand? How can I say this in the simplest and clearest way?
- Why do I want to say it? What do I hope will be different once I've talked about this?
- What effect might this conversation have on my partner? What might they think and feel about what I have to say? How can I say what I need to say in a way that my partner will find easiest to receive and understand?
- When would be a good time to talk? Plan your deeper conversations for a time when you both have the space and energy to talk and listen. It's difficult to focus on

important conversations when you're tired, hungry, stressed, or distracted.

- One useful framework for explanation: "When this happens . . . in this specific context . . . I feel . . . , and it would really help me if you could . . . , and then I could help you by . . ."

ARE YOU REALLY LISTENING?

Many important conversations break down because one or both people aren't listening with their full attention. Take notes to remind yourself of what your partner is saying, or draw a mind-map if you prefer. Or pause after a few sentences and let your partner sum up what they've heard you say. Then both of you can check that you've been clearly understood.

GROUND RULES

Some couples create ground rules to help them talk about difficult issues. Here are some of their tips:

- Listen to each other speak for five minutes on the topic without interrupting or commenting. Then sum up the speaker's key points.



If one of you gets distressed or angry during the conversation, take a break for a while.

- Maintain eye contact or physical contact while your partner is speaking.
- Give yourselves space to reflect on what's been said before expecting a response. "OK, this is a very important matter. I'd like to give it some serious thought. Please can we talk about it for an hour after dinner?"
- Make appointments to talk about important things so that you both keep the time free.
- If one of you gets distressed or angry during the conversation, take a break for a while. It's almost impossible to think and talk rationally when your emotions are running high.
- Check that you're speaking the same "language." It doesn't help if one of you is discussing the topic at a deeply emotional level and the other is discussing it in a rational way. Strong

emotions need empathy and soothing *before* the brain is ready to talk at a more rational level.

- Don't try to problem-solve until you fully understand what your partner thinks and feels about an issue.
- One reason that challenging conversations can be difficult is that we haven't seen other adults talk about their differences in a respectful and useful way. Try having some well-managed conversations when your older children are around. This will help them learn how to talk about their own complex issues.
- Don't give up on having challenging conversations about your differences. The more you talk, the easier it will probably become. The more you welcome and accept your partner's thoughts and feelings, the more confidence they'll have to talk about the things that bother them. J

Karen Holford is a family therapist who helps families talk about difficult issues in Edinburgh, Scotland.

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and Shine,
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THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

by Karen Holford



“A happy marriage is the union of two good forgivers!”

Sarah sat on her bed, hugged a quilt around her shoulders, and cried. Her sobs were loud and painful, and her tears were hot. Some tears were angry and some were sad, and she hurt so much she didn't know what to do. Today was their wedding anniversary, and she'd taken the day off work. They were going to hike around a mountain lake and stop for dinner in their favorite restaurant.

Then Luke received a call from Jason. “Hey, Pastor Luke! My truck's broken down, and I need help getting to a roofing job. I promised to finish it by this afternoon. I'm already late! I'll lose my contracts if I can't complete this one in time!”

“Don't worry, Jason! I'll bring my truck over right away and I'll stay and give you a hand so you get it done on time!”

Sarah stared at Luke, silenced by his complete lack of consideration. “Well, of course I have to help him! He's struggling to get his business going! It's much more important than having a nice day off. Just call the restaurant and cancel the table, and I'll see you later.”

Sarah wiped her tears with the edge of the quilt. This wasn't the first time Luke had let her down badly. How was she ever going to forgive him?

THE VIEW FROM HERE

One of the obstacles to working through our hurt and forgiveness is that we often limit our view of the situation to our own perspective. If we've hurt someone, we can become self-defensive. And if we've been hurt, we can be absorbed in our own pain.

THE FOUR PLACES

There are four places we need to go and reflect before we can thoughtfully ask for forgiveness—or offer it to others:

Forgiveness place #1: The heart of God

Before we can understand how to respond to a painful situation we need to spend time alone with God. We need to be still and listen to His love for us and our spouse.

If you're the “hurter” you need to remember how much God loves you and is willing to forgive you. You also need to understand that God hurts because your spouse hurts, and you caused that hurt. This is a vital part of the process because it helps you to understand the spiritual significance of your actions. Jesus died so that you could be forgiven for the hurt you caused your loved one. Don't rush

through this place on the forgiveness journey. It's the most important one because this is where you face the truth about your actions.

If you've been hurt, you need to remember how much God loves you, and how sad He is that you're hurting. You also need to see that God loves your spouse too, and He wants to use this experience to help you both understand more about His love and forgiveness.

Forgiveness place #2: The other person's shoes

It's important for each of you to understand what the other person is experiencing.

If you're the "hurter" you need to understand how much your actions have hurt and affected your spouse so you can fathom the depth of the forgiveness you need. This will help you to avoid repeating the same mistake.

If you've been hurt, it's helpful to wonder why your spouse made the mistake so you can pray for them in a focused way. Does Luke need help exploring his priorities? Does he help others because he needs to feel valued? Does he need to understand that he may be hiding in his work to avoid closeness in his marriage?

Forgiveness place #3: The relationship

Each of you needs to ask yourself what your relationship most needs from you to help it heal. If you're not sure what to do or say, pray for wisdom and ask, "Will this help our relationship, or will it cause more pain?"

Forgiveness place #4: The future

This is often a place we forget to explore when we're working out how to help our hurting relationship. Think about your hopes for your marriage and the commitment you've made to cherish each other. What do you both need to do now to protect your relationship from future hurts? What plans can you make to help your marriage grow stronger and closer?



If you're the "hurter," what decisions can you make to ensure you don't hurt your loved one in the same way again?

If you're the hurt person, how can you respond to your spouse in a way that will help you to grow closer and not damage your future relationship?

CARE-FUL CONVERSATIONS

Care-ful conversations are calm, kind, clear, and hopeful.

After spending prayerful time in the four places of forgiveness, Sarah could say, "When you chose to help Jason rather than spend our anniversary with me, I was very sad and hurt because it felt as if I wasn't very important to you. I felt lonely, abandoned, and disappointed. I need to know you value our relationship. Next time please could you stop and ask me first before making choices that affect me? I am also wondering how we can take care of our own relationship by making it more of a special priority in our lives."

Luke could say, "I am so sorry Sarah. I realize that I hurt you and God very much when I chose to help Jason rather than spend the day with you. I need to understand just how much my ministry choices hurt you at times. I was wrong. Please forgive me. What can I do differently in the future to show you how special you are to me?"

Some things are very hard to forgive, such as adultery, domestic violence, abuse, continuous neglect, betrayal, or being seriously shamed, bullied, or ridiculed. When we cause such deep wounds, we can expect healing to take a long time. If someone tripped you and broke your leg, you might forgive the person immediately, but the fracture would still need six weeks to mend.

Forgiveness is also like a journey. It may take a while to arrive at the destination, but as long as we're on the forgiveness road we're moving in the right direction. It's not kind or respectful to expect immediate forgiveness for a serious offense.

Hurts, resentments, and grudges fracture the oneness that God wants us to experience in marriage. Forgiveness binds the relationship together again, like a plaster cast, so that our hurting hearts can be healed and become stronger than ever before.



KAREN HOLFORD lives in Scotland where her husband, Bernie, is the mission president and pastor of the Crieff SDA Church. Even after 28 years of marriage they are still learning about the profound mystery of forgiveness.

TOGETHER FOR A PURPOSE

FINDING A SHARED MINISTRY

by Karen Holford



When Bernie and I were very new in ministry, we were sent to an isolated church that was going through a difficult time. Soon we were overwhelmed and discouraged. It felt like nothing we did was ever right or good enough.

Then our friend Jeff called us. We'd gone to seminary together, and now he was preparing several couples for marriage. He invited us to work with him on a weekend of seminars for engaged couples. We had a toddler and a crazy busy life, but we went along—often writing our next seminar while Jeff was presenting his! At the end of the weekend we were exhausted, inspired, and invigorated.

Completely unintentionally, we had stumbled across our shared ministry! Twenty years later we are still regularly involved in couple and family ministry. Our own marriage has inevitably been enriched and strengthened by preparing seminars, taking further studies, and learning from the couples we counsel. The demands of ministry could easily send us off in different directions, but we reconnect deeply several times a year when we minister to other couples.

Ministering together is not for every ministry couple. It has profound challenges as well as joys, and working on a shared project isn't always easy. We may still find ourselves doing some of the work alone, we may still struggle with our different ideas about how and what we should do, but many couples are finding that even a small shared ministry can enhance their closeness and happiness.

DISCOVERING GOD'S UNIQUE MINISTRY FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

Take a piece of paper each and write seven lists.

1. **My spiritual gifts:** These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in the Bible, such as being generous, teaching, being kind and merciful, serving, leading, etc. Read Romans 12:6-8 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, then list the gifts you believe God has given to you.
2. **My natural talents:** These are the special gifts that you were born with and nurtured over the years, such as being able to sing or play an instrument, writing, public speaking, financial skills, creativity, etc.
3. **My skills:** These are other skills you've learned and practiced over the years, such as being able to fix a car, grow vegetables, decorate a home, ride a bike, cook, etc. They aren't spiritual gifts or talents, but they are very useful skills that you have learned over the years.
4. **My education:** You have learned how to do some things because of your education and training background, such as nursing, teaching, accounting, creating a web site, leading a choir, etc.
5. **My interests:** These are the things that interest and inspire you. Again, they may be similar to things you have put in the other lists,



KAREN HOLFORD has been married to Bernie for 28 years. They say, “OK, there are times when trying to minister together drives us both a little crazy because we’re so different! But some of our closest and happiest moments have been when we’ve been ministering together and feeling totally part of God’s plan.”

but there may be some interests you have that don’t fit under any other category, such as an interest in health, learning about other cultures, traveling, community affairs, reading, etc.

6. **My passions:** These are the things you feel passionately about. Maybe it’s working with children, or sharing your faith, or health ministries, or serving the poor, etc.
7. **My ministries:** These are all the ministries you have enjoyed over the years. Perhaps you enjoyed working at a summer camp or helping disabled people get out and about. Maybe you enjoyed creating a prayer room at a retreat or being the hostess at an evangelistic event. List the ministries you’ve been involved with that left you feeling fulfilled in some way.

BLENDING YOUR GIFTS

Now look at each of your lists and prayerfully consider what God has given you. Pray that He will guide you to fill an important need in your community or circle of influence. Look for any common threads in your lists, such as passions and skills for working with children, or running a cooking class, or developing an outreach web site, or running family life seminars.

As you discuss and explore your unique blend of gifts, talents, interests, skills, passions, education, and ministries, you may discover some ministry that excites you both. Maybe, like us, you’ll minister a couple of times a year at a marriage retreat. Perhaps you’ll work together in a Pathfinder class for an hour a week. Maybe you’ll go overseas and build schools for one week a year.

COUPLES MINISTERING TOGETHER

Steve and Meg are passionate about making church a place where children and families want to be and where they are always learning about Jesus. Meg is especially good at finding fun ways to involve the children in Steve’s worship services.

Paula loves teaching children about health and making it fun. Her husband, Bob, is great at playing the guitar and writing easy-to-learn songs. So they visit local schools during health-emphasis weeks, helping children to learn about healthy choices and teaching them fun songs to reinforce their message.

Now it’s your turn. How could God show His love for the world through your unique couple ministry?

6 REASONS FOR SHARING A MINISTRY

1

Ministering to others can bring you closer together as you talk, make plans, pray, work, and celebrate the joys and challenges together.



2

It may be better for you to share a joint ministry, and work together, than for each of you to work in isolation with separate ministries, which can more than double the time you are apart from each other.

3

Doing something kind for others is one of the best ways to experience joy, peace, and love for yourself, too.

4

Discovering a shared ministry leads you to fill a unique role together as part of God’s purpose for your relationship.

5

The enjoyment and sense of purpose you have in your shared ministry can help you to weather the storm when you face challenges in your local churches.

6

You can spend time together working on projects you enjoy, and your spouse can still count it as ministry time!





WHEN LIFE HURTS

by Karen Holford

When James came home after the board meeting, Sarah could see he needed some comfort. Hardly anyone at church knew that his brother was dying, that his father was in the initial stages of dementia, and that he'd been up all night at the police station with one of the church teenagers. She hugged him warmly and handed him a hot drink. Then she led him to the sofa by the fire and sat with her arm around him, giving him space to talk.

Luke knew that his wife was feeling down. Cindy hadn't been able to find work in their new church district, and her mother had just been diagnosed with cancer. She was feeling sad, lonely, and discouraged. He canceled all his appointments for the day so he could be with her. Cindy needed his ministry, too.

God gave us the gift of marriage so that we could take away each other's aloneness and comfort and support each other through challenges and hurts. The English wedding service describes marriage as a place where we "may find strength, companionship, and comfort."

When we comfort each other well, we recover more quickly from the hurts of life, we grow closer to each other, and our love matures. When we

don't know how to comfort each other or how to ask for comfort, our hurts can linger, and our lonely sadness can push us apart, encouraging us to look for comfort in inappropriate places, such as on the Internet and through other relationships and addictions.

WHAT'S YOUR COMFORT STORY?

So that each can understand where the other is coming from, husbands and wives should discuss what they learned about comforting and sadness when they were children. Here are some questions to talk about:

- Who comforted you as a child? What did he or she do and say that was helpful?
- When you were growing up, what did you learn about being sad, being comforted, and comforting other people?
- Which messages about sadness and comfort that you received as a child came from your culture, your family, or your faith?

As you talk together about your comforting experiences, it's important to remember that different families and cultures believe they are doing their best to help prepare children for a painful world. In many cultures, boys are actively dis-

couraged from crying and are less likely to receive comfort from their caregivers, which can make it harder for them to tell their wives about their distress and more difficult for them to offer comfort to their wives. But we know that Jesus wept, and He knew what to say and do to comfort the sad and suffering people He met.

COAT-STEALING

Solomon wisely warned us about being careful with the feelings of those who are distressed. Not only did he say that there's a time to weep and a time to laugh (Eccl. 3:4), he also said that when we sing cheerful songs to a sad person, it's like taking a coat away from him or her when it's bitterly cold (Prov. 25:20). Clearly, this isn't a very helpful way to comfort someone who is sad, yet we often respond like this because of our own experiences, culture, fears, and ideas about sadness and comfort. When people experience many un comforted losses, they may become depressed or build a strong, defensive wall around their feelings to protect themselves from further hurts.

Here are some common responses to other people's sadness that often contribute to their distress:

- Minimizing their sadness: "Oh, it's not really that bad!" or "Don't be sad. Look at all the good things that are happening."
- Invalidating their feelings: "Stop crying! You've been sad long enough! It's time to get on with your life again."
- Spiritualizing away their feelings: "Don't be upset—just have more faith. You need to trust God more. You know He'll make everything work together for good. Don't you believe in the resurrection?"
- Competing with their feelings: "You think that's bad? You should hear what happened to me!"
- Fixing them: "To feel better, you just need to _____."

To someone who is sad, these responses are neither understanding nor comforting. They imply that sad people aren't good enough, happy enough, strong enough, or spiritual enough. If their pain hasn't been heard and comforted, discouraged people may emphasize their sadness, trying to get their partners to take their distress seriously. But this may cause their partners to work harder at minimizing the sadness, thus leaving sad people feeling even more alone, as if someone had stolen their coat on a freezing day.

SOMETHING TO TRY:

CREATING A COMFORT MENU

Make a list together of all the things that could be comforting. When you see that your spouse is upset, ask him or her to choose something from the comfort menu and then do whatever is asked.

Here is a list of ideas that other couples have suggested:

- Someone who listens to me without trying to fix me
- A warm hug
- Someone just being close to me for a while
- Going for a long walk together
- Going to bed with a hot water bottle my spouse has filled
- Sitting in a café together eating dessert
- Having someone to hold me when I cry
- Someone else doing my chores for a few days
- Doing something fun and interesting together
- Hearing or reading comforting words from people who care for me
- Someone making my favorite drink as a surprise
- Receiving a bunch of flowers or a thoughtful gift
- Being prayed for in a comforting way
- Reading encouraging and comforting Bible verses
- Doing something kind and caring for someone else who is hurting
- Having someone with me when I'm likely to feel extra sad
- Being able to let those who love me know just how sad I am
- Knowing that my spouse is comfortable listening to me when I talk about my pain
- Knowing that my spouse can anticipate my sadness or tell when I need extra comfort, without my having to say so
- Having time to do something that lifts my spirits, such as a hobby, spiritual activity, exercise, being with friends, walking in nature, etc.



**LIKE TAKING SOMEONE'S
COAT IN COLD WEATHER
OR POURING VINEGAR IN A
WOUND."**

Proverbs 25:20, NIV

Their "coat" is their natural human need to grieve a loss of some kind, and denying this need can add to their suffering instead of relieving it. When someone asks for a coat, Jesus suggested that we give him or her two coats! So we need to work doubly hard at comforting our spouses when they are sad.

TALKING ABOUT SADNESS

It's not always easy to talk about sad feelings because many of us have had bad experiences when we've spoken of our distress to others. Here are some things that have helped other couples begin to talk more about their hurts:

- Telling your spouse about your sad feelings:
 - I feel sad because . . .
 - I feel most sad about . . .
 - I'm most likely to feel sad when . . .
 - It's hard for me to talk about these things. Can you just hold me and listen while I try?
 - When I'm sad and need comfort, I'll let you know by . . .
 - Some things you do that I find really helpful and comforting are . . .
 - I appreciate the things you have done to try and comfort me such as . . .
 - I'd like to help you comfort me. I'll let you know the most helpful thing to do, so that you don't have to guess what I need.
 - When I'm feeling comforted, I'm more likely to be able to support you by . . .
- Responding to your spouse's sad feelings:
 - I'm so sorry that you're going through this pain. Tell me more about how you feel so I can understand it better.
 - Your sadness touches my heart, too, and I feel sad with you because I love you.
 - I hurt because you're hurting.
 - I care so much about your pain. What can I do to show you how much I care?

- It sounds to me as if you are really upset/sad/hurting/distressed. I'm so sorry. What's the best thing I can do to comfort and support you?

When your spouse talks about his or her sadness, listen and let him or her know that you've really heard these feelings and concerns. Trying to cheer someone up too quickly can leave him or her feeling even sadder and lonelier. Being sad *with* them will actually help them to feel happier more quickly. This follows Paul's wise advice to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15, NIV) and Jesus' promise to mourners that they will be comforted (Matt. 5:4).

MOURNING WITH

When I miscarried our first baby, Bernie and I promised each other that we wouldn't cry alone. We tried hard to be sad *with* each other, so we could share our sorrow and our comfort. This brought us even closer together at a time when we could have found ourselves drifting into separate, sad, and lonely lives or searching for comfort in ways that damage marriages, such as addictions, online relationships, and affairs.

WHY COMFORT MATTERS

Being able to soothe another person's distress and pain is a vital responsibility for every Christian, especially within marriage. Ministry marriages are particularly vulnerable because our congregations include many people who are hurt, sad, and distressed. Pastors can be so busy comforting others that they don't have the emotional energy and time to comfort their own spouses. And spouses can feel that everyone else's needs for comfort are more important than their own.

Expressing your own need for comfort, your desire to comfort one another, and finding practical ways to soothe each other also helps you to manage the distress and conflicts in your relationship. These experiences can help you feel closer to your spouse so that you can discover more of the "one-flesh" experience that God intended marriage to be.



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ANXIETY GONE *Vinal*

HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR FAMILY, ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN, HANDLE CRISES?

The coronavirus outbreak has triggered an enormous outpouring of anxiety. The escalating crisis is in the news every time we turn on the TV or tap on our phones. Life has suddenly turned upside down, and the rules are being rewritten daily. Families are working and studying at home. Some are trying to stay healthy in confined spaces, with limited resources, and often a long way from those they love. When we feel anxious, we're more likely to be irritable with each other, and that causes even more anxiety.

Here are some tips for helping yourself and your family through this crisis and any others that come your way.

MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY

The more our children feel loved, safe, and happy, the less anxious they'll be. So one of the first things you can do as a parent is to manage your own anxiety around COVID-19. Find out the latest reliable information about staying safe, and help everyone in your family to follow the advice. Limit the amount of time you spend reading the anxiety-provoking news. Look for the heartwarming stories of kindness and generosity in this crisis, and share these with your children. Quiet your own heart with God's reassurances and your favorite Bible verses.



Look for heartwarming stories of kindness and generosity in this crisis.

TEACH CALM PRACTICES

Tell your children what you do to calm yourself when you feel anxious so they can learn tips to manage their own fears. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, try some of the ideas in this article so that less of your distress spills onto your family. Find a quiet place to talk to the people who listen to your feelings and help you feel calmer.

NOTICE WHAT THEY'RE FEELING

Pay close attention to what your family is feeling, looking out for signs of worry. Some children go quiet, others might become moody, and some might behave more roughly with those around them or play in ways that are destructive. Children and teenagers might not know how to start a conversation about how they're feeling. Spend time alone with them, doing something that they really enjoy, before opening up a conversation about their concerns.

LISTEN CAREFULLY

Listen to your family members' fears. Stop what you're doing, look into their eyes, and show that you care by hugging or touching them warmly. Explain that it's normal to feel worried when scary things happen in the world, and the best thing to do is to talk about it so you can care for each other and work things out together. Write out each worry on a separate piece of paper and think of practical things you can do together to manage those concerns. Try not to dismiss children's fears or put them down for being worried or they'll be less likely to talk to you about their feelings in the future.

CHECK IN DAILY

A crisis brings up all kinds of different emotions and challenges for each of us. Check in with one another every day by sharing your saddest moments together and comforting each other. Then share your happiest moments and celebrate in a fun way. Tell each other the most surprising thing you learned in the day, or the most beautiful thing you saw or heard, or when you experienced God's love.

BE HONEST

When children ask us hard questions about the pandemic, we need to answer them honestly and simply, without too much extra information. If we "lie" to help them feel better, it will make it harder for them to trust us. You might say something like, "Yes, a lot of people are getting very sick and some of them are dying, but most people get better. Many people in the world are working really hard to find a solution, and lots of people, right here around us, are doing amazing things to take care of others."

STAY BUSY

When negative thoughts and concerns take over our brains, they can make us feel even more worried. Learning a new skill and engaging in hobbies, construction kits, jigsaw puzzles, cooking, reading, mind puzzles, and arts and crafts can help to distract children and teenagers from the spiral of anxious thoughts, especially when everyone joins in.

TRY GRATITUDE

Thankfulness can be a great antidote to anxiety. When we remember the positive things in our lives, we're more likely to feel calmer and more joyful. Go through the alphabet as a family, listing all the things you're thankful for, beginning with each of the letters. Walk through your house and name 10 things you're thankful for in each room.

When we feel anxious, we're more likely to be irritable with each other.

LEARN TO SELF-SOOTHE

Help your child or teenager make a list of things that help them feel better when they're upset. Sipping cool water and blowing the biggest bubbles possible can help them breathe in naturally calming patterns. Hugs, laughing at jokes and funny video clips, gentle tickling, back rubs, warm bubble baths, playing games, baking bread, making a meal together, being creative, and focusing on the intricate details of nature might be items to put on their list.

BE KIND

When we're compassionate and think of others, we're naturally calmed as well. Check out the kindness activities you can do from home at: https://ted.adventist.org/images/Family/Kindness_home_final.pdf. Help your children to make colorful and encouraging posters to put in the windows of your home to give hope and joy to the people who walk down your street. Make cards to send to lonely relatives and create gifts together.

WORSHIP

In this time of anxiety and stress, focus on Bible verses that bring peace and comfort. Learn them in fun ways and sing Scripture songs based on these verses. Read some of these passages together: Revelation 21; 1 John 4:18; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4; 1 Peter 5:7. Act out the story of Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41) and reflect on how He calms the storms in our world and in our hearts. If you are looking for creative worship ideas to do at home together, check out

the family worship placemats that you can download and print at: <https://ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/family-spirituality>.

PRAY

At times of major crisis, such as this COVID-19 pandemic, we can become overwhelmed with a sense of helplessness and tragedy. Encourage your family to pray for all the suffering people, those who have lost loved ones, the medical staff, and the scientists who are looking for cures, medicines, and vaccines. Anxious children may need interactive prayers that they can see and experience. Draw around your hands and cut out the shape. Imagine this is the hand of God. Write your worries on the palm of the hand. Then remember that God cares about us very much and we can leave all our worries in His hands.

These are challenging times. None of us has a clear road map about how this pandemic will be resolved. We will have moments of anxiety as we face difficult challenges and decisions. Talking about our dilemmas together, comforting one another, and praying for one another will help us navigate this unknown territory.

But we can be sure that God does have the map; He knows how this will work out, and we know that He is lovingly longing to take us all away from this broken world. One day He will wipe away all our tears forever and calm all of our fears with His love.

For now, He is with us and our families through this crisis. He holds us all close to His heart. He cries when we cry, and He hurts when we hurt. He comforts us in all that we are facing so that we can comfort others and pass on His love. And He invites us to hand over all our anxieties to Him, because He cares so much for each of us. ■

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Becoming a Tech-smart Family

SIX YEARS AGO MY CELL PHONE only made voice calls. My latest phone is my computer, camera, calculator, diary, Bible, lesson quarterly, library, shopping assistant, bank manager, entertainment system, map, and so much more. My smartphone helps me organize my complex diary and stay in touch with my husband when plans change. We can chat by Skype when I'm traveling, see our grandchildren, and watch inspiring sermons and videos. We've even experienced our own personal marriage seminar through www.toucanttogether.com.

DANGEROUS DEVICES

But there is no doubt that our intensive use of technology, apps, games, and social media also carries incredible risks. Preschoolers are accidentally accessing pornography. Dangerous strangers are grooming our children. Teenagers are depressed and anxious because of the intense peer pressure exerted by social media, cyber-bullying, shaming, and sexting. The Internet is babysitting our children, and it has absolutely no interest in their well-being.

INTO THE UNKNOWN

Our pocket-sized devices have the power to take over our lives, create addictions, feed anxieties, destroy our innocence, drain our joy, and distract us from our relationships with God and each other. We don't have the wisdom of previous generations to help us navigate the ever-changing terrain of these incredibly helpful, yet highly dangerous, gadgets. It's hard to stay ahead of our children so we can guide and protect them because they're already running down the road ahead of us, exploring new possibilities beyond our imagination. We're living inside a huge social experiment with technology. And, by the time the scientists understand the complex consequences for our minds, health, relationships, and spiritual development, it will be too late to reverse the potentially catastrophic damage.

TAKING STOCK

We need to be wisely informed so we can protect ourselves and those we love from the invisible dangers that are tumbling out of the "Pandora's box" of hand-held technology. Start by reflecting on the effect that Internet/screen use is already having on your home, and discuss your ideas and concerns together.

- How many hours does each person spend on their devices (computers, phones, and tablets) daily, apart from work and homework?
- How do your family's devices enrich or damage your family life, relationships, well-being, spiritual life, ministry/service activities, and studies?
- What negative effects is your device usage having on your own life? What are you doing to address these effects?
- When is device usage most likely to be a problem in your home? What effect is this having on each person? What changes might be needed?
- In what ways are you managing the devices in your home well? What helps you to do this?
- How do your devices help you to live out your Christian values? How do they distract you from living out your values?

SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE

Here are some biblical values to help us set wise boundaries around our devices.

- Philippians 4:8: Positive values help us evaluate which activities are true, pure, just, noble, lovely, virtuous, and worthy of our time and effort.
- Isaiah 26:3: Does our screen usage help us to experience peace and focus on God, or are many of our activities time-consuming, worrying, and overstimulating distractions?
- Romans 12:9-18: The wisdom in these verses gives us positive guidance for healthy relationships. How does our device usage affect our ability to love well, respond empathically to other people's emotions, show respect, and be kind and hospitable?
- Galatians 5:22, 23: How do our device activities enable us to live Spirit-filled lives?

TIPS FOR MANAGING SCREEN USE IN YOUR HOME

- Stay informed. Read helpful books by Christians, such as *Left to their Own Devices? Confident Parenting in a World of Screens*¹ and *The Tech-Wise Family*.²
- Access www.covenanteyes.com and download the free e-book *Parenting the Internet Generation*.
- Visit <http://www.vodafone.com/content/digital-parenting.html/#> for tips and ideas about helping your child to be strong and resilient in an online world.
- Research the games and apps that your children are using so you are familiar with the content and can help them make good choices.



Becoming a Tech-smart Family

- Check out parents' reviews of apps, videos, and games on www.pluggedin.com (Christian perspectives) and www.common sense media.org.
- Talk about the dangers of online pornography with your children as soon as possible. Use the book *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*.³ This book explains the dangers of pornography in child-friendly language and offers a simple procedure for helping children respond appropriately if they accidentally access pornography.



- Be active together. Go for hikes, swim, row, or ski. Walking together in nature is a great way to have family adventures, learn practical skills, talk together, and be filled with wonder at God's real-life creation.
- Be a good role model. Use your own devices with integrity. Let children see that you shut down all your devices at a set time each evening.
- Be transparent. Spouses need to share passwords, and parents need access to children's phones and screens at any time to keep them safe.

- Monitor and review each person's usage. Keep bedrooms screen-free. Focus on developing internal values for managing screen activities rather than imposing external restrictions.
- Try some of the Get Real ideas in this issue's children's pages. Make these kinds of activities a regular part of your family routine. Spend time just hanging out together.
- Set ground rules as a family. For example, phones are gathered together in a charging zone when everyone comes home, and an hour before bedtime. In order to earn one hour of screen time each person must do a chore well, complete all homework assignments to the best of their ability, prepare and eat a meal together, have family worship, spend 15 minutes in physical activity and 15 minutes in a non-screen activity, such as a hobby. When all of these have been completed, the phones can be accessed for a set amount of time, but all the devices must be "put to bed" at least one hour before bedtime. See <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx> for how to create a family media plan. **7**

1 Hill, K. *Left to their Own Devices? Confident Parenting in a World of Screens*. Muddy Pearl, 2017.

2 Crouch, A. *The Tech-Wise Family*. BakerBooks, 2017.

3 Jenson, K. A. and Poyner, G. *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids*.

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Growing Characters for Eternity

TWO-YEAR-OLD HANNAH pulled the toys out of her toy box and scattered them over the floor. Finally she found what she was looking for—a soft rattle for her new baby brother to play with. Instead of focusing on the messy floor, Mom smiled, hugged her, and said, “Thank you, Hannah! That was very kind of you.” She could learn about tidying up another time.

Toby was doing his math homework. It was hard, but he was determined to finish it before bedtime, even if it meant missing his favorite TV

program. Dad came by with a glass of juice for him. “Hey, son! I’m proud of you for sticking with your homework, even when it’s hard and takes a long time. That’s perseverance.”

Pastor Gary and his family parked around the corner from Katie’s home. Her husband had just left her. She had four children, and the youngest, Janna, was chronically



ill. Quietly, Pastor Gary's family carried several boxes of groceries and vouchers for children's clothing and toys up to Julie's front porch. As they drove away, they planned their next act of kindness.

All of these families understand the importance of growing characters for eternity. They are pro-actively nurturing their children's characters, and their own.

GROWING STRENGTHS

A character strength is what you're capable of being and doing when you're functioning at your best. The more often you use a character strength, the stronger it will become. The more character strengths you cultivate, the happier and more resilient you'll be, and the more likely you'll be to have healthy relationships and a strong faith. You can work on character strengths as a family, encouraging each other and developing them in creative ways. Pray that you and your children will develop your different strengths so that you can become more like Jesus.



EXPLORING CHARACTER STRENGTHS TOGETHER

- Make a list of characteristics you want to nurture in yourself and your children.
- Invite your children to create posters for your home describing the different character traits. Search for poster samples on the Internet to inspire them.
- Focus on one character strength each week and ask your children to research and list the choices and behaviors that develop each character strength.
- Read Bible verses about each character strength and look for Bible stories about people who used that strength. Think about characters who made mistakes. Which strengths were they neglecting or missing? What could they have chosen to do instead?
- Watch for people using character strengths at church, at school, in the family, in storybooks, in movies, in news stories, etc.
- Encourage one another to practice different character strengths—as individuals and together.
- Work on your own character strengths so that your children have a positive role model.

FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS

It's easy to focus on your child's mistakes and misbehavior and forget to notice the amazing times when they practice their character strengths.

- Try to notice your child using one of their character strengths every day. Let them know when you've seen them using a character strength, however small it may seem. Your appreciation is one of the biggest incentives they have for developing their character strengths.
- Make a chart where your child can add a sticker, shape, or mark whenever they've practiced a character strength.
- At bedtime tell them which strengths you've noticed them using throughout the day. Ask them to tell you about a time when they used one of their character strengths, too.

MAKE GROWING CHARACTER STRENGTHS FUN!

Think of fun ways to help your child develop character strengths—then they will associate practicing their character strengths with feeling happy and appreciated. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Thankfulness:** Make a scrapbook of things your family is thankful for, or make a collage of pictures and objects on a canvas, grouped around the word *Thanks!*
- **Appreciating creation:** Make a “wonder box” and fill it with non-perishable nature objects for your children to explore, such as seed pods, shells, feathers, etc. Encourage them to find three things about each object that fill them with wonder.



- **Generosity:** Grow vegetables or bake bread and cookies so your child can share with others.
- **Kindness:** Plan a special act of kindness each month. Work on the project together and do something fun as a family after dropping off your soup at the soup kitchen or leaving a package of food on someone's doorstep.
- **Patience:** Teach your child fun things to do whenever they're waiting or bored. Encourage them to save up for things they want, so they learn to wait.
- **Respect:** Role-play different situations where they can show respect to others. Set out a pretend banquet at home and make it fun to learn good table manners. Help them to look for the good in every person, even those who are hard to like.
- **Helpfulness:** Encourage your child to find ways to help others, or to ask, “How can I help you?” and then help cheerfully.
- **Teamwork:** Do fun projects where your family needs to work together for a good result. Try flying a kite, putting up a tent, or making a surprise party for someone.



Karen Holford writes from Crieff, Scotland, where she's working on being wiser and more patient.

Growing Happy Children

BY KAREN HOLFORD



IF YOU ASK MOST PARENTS what they want for their children, it won't be long before someone mentions "happiness." Just as there are simple, basic principles for nurturing physically healthy children, there are also simple, basic principles for nurturing their emotional wellbeing. And the two go together—happy children are more likely to be healthy, and healthy children are more likely to be happy.

Happier students are more likely to believe they can learn new things, be creative, and do better in their studies. Happier people are more likely to get married, stay married, and have happy families. Happy people are more likely to do well at their jobs and help others. And happiness is an important part of a healthy Christian life. Paul was a wise psychologist when he told the Philippians to rejoice in all things and to focus on positive thoughts (Phil. 4:4-8).

MANAGING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Negative emotions are things that drain the happiness out of our lives, such as anger, contempt for others, disgust, embarrassment, fear, frustration, guilt, sadness, shame, or stress.

Here are some ways to help your children empty their emotional garbage bins every day so they aren't overwhelmed by their negative emotions:

Be a good role model. Show your child how you manage your own negative emotions. Let your children see and hear you pray for help with your own difficult feelings. Talk about what you are feeling and what you are doing to manage the feeling. "I'm really sad because someone was unkind to me at work, and that hurts. But I'm also remembering how kind most of the people are, and I'm going to bake a cake for everyone to share tomorrow."

It's very hard for children to deal with emotions they can't name. Help them by using feeling words to describe what they might be experiencing. "You must be so sad and disappointed that David wasn't able to come and play today." When they can use words to describe their feelings, their emotions are easier to manage.

If your child looks worried or distressed, invite them to talk and be ready to listen, to accept their feelings, and to let them know you understand and care. Encourage them to pray about every worry they have because God cares about their concerns. Once they feel understood and comforted, they'll find it easier to sort out their feelings and find healthy ways to manage them.



Acknowledge when your children manage their emotions well, and let them know you've noticed how brave they've been in a scary situation. This encourages them and lets them know when they're getting it right.

However understandable a child's difficult emotions might be, let them know when their behavior is inappropriate and help them find different ways to respond. "I know you're angry that Tom broke your toy by accident, but it's not OK to hit him. Let's go for a run to let off some steam!"

Teach children to distract themselves when something's bothering them. Help them make a "busy box" full of interesting things to explore, or find a funny song they can sing. In *The Sound of Music*, Maria makes up a lovely song to distract herself from feeling afraid—"My Favorite Things."

Whatever you do, don't dismiss their negative feelings or tease them for being scared. Negative feelings are a normal response to a sinful world,

but the feelings are not necessarily sinful. God also feels sadness, anger, frustration, and disgust.

ENCOURAGING POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Positive emotions include laughter, wonder, thankfulness, joy, inspiration, interest, serenity, love, hope, and feeling valued.

You're the best teacher to help your children learn how to have happy and healthy emotions. So take care of your own needs and make sure that your children see you enjoying positive emotions. Talk openly about your happiness and gratitude. Thank God for the good things in your lives.

Involve your children in being kind to others. Being kind is one of the best ways for children to experience positive emotions.

Laugh before learning! Having a moment of fun before trying to learn a new skill actually relaxes and opens the mind to make learning easier. Talk together about what went well during the day and why it went so well. Remember the happy and good things that have happened to your family, such as answered prayers, God's guidance, and His provision.



Children need space to be quiet and still. Don't overfill their time with activities. Help them find a "peaceful place" where they can think and pray. Help your children experience God's love, acceptance, and forgiveness through the way you love, accept, and forgive them. Encourage children's *efforts* rather than their achievements to keep them working and motivated.

Keep a gratitude diary and write down what you're thankful for as a family. Inspire your children by reading and watching true stories of people who excel in their field and by talking about how hard they have worked to reach their goals. Use some of these ideas to start small traditions in your home that will help to nurture positive emotions on a daily basis. The happier they are, the easier it will be for them to love, learn, trust, and obey. 7

Karen Holford is a family therapist living in Scotland, where her husband is the mission president.

HEALTHY, HAPPY EMOTIONS	BRIEF DESCRIPTION AND BIBLE VERSE
Awe and wonder	Encountering God. A sense of wonder about something beautiful in nature. Ps. 139:13, 14
Laughter/ amusement	Laughing and smiling at something unexpected, positive, unusual, and safe. Pr. 17:22; Eccl. 3:1, 4
Thankfulness	Sincere appreciation for the good gifts that God and others give us. 1 Thess. 5:18
Hope	The belief that things will change and improve. Jer. 29:11
Inspiration	Being inspired by God and the wonder of His works. Recognizing excellence in others and being inspired to pursue excellence. Ps. 104
Joy	A feeling of pure and happy delight. Pr. 15:13
Interest	Being intrigued or challenged by something new. Wanting to explore and discover new things. Eccl. 1:13
Feeling valued	Having your efforts noticed and valued by others. Healthy satisfaction in a job well done. Eccl. 9:10; Col. 3:23
Serenity	Feeling peaceful, still, calm, and contented. John 14:27; 1 John 4:18
Love	A blend of positive emotions experienced within a warm, close, safe, and caring relationship. 1 Cor. 13:4-8

Married to a pastor?

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Official groups for Ministry Spouses online:
 Twitter @ministryspouses
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Growing Resilience

NAOMI'S LIFE HAD NOT BEEN EASY. The names of her two sons, Mahlon ("sickly") and Chilion ("wasting"), suggest that they were born with chronic illnesses. When famine shrunk their resources, Naomi and Elimelech moved to Moab to give their sons the best chance of survival. But Elimelech died, and Naomi was left alone in a foreign land. She found the best Moabite wives for her sons and prayed for healthy grandsons who would secure the family's inheritance. Sadly, the two young men died without heirs.

Childless and widowed, Naomi was bitter and distraught. She could have let these multiple tragedies overwhelm her and break her spirit. But she kept trusting the God who cared about her, and eventually she found hope and joy again. Naomi's life is a story of resilience.

TRAGEDY HAPPENS

Ministry families also experience unexpected tragedies, broken dreams, and the challenge of living in unfamiliar places. Today we face different famines—the shortage of friends or a lack of people who are willing to walk beside us through our pain. What can we learn from the story of Naomi?



“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

Matthew 5:4

LOVE GOD

Keep growing your relationship with God. The more you have experienced His love, the easier it is to hold onto His reassuring hand as He walks with you through the pain. When I need to immerse myself in God’s loving character, I always turn to Psalm 103 or Psalm 145 and focus on these vibrant portraits of God’s love. Naomi didn’t have the comfort of David’s psalms, but she must have talked about God’s loving character because Ruth was so eager to accept her faith (Ruth 1:16, 17).

KEEP PRAYING

Talk to God honestly about your experiences and listen to His words of strength and comfort. He is big enough to hold all your questions and to absorb all your tears and challenging emotions.

TRUST GOD

Naomi couldn’t see what God was doing behind the scenes. But she continued to do the best she could and trusted God to do the rest. Maybe the family’s migration to Moab and connection to Ruth was God’s way of correcting a genetic weakness that had developed in Elimelech’s family? Naomi never knew that she was the “great-grandmother” of a king (Ruth 4:16, 17), or that she would play a walk-on part in the lineage of Jesus.



LOVE OTHERS

Strengthen your relationships with your friends and family. Be there for them through their hard times, and they will be more likely to support you through your challenges. Ruth, Naomi, and Orpah must have cried together when their husbands died, and Naomi must have been a very loving and caring mother-in-law. Ruth’s dedication to Naomi and willingness to follow her into a vulnerable and uncertain future demonstrates their supportive relationship (Ruth 1:16, 17 and 4:14, 15).

KEEP TALKING AND LISTENING

Talk honestly about your challenges, hopes, and fears. Naomi was not afraid to be honest about her bitter feelings (Ruth 1:20, 21). Paul tells us to mourn with those who mourn (Romans 12:15), and Jesus says that those who mourn will be comforted (Matthew 5:4). When your family is overwhelmed by pain, make space for each person to talk about their feelings. Take time to comfort each other.

BE PREPARED

The most resilient families anticipate future challenges and prepare for them. Naomi and her family moved to a foreign land so they could feed and care for their sons. She arranged for them to marry good local women, hoping they would produce heirs. As a widow, Naomi realized she needed to return to her family in Bethlehem and then find a husband for Ruth to give them both security.



Growing Resilience

Imagine your family life in a year, five years, or ten years. Pray for God's wisdom to help you anticipate and prepare for the needs of family members. Take a parenting course, teach your children essential life skills, or prepare wisely for retirement.

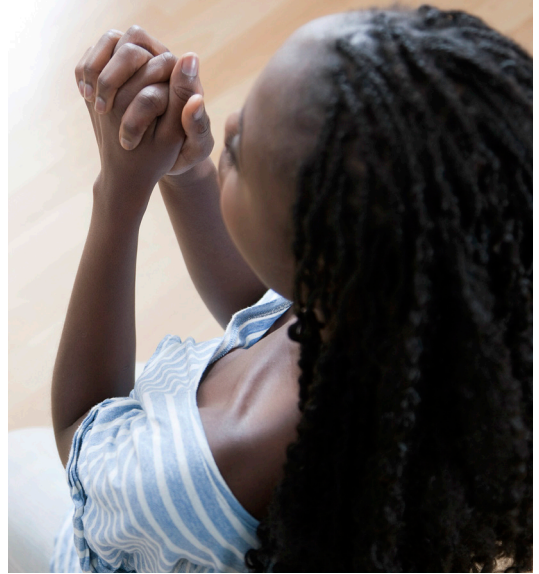
BE RESOURCEFUL AND FLEXIBLE

Naomi and Ruth had nothing. They were poor, vulnerable women. But Ruth was willing to gather the fallen stems of the barley harvest to give them something to eat. Find out if any resources, charities, support groups, or books might help your family through your current life challenges.

BE CREATIVE

Think creatively. Turn your situation upside down and look at it from every angle. Naomi's matchmaking plans seem bizarre from a 21st-century perspective! But she was searching for creative solutions to their serious problem of poverty and insecurity. Without a male relative, they would be very vulnerable in their society.

Ask God to help you see your life from His perspective and to show you creative solutions.




REMEMBER GOD'S CARE

We faced challenging situations in our own ministry—profoundly critical church members; miscarriages; unbelievable tragedies; traumatic transitions; and long-term, misdiagnosed illness. But, when the fires burned down and we sifted through the ashes, we always found some grains of gold. Now we can see how God was growing us, shaping us, refining us, and giving us unexpected gifts and experiences that developed our empathy for others and provided us with all kinds of resources.

It's hard to notice the diamonds when your life feels like dust. But God is still scattering them along the path. Become a diamond hunter. Find at least one sparkling moment in every day. Write it in your journal. Focus on every scrap of evidence of God's love for you, however small (Philippians 4:8).

Make a timeline of your life and record all the ways God has cared for you in the past. Look for the patterns of His loving presence, sometimes hidden in the tapestry of darkness, but always there in threads of gold (Deuteronomy 31:6).

KEEP GROWING

Although most of us would never choose the tragedies that tumble into our paths, God will use them to grow us in amazing and unexpected ways, if we let Him. Like Naomi, we may feel bitter for a while, but He will lovingly bring us to a place of peace and joy (Jeremiah 29:11). 

Karen Holford is director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division.





HOMEGROWN COMPASSION

THE WORLD NEEDS COMPASSION, AND IT BEGINS RIGHT WHERE YOU LIVE.

EARLY IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC I listened to some leading experts in medicine, economics, politics, and education. Each of them projected what life might be like by June 2021. The picture was vague and washed with shades of gloom, but tiny glimmers of hope still sparkled here and there.

Their conclusion really caught my attention. They pointed out that when life settles back into some kind of new normality, the test of our society will be how compassionate and supportive we have become toward those who are now poor, weak, bereaved, homeless, jobless, and more vulnerable than ever before.

Jesus is our ultimate example of compassion. His eyes noticed the people on the edges of the community and marketplaces, such as tax collectors, tired mothers, people who were rejected and distressed, and people with leprosy, paralysis, and blindness.

He didn't blame them for their problems or tell Himself that it wasn't His responsibility to help them. He was moved with compassion for those who were vulnerable and hurting and who needed His love, acceptance, encouragement, hope, and help. His compassion didn't just stay in His heart as a warm, fuzzy feeling—He acted on that love and gave others just what they needed: healing, forgiveness, respect, value, food, and protection from danger.

FAMILY FIRST

The best place to develop our Christ-like compassion is in our own homes. When we practice compassion in our marriages and families, our “compassion muscles” grow ready for action. God calls us

Jesus didn't blame people for their problems.

to care for our families first, because our closest relationships are always our greatest responsibility. Husbands and wives are called to cherish each other, and parents are called to cherish their children. When everyone in the family has been cherished and cared for, then we are ready to care for those outside the home (1 Timothy 3:4, 5).

Before we can show compassion to others, we must first experience God's loving compassion for us and our loving compassion for each other. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another" (John 13:34). The more love we pour into our spouse's heart, the more love is likely to flow back to ours. If we want our children to grow compassionate hearts, we first need to show them compassion.

Read Psalm 103 and let the loving picture of God soak into your heart and mind. Encourage everyone in your family to do something kind for everyone else in the family every single day. Ask how you can help each other to experience a small taste of God's incredible love.

NEW EYES

The compassionate love that God showers on us also changes our perspective of others. We begin to see every person as a child of God, just like us. We are called to love and care for them the way that our Father God would want each of His beloved children to be loved. But compassionate eyes don't just see other people as God's children—they are constantly using their peripheral vision to notice the suffering of others, just as Jesus did.

Watch each person in your family. Look for any signs that they are struggling, sad, anxious, or distressed, and ask how you can help. Teach your children to notice other children who might be sad, hurt, or lonely. Role-play the skills of noticing when others need friendship and help, listening to what's bothering them, and caring for their needs.

COMPASSIONATE BELIEFS

Another important aspect of compassion is the belief that it's my responsibility to help those around me who are hurting. As soon as I think that it's not my problem, or that their suffering is in some way their own fault, my compassion evaporates, just as it did for the priest and the Levite in the story of the good Samaritan. True compassion believes that it doesn't matter who you are or why you are suffering. What matters is that another human being is hurting, and my responsibility as a fellow human being is to relieve that suffering, even if it's just by being there.

Nurturing compassion starts in the home. Developing your child's kindness and compassion helps them to grow more like Jesus, strengthens their character, and creates the foundation for greater resilience and happiness. Create worships based on stories of compassion in the Bible. Notice those who are compassionate and kind in your children's reading books and in the news. Help them to find compassionate heroes and role models.



*True
compassion
believes
that it
doesn't
matter who
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why you are
suffering.*

COMPASSIONATE FEELINGS

In order to be compassionate, we need to imagine and understand how other people are feeling. It means entering into their emotional world—being sad with them when they are sad and happy when they are happy (Romans 12:15). We need to let our hearts be moved by their emotions so that we can respond in the most compassionate way.

Take time around the dinner table, or at bedtime, to listen to each other's stories of the day. When we regularly ask other family members about their daily challenges, the saddest moment, the greatest joys, and any time when they felt afraid, it becomes easier to talk about emotions together. It also means that we're regularly monitoring each other's emotional well-being so that we can help if someone is being bullied or slipping into depression.

COMPASSIONATE HANDS

Compassion is empty and useless unless it responds in wise, caring, and practical ways to the other person's needs. Jesus noticed that people were hungry and fed them. The good Samaritan cared for the injured man by cleaning his wounds, giving him water to drink, and taking him to a safe place. In Jesus' parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25), the sheep are the ones who demonstrate their care for others by providing for their practical needs.

Pray together about developing a compassion ministry as a family. You can find lots of kindness ideas at ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/live-kind. Regularly involve children in family acts of compassion, and listen to their suggestions for helping others. Look for stories of children and teens who have started compassion projects in their local towns, and inspire the families in your church to become families of compassion. **J**

***Karen Holford** is a family therapist and the family ministries director of the Trans-European Division. She is passionate about developing compassionate families and children.*



It did . . . but he had to work hard to put everything straight. He was so upset at the behavior of these “friends” that he stopped hanging out with them. We took a risk, we set a boundary for him, and he learned some important lessons without us saying a word.

We discussed the rules for our family with our teens, and they decided on the consequences for breaking them. They would often suggest harsher consequences than we would, giving us a special opportunity to show them grace.

*Let them know
that whatever
mess they get
into, you will be
there for them.*



WHAT'S BEHIND THE ARGUMENT?

Underneath most arguments, teens are really asking one or more of the following questions:

- Do you love me/care about me and my well-being and happiness?
- Are you able to understand what I am feeling right now? Can you empathize with me?
- Are you willing and able to help me when I am struggling?
- Will you always be there for me? Can I depend on you?

If we answer these questions in the way we relate to them every day—regularly showing kindness, appreciation, empathy, and helpful support—and if we express our commitment to them, then this tends to reduce their need to argue with us.

Staying calm, speaking gently, listening to them before answering, responding to their honesty positively, and helping them make their own risk assessments can also help to reduce arguments. If you have a major disagreement, reconnecting warmly and positively with your teen before bedtime is vital. When a painful disconnect lasts too long, it can be devastating for the teen's emotional well-being. As an adult, take the first step to show warmth and forgiveness and set a healthy example.

LOVE ALWAYS PROTECTS

Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). So we took a deep breath and told our teens that if they ever found themselves in difficulty or facing a challenge, such as an unexpected pregnancy, addiction, or the possibility that they were gay, we wanted to be the first people to know. We reassured our children that we would always love them and welcome them, and that we would always be there to help them, whatever their life challenges.

Parenting teenagers can be challenging. Pray for them every day and pray for the wisdom and love to respond to them with kindness and patience. Focus on God's incredible love for you, as described in 1 Corinthians 13. Fill your hearts and minds with His love, and generously pass it on to every teenager in your life.

To learn more about supporting teens, watch Karen's webinar: youtube.com/watch?v=KnNPkWoi2DU



Karen Holford is the family ministries director for the Trans-European Division and a qualified family therapist. She has a deep compassion for teens, having been one herself.



IS EVERYTHING OK?

HELPING CHILDREN WITH THEIR MENTAL HEALTH

THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A CHALLENGING ONE for children as well as adults. Isolation, uncertainty, fear, illness, loss of loved ones, and disrupted routines in the home, school, work, and church have all taken their toll. These stressors have an impact on physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being, especially with children.

Some families and children seem to have flourished from being at home, having a slower pace of life, spending time in nature, and growing spiritually closer as a family. And, for all kinds of reasons, others have struggled. Whether you are a concerned parent, grandparent, friend, neighbor, teacher, or pastor, you might be wondering about a child's mental health, praying for them, and looking for ways to help.

IDENTIFY TRIGGERS

Some children show their distress by being aggressive toward themselves, other children, adults, and objects. If you notice this happening, try to understand what might have triggered the behavior. Ask what happened just before their outburst. Anger is a secondary emotion that can quickly follow on the heels of fear, sadness, feeling out of control, or being misunderstood. Help them identify their primary emotion, which may be easier for them to talk about and manage. You could say, "Sometimes when people throw things or hurt people, it's because they are hurting inside. I wonder what your throwing/hitting hand would say if it could speak and tell us what it's thinking and feeling?"

Before disciplining a child for being out of control, stop and consider any distress that might be fueling their misbehavior. Gently say something like, “Tommy, I know you don’t usually behave like this, and I’m wondering if something is bothering you or making you feel funny inside. Would you like to have a cuddle and we can talk about it together?”

SPREAD CALM

Stay calm. The calmer you are, the easier it is to help your child calm down and feel safe. If you become angry or shout, they are likely to become more distressed, which will make it even harder for them to manage their behavior. Or they may lie to you or hide their behavior because they feel afraid.

Reassure them of your love, acceptance, and care before you try to correct them. Wait until an aggressive child has calmed down before touching them. Find other ways to connect. Gently say, “It sounds like you are really frustrated/upset/annoyed/hurt. I want you to know that I care about what you are feeling, and I’m going to stay with you until you feel better.” Wait for them to calm down before trying to have a rational conversation about their behavior.

Help them to find a positive outlet for their energy—a safe place to burn off steam, an engaging hobby, a calming activity, a fun distraction, a kind thing to do for someone else, or a gratitude activity. If they have hurt another child, help them do something to repair the relationship. If they have made a mess, help them clean it up.

WATCH FOR SIGNS

Look out for the quieter children, too. It’s easier to miss changes in the behavior of children who are introverts, who are naturally less active, or who stay alone in their rooms.

Emotional distress is the most common cause of abdominal pain in children. So respond to tummy aches with loving care and attention, and always ask if anything is bothering them.

Some anxious and distressed children will act younger than their age, such as sucking their thumb, bed-wetting, or wanting a parent to feed them. This is often a response to feeling sad, insecure, or frightened and in need of reassurance and protection. They might unconsciously regress to an age when they received more comfort and support. Avoid shaming them for their behavior and making them feel worse. Listen to them and be compassionate, comforting, and reassuring.

MAKE A COMFORT MENU

When children feel sad or depressed, they might cry more than usual, refuse to do simple tasks, be less energetic, or become aggressive. They may have lost someone or something important to them. Take lots of time to listen to their sad stories and reassure them with your hugs and comfort. Ask how you can help them feel better.

Make a “comfort menu” together, listing things that help them feel better when they’re sad inside. Always include talking to you and having a big hug so they don’t have to feel sad alone. Encourage them to make a gratitude journal where they write or draw the things that they are thankful for each day. Being kind to others can also help them to feel happier. Sometimes when people are sad, something very simple becomes an almost impossible task. So if they are struggling to do something, gently come alongside and support them.

Whenever you look at a child’s behavior, you are just seeing the tip of the iceberg.



Is Everything OK?

CREATE ROUTINES

Establish simple everyday routines, with enough space for some flexibility. Slow down the pace of activity in the home, and be intentional about creating a warm, safe, and happy place for children to be. Set up a chill-out area or even just a basket or box of quieting activities—bubbles, calming storybooks, cuddly toys, etc. Read stories from the library about children managing their feelings in different ways. Go outside for refreshing walks in nature whenever you can. Plan family worships and prayer times around calm and reassuring themes of God’s love, forgiveness, and protective care.

If you’re all working and studying from home or life is particularly stressful, create some fun ways to release the tension. Invite everyone to stop what they’re doing once an hour and connect in a fun and creative way. Try calling out an alphabet of gratitude together or try a physical challenge such as patting your head and rubbing your tummy at the same time. Play a quick group game. Sing a favorite action song together. Run around the house and find some things that are each color of the rainbow. Throw a soft ball to each other as you tell something that makes you feel happy.



*Create
some
fun
ways
to
release
the
tension.*

CHECK IN

Daily emotional check-ins can help you notice when a child is distressed. This can also help them find the language and opportunity to talk to you about their struggles. Check in by asking them about the happiest moment, saddest moment, most difficult/challenging moment, and most surprising moment of their day. Always take time to listen to their concerns, remembering that they may not always be able to express their thoughts and feelings clearly. Normalize their worries and experiences, when appropriate, because everyone is feeling a little topsy-turvy at the moment. Support them as they explore activities that might be helpful for them.

LOOK FOR MORE

Whenever you look at a child’s behavior, you are just seeing the tip of the iceberg. If they are happy, there is a whole load of happy beneath the surface, and if they are behaving in unexpected, aggressive, and distressing ways, there is probably a whole lot of sadness, fear, frustration, and worry inside them that needs to be soothed and untangled.

All children will feel sad, afraid, anxious, frustrated, or angry, and it’s quite normal for them to express their feelings through their behavior, especially if they are experiencing a complex feeling that they can’t name or describe.

Notice when troubling behaviors become a regular pattern. Think about what was happening in their life when the behavior began, because that might help you understand their underlying emotions and distress. When do these behaviors happen, and how often? Are certain events more likely to trigger the behavior?

Talk to your family doctor about your concerns, and try to get help for the child as soon as possible so their distress can be relieved. Wherever possible, choose a therapy in which children are seen together with their parents and caregivers so that you can understand what is bothering your child and support them better.

Visit www.handsonscotland.co.uk for clear and simple advice to help your child through all kinds of troubling behaviors, as well as ideas and activities that can help them to flourish. 1

Karen Holford is a family therapist and pastor’s wife. She is the family ministries director of the Trans-European Division. While her husband was pastoring in Scotland, she worked with the team that developed the “HandsOn Scotland” website mentioned above.



IT'S TIME TO TALK ...
About Sex

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT GOD'S DESIGN

MY GRANDPARENTS WERE MARRIED in the 1920s. Stan was blind, and Lily was the youngest of thirteen children. She conceived on their honeymoon and had no idea how she would give birth. When Lily asked how the baby would come out, her aunt replied, “The same way it got in.” Lily had never seen the birth of a baby or even an animal. She was frightened and confused.

Because of the silent embarrassment of their parents, my parents found a book to help them navigate the basics of sexual intimacy. Thankfully, they chose to give us the message that sex is a beautiful gift from God. Our sexuality was something to anticipate with joy and wonder and a delight to treasure. God wonderfully and beautifully created our bodies, and how they work is “very good” (Genesis 1:27–31).

It’s not easy to talk about God’s amazing gift of sexuality and the wonderful way in which God designed our bodies for intimacy. We struggle with our own stories of shame and embarrassment or to find the best words to discuss the topic. But we need to have an ongoing conversation about healthy sexuality with our children, one little piece at a time.

AS THEY GROW

The way we care for our babies, talk about their bodies, and delight in how they were created is vital for developing their healthy body image. They learn that they are wonderfully made when we handle them gently and lovingly as God’s precious gifts. Even when we change their diapers, we can smile and care for them cheerfully rather than with disgust (which can give them the unintentional message that their genitals are dirty and shameful).

A marriage in which each partner cares for the other and invests in the other person’s flourishing can demonstrate healthy boundaries and positive attitudes toward sexuality. This helps children learn about good relationships, kindness, respect, and serving each other in love.

As children grow older, continue to talk about their bodies with wonder and respect, and help them to delight in all their body systems. It’s best to give children bite-sized chunks of information about sex when it arises in the conversation or when they see animals mating and giving birth rather than having one Big Talk about sex.

Answer their questions as simply and warmly as you can, with a smiling face and a soft tone. This will help them to feel comfortable and confident when they want to talk about sexual topics and questions in the future. If you’re not sure what to say, tell them they’ve asked a good question and that you’ll look for some good answers.

Sometimes children explore their bodies and touch their genitals. This is perfectly normal. They are learning that God has filled them with enjoyable sensations, like touch, sound, taste, sight, and smell.

Look for Christian books that present a simple, positive picture of our sexuality and God’s plan for families, such as *The Story of Me* by Brenna Jones. Teach children about pornography early, especially if you live in a culture where they might accidentally discover pornography when using computers and phones. *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures* by Gail Poyner and Kristen A. Jenson explains pornography in a simple way and then teaches children five “Can Do” steps to respond to pornography if they accidentally encounter it:

- C – Close your eyes immediately.
- A – Always tell an adult.
- N – Name it as pornography.
- D – Do something distracting.
- O – Order your thinking brain to take charge.

Prepare children for the exciting changes of puberty.



Your children are on a journey of learning about sexuality, just as you are.

Prepare children for the exciting changes of puberty. Give girls a positive concept of menstruation by celebrating this new stage in a fun and special way. Keep affirming the wonder of their body, and make sure that your comments about them and their bodies reinforce that they are precious to you and God. Avoid teasing them and shaming them.

As they grow older, teens will ask more challenging questions about relationships and sexuality. The website at www.axis.org provides excellent discussion guides on various subjects. They contain current research, biblical references, and robust answers to help you navigate the complexity of your teen's questions.

TOP TIPS

- Where possible, continue to nurture your marriage by learning more about your own sexual intimacy and seeking help for your areas of struggle and pain. When your attitudes toward sexual intimacy are healthy and positive, you will also help your children to appreciate and respect God's wonderful gift.



- When you have a warm and open approach to your children's sexual curiosity, they are more likely to turn to you with their concerns, worries, and questions. Breathe deeply, stay calm, and ask them where their question has come from. This will help you understand the context of their question and what kind of answers they need.
- Teach the importance of consent in relationships. This helps them create safe boundaries by saying "No!" when others want them to do things they don't want to do, and shows them how to respect others when they choose to say "No!"
- Your children are on a journey of learning about sexuality, just as you are. Don't panic when they are struggling. Stay calm and hold on to the bigger picture of their lives and God's grace.
- Help them to understand the difference between feelings and identity. Feelings can be complex, but they don't define us and can change over time.
- Help your teens find safe Christian adults to mentor them so they have a caring and positive support system.
- Keep praying for wisdom and love as you share the secrets of God's wonderful design for sexuality with your children.
- Remember that God has already forgiven every sexual mistake and unwise decision. Everyone can start again and make better choices next time.
- Tell them that whatever they are struggling with, you will always support them and be there for them, just as God is always there for us. Even when they have messed up, we can welcome them home and love them deeply, just like the father of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

***Karen Holford** is a family therapist and a departmental director at the Trans-European Division. She has been married to Pastor Bernie Holford for more than 40 years, and they are still learning and growing in sexual intimacy!*

Leading with *Love*

CHRISTIAN PARENTS OFTEN STRUGGLE to find the best ways to discipline their children and help them learn self-control and positive behavior. But before we can help our children make good behavior choices, we need to understand their needs, we need to create an environment in which they can flourish, and we need to be living examples of God's compassion, gentleness, and forgiveness.

GOALS OF PARENTING

The main goals of good Christian discipline:

- Raising children who have an active experience of God's expectations, love, and forgiveness
- Raising children who are loving, happy, and obedient
- Raising children who know how to behave appropriately

SPARING THE ROD?

Many parents are confused about the role of the "rod" in disciplining their children. It's helpful to remember shepherds don't use their rods to beat their sheep. It would make a shepherd's job so much more difficult if the sheep were terrified of him. Rods were held alongside sheep to guide them on the right path and prevent them from slipping over cliffs. They were used to lift sheep out of ditches when they fell and to kill wild animals that threatened to harm them. The shepherd's rod and staff were used to create safe boundaries and to support, rescue, guide, comfort, and protect the sheep (Ps. 23:4).

DON'T PUNISH IN ANGER!

Punishing children by hitting and yelling can have serious long-term consequences. When parents react to disobedience with anger, or by lashing out physically to harm a child, they model a picture of God that is out of control and ruled by emotions. Jesus was kind and



compassionate, welcoming children even when He was tired. He makes it clear that it's wrong to treat children in any way that misrepresents God's loving character (Matt. 18:6, 10).

Reacting in anger or temper:

- induces fear (1 John 4:8 says perfect love casts out fear)
- builds anger, resentment, and rebellion in a child's heart
- does not model Christlike behavior or self-control, and
- gives a distorted picture of God

DISCERNING YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR

Before you discipline your child, pause and think about any unmet needs that might be underlying their behavior, and run through a list that reflects on your responsibility as a parent. These needs, and your child's ability for self-control in response to them, will vary depending on their age and temperament.

Does your child need food, a drink, a nap, some space to burn off energy, or quiet time away from too much noise and stimulation? When a young child needs any of these vital things, it can become very difficult for them to stay calm and obedient. While it is important to help children develop strong character at all ages, punishing children for being hungry, tired, or overwhelmed can create confusion and anger in their hearts.

Also, ask yourself if your child has togetherness-with-you needs, such as these:

- your focused and loving attention
- your acceptance and forgiveness
- your comforting hugs and loving words
- your appreciation and gratitude when they've been helpful

- your encouragement and support when life is challenging
- your respect when they feel shamed
- your protection and reassurance when they feel afraid

BEHAVIOR — COMMUNICATION

Your child's behavior may be giving you an important message that you need to hear. It might be:

- I need your love and attention. Please spend some time with me.
- I'm overwhelmed by difficult feelings and too much stimulation. Please help me calm down because I don't know how to do this on my own.
- I'm confused and don't know what to do. Please guide me.
- I can't handle this situation anymore! Please change something!

You may need to respond to your child's unspoken needs rather than punishing their behavior.

BASIC BOUNDARIES

Set clear boundaries to help children manage their behavior. The amount of explanation will grow as children get older and they are able to comprehend the principles behind the boundary.

Very young children need simple, clear instructions without extra information to confuse them.

Older children need to have the principles behind the rule explained so that they can take ownership of their behavior and gain tools for making wise life choices. For example:

- Actively demonstrate the desired behavior so they can clearly see what you want them to do.
- Explain why the rule or boundary is important, as appropriate for their age.
- Check to be sure your child clearly understands the boundary (ask them what they think the rule means).



To encourage positive character development, help children notice three things they did well each day, and to think about how they managed to do them so well.

- Help younger children stay inside the rules, and warn them if they are getting close to the edge.
- Enforce the rule or boundary firmly, gently, and consistently.
- Give affirming feedback to your child when they're staying within the rules.
- The most important time to discipline is when a child has intentionally and rebelliously crossed an important boundary.

WISE AND LOVING DISCIPLINE

- Enforcing rules without showing love and compassion leads to resentment. So "connect as you redirect"—show your child warmth, love, and understanding, instead of just dealing with their behavior (Eph. 6:4).
- Soothe their emotions before responding to their behaviors (Prov. 15:1).
- Pray for wisdom to respond well (James 1:5).
- Talk calmly and privately with your child about what went wrong. Don't shame them in front of others.
- Ask "what?" happened instead of "why?" Children find this question clearer and easier to answer.
- Make sure they understand which boundary/rule was broken and why it's important not to do it again.
- Quickly show your love after they have been disciplined (Ps. 103:8-11). Don't leave them to feel alone, unforgiven, or rejected (Gen. 2:18).
- To encourage positive character development, help children notice three things they did well each day, and to think about how they managed to do them so well.
- If you want to encourage positive behavior, time-in (quality caring time with you) is often much better than time-out (leaving a child alone).

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE

- The best disciplines are often thoughtfully linked to the disobedient act. If they took

a cookie before dinner, they don't get one afterward. If they mess something up, they have to help tidy it. If they hurt someone, they need to do something kind for them.

- Help your child to put things right again—to replace the things they break or apologize to people they've hurt. This gives them a positive self-image that shapes positive behavior.
- Give them special attention when they're behaving well. "You've played happily with your brother for ten minutes. Well done! Choose a book, and I'll read to you."
- Try one approach to discipline for a few weeks and see what happens. If it works better, and you and your child are happier and closer, then you've made a good choice.
- Keep adjusting your disciplinary methods as your child grows. Older children can help create family rules and decide what to do when the rules have been broken. You can occasionally help them better understand God's grace in a powerful way by making the discipline less than they were expecting.

WHAT NEXT?

- Has this article given you new ideas for disciplining your children with love and grace?
- How will you put your ideas into action? J

Karen Holford is a family therapist and parenting consultant.

SCAN FOR AUDIO



RAISING COMPASSIONATE CHILDREN

MAKE KINDNESS A WAY OF LIFE

I WAS JUST THREE YEARS OLD when I discovered the joy of serving others. My father was working at the mission hospital in the Kwahu region of Ghana. Every day, I saw the line of sick and injured people outside the clinic, and every day, I saw the joy on people's faces when their wounds were cleaned and bandaged, when they were handed a bottle of medicine, or when they lay resting in a comfortable bed after urgent surgery.

When we returned to England, I watched my parents quietly caring for struggling families and refugees. I realized that helping others made my parents happy, and I also felt a glow in my heart when I saw the gratitude of those they helped. Later, my dad worked for ADRA, driving trucks of food into war zones. One day my mom packed a box with party food, gift bags, and dresses for two little girls who had never had a birthday party because of the war.

THE BLESSING OF COMPASSION

I recently learned how the brain responds when we relieve the suffering of others. When we empathize with people and sense their distress, the pain networks in our brain are stimulated, and we feel sad too. But when their pain inspires us to respond with compassion and alleviate their suffering, the pleasure

and reward networks in our brains are activated. We feel peace, gratitude, and joy. Amazing! God has wired our brains to be rewarded for blessing others! Helping others is one of the best ways to experience joy and overcome the sadness and distress in our own lives. When we help children feel the joy of helping others, we give them a gift that will bless them and others for a lifetime.

COMPASSIONATE GOD

God is compassionate (Psalm 103:8). His compassionate love for all His children is the motivation behind His desire to save us and to prepare a home where we can live with Him forever (John 14:1–3). Jesus was compassionate to others (Matthew 14:13–21). His compassion moved Him to heal, help, forgive, and encourage people, as well as to feed the multitudes who came to hear His teachings. God shows His loving compassion for us in thousands of ways every day. When we recognize His care in our lives, it fills our hearts so we can show care for others (1 John 4:19).

SMALL THINGS, BIG DIFFERENCE

Even small acts of compassion can make a huge difference to someone who is suffering. Researchers discovered that when doctors expressed compassion in a 45-second message, their patients experienced many health benefits—and these positive effects lasted for months. They told the patients that they did not know how their illness would progress, but they promised to be with them every step of the way, to support and help them.

*God has
wired our
brains to be
rewarded
for blessing
others!*



A smile, a listening ear, a comforting hug, a gentle touch, a tiny gift, a thoughtful action, or an encouraging message may take very little time. Still, these gestures can bring hope, peace, joy, love, and gratitude to others, which the Holy Spirit can expand in their lives and ripple out into their community.

Think about a time when people showed you compassion and relieved your suffering. What effect did it have on you? How do you feel when you remember the moment of kindness? When my family experienced a tragedy, someone left a tiny bunch of flowers on our doorstep. The memory of that small action brings me joy every time I think of it, and I thank God for the neighbor who took a few minutes to gather the flowers for us.

*Every child is unique.
Help them discover
their special ways to
help others so they
can experience joy.*

EXPLORING COMPASSION

Use the story of the Good Samaritan to help your children learn about compassion (Luke 10:25–37). The Good Samaritan believed it was important to help those who were suffering, regardless of their nationality or social status. He used what he had available to treat the man's wounds and to take him to safety. He acted quickly and generously. The Good Samaritan needed to travel farther but knew the injured man needed to rest and recover in comfort. So he paid the innkeeper to care for the man and promised to cover any extra expenses upon his return.

Explore this story together and learn the process the Good Samaritan used to help others so that your children understand their responsibility to be compassionate, to look for opportunities to help, to ask or notice how they can help, and then to act quickly—and find others who can help too.



COMPASSION GROWS AT HOME

Loving families nurture compassionate children who love to serve God and others. Look for ways that God is showing compassion for you and your family. Help your children experience God's compassion for them. Find ways to show comfort and compassion to your children when they are sad and struggling. Involve them in acts of compassion for your neighbors, friends, church members, and community. As you model compassion to your children, it will become more natural for them to show compassion to others. Encourage them to notice how being kind and compassionate helps them feel happier too.

IDENTIFY THEIR GIFTS


Help your children discover their spiritual gifts and talents. They may enjoy playing music, singing, drawing, cooking, or gardening. How can they use their simple skills to be a blessing to others? Their gifts don't need to be perfect. When I was a child, I wrote poems for people and made little cards. The poems were not amazing, and the cards were childish. But they made other people smile and feel loved because I had thought about them.

Every child is unique. Help them discover their special ways to help others so they can experience joy. Creative children might prefer to make a gift. Others will enjoy singing songs in care homes, visiting lonely neighbors, or helping you to make soup for homeless people. Affirm whatever they do to care for others. Your positive response will inspire them to keep trying.

ONE SIMPLE COMPASSION CONCEPT

Whenever Jesus met suffering people, He found a way to bless them with love and left them much happier than when He found them. This is a simple concept to help you, and your children, make compassion a way of life. You can practice this at home by aiming to leave each other feeling happier and blessed. And you can help your children bless others by thinking of kind things to do and say to everyone they meet at school, in church, and even in the grocery store.

COMPASSION SHARES GOD'S LOVE

Compassion is a powerful way to share God's love. It helps us become salt and light in our communities (Matthew 5:13–16) and bless others as the Good Samaritan blessed the injured man. The "sheep" in Jesus' parable noticed those in need and blessed them with kindness (Matthew 25:31–46). Whenever we show compassion to others, they will taste God's love and see that it is good (Psalm 34:8). 

Karen Holford works for the Trans-European Division and enjoys studying research on compassion, which affirms God's character and the biblical principles of caring for others.





Raising Contentment

TODAY WE'RE BOMBARDED with messages telling us that we need to buy newer, better, and more perfect things. These messages leave us unhappy with our looks, our clothes, our home, our car, and everything we own.

Jesus taught us not to worry about all these things because God knows our needs (Matthew 6:28, 29). As a missionary, Paul faced hardships and lived without many things, but he learned to be content in all circumstances. Philippians 4 contains some of his secrets for peace: gratitude for what he had;

asking God for what he needed; experiencing the peace of God in his heart; and focusing on the positive things around him. These values can help our families find joy in a society that continually whines for more.

MODEL CONTENTMENT

We need to reflect prayerfully on our own attitudes if we want to develop anti-materialistic attitudes in our children. So, how contented am I with my car, home, furniture, clothes, technological devices, and even my appearance? Do I believe that everything I have has to be just perfect, or have I learned the joy of "good enough"?

And how am I verbalizing my contentment to my children? We can talk intentionally about our blessings, peace, and joy. We can express gratitude for what we have. We can limit our own purchases and take care of our possessions. We can teach our children how to “make do and mend” in creative ways and share our own delight in giving things away to make others happy.

ANTI-WANTING

Advertising creates a desire for things we never knew we “needed.” Describe advertising to your children as a sneaky little thief who is trying to steal their money and their peace of mind. Help children to spot some of advertising’s nasty little tricks.

When your school-age child wants something very badly, try the anti-wanting debate. Pretend that you are your child, and have your child pretend to be you. You present the case for buying the object, and they have to come up with 5 to 10 reasons, depending on their age, for why it’s not worth buying.

When children want something new, encourage them to write it on a wish list with today’s date, and then see if they still want it in a month. Help them to develop delayed gratification by earning money and saving up for bigger items. This is an important life skill that will protect them from getting into debt later.

ENOUGH

Most of us have enough in our homes already. When tempted to buy something new, be creative and wonder if you already have something you could adapt, repaint, renovate, or reuse. Choose simple, timeless decorating styles, and add color or accessories with budget-friendly items. Challenge your children to have fun making a spaceship out of an appliance box or to find new ways to play with old toys. Explore the Internet for free printable Lego challenge cards, which help children to use this versatile toy in fresh and creative ways.

BUYING AFFECTS THE WORLD

Encourage your child to care for the environment. Most toys are made from plastics and synthetic materials from nonrenewable sources. Encourage older children to explore the environmental effect of using disposable plastics. Learn about fair trade and choose to buy items that show care for the workers who made them and for the creatures and beautiful world God created.

BETTER SPENDING

If children have pocket money to spend, take them to thrift stores and yard sales. Teach them to save money by choosing good, pre-loved toys and clothes. It can be loads of fun discovering interesting toys that you can’t buy in stores today. Show them how to check secondhand items to make sure that all the pieces are there and nothing is broken. Being willing to buy pre-loved items and knowing how to do it wisely and well could save them thousands of dollars in the future.





ENCOURAGE GENEROSITY

Work together as a family to raise money for a caring project. Try to find a project your children can be actively involved with and where they can see the difference that their generosity makes to others. Provide them the opportunity to give some of their own savings to the project.

Linda's family has decided not to buy anything new unless they can afford to buy two. They wait for half-price sales and two-for-one deals so they can give away the second item or an equivalent-value gift voucher. "We now spend much less, we choose more carefully, and we're more generous," Linda says. "It has changed the way our children think about buying and giving."

When you go to a store with children, give them some money to buy food for a food bank or a gift for a homeless child instead of buying something for themselves.

Celebrate your birthday by taking your children with you to do 10 acts of kindness in the community, and encourage them to do the same on their birthdays. Planning acts of generosity can help to focus your child on the needs of others at a time when they might otherwise be focused on their own wants.

MAKE GIVING FUN

Researchers have discovered that the happiest people are not those who have the most but those who regularly give things away. Help your children to experience the joy of giving by showing them how to make simple gifts. Download printable playdough playmats, laminate them, and make little pots of colored dough to share with friends. Bake bread and cookies together, decorate planters, grow bulbs, then share them with neighbors and friends. Learn how to make a giant-bubble mixture and wands using dowels, string, screw eyes, and washers (<https://happyhooligans.ca/homemade-giant-bubbles/>) and share with others at the park. Or make kindness rocks by painting smooth garden stones and decorating them with encouraging messages, Bible verses, and cheerful designs. Brush a layer of clear sealant over each rock to protect the design. Have fun leaving the rocks where they will bring joy. (See www.thekindnessrock-sproject.com/home for more information and project guides.)

It's challenging to help your children swim against the tide of materialism, but they'll develop positive Christian values for a lifetime of contentment and joy. J

Karen Holford is director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division.

SCAN FOR AUDIO

A young girl with dark skin and her hair styled in two braids, wearing a white turtleneck shirt. She has her eyes closed and her hands clasped together in a prayer position. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of teal and pinkish-purple colors.

RAISING SPIRITUALLY SECURE CHILDREN

HELP THEM PICTURE GOD'S ARMS AS
THE SAFEST PLACE TO BE

“DURING THE SERMON, I want you to draw a picture of God. No one knows what He looks like, but most of us have a picture in our head when we think of Him. I would love to see what your picture looks like!” Pastor Bob* had just finished the children’s story in church, and he was giving all the children paper and crayons.

James wondered about his picture of God. “He’ll be a bit like Dad,” he thought. “Kind and fun!” He loved hugging Dad and laying his head on Dad’s chest to feel Dad’s heartbeat. He drew God smiling and saying, “I love you, James!” James looked at his picture. He couldn’t wait to meet God one day!

Mary looked at her piece of paper. She felt sad. Mom often yelled at her and told her God was sad when she disobeyed. Mom said Mary wouldn’t get to heaven if she kept sinning. Mary tried her best to keep Mom happy, but Mom always found something wrong with Mary’s behavior. When Mom was very angry, she would hit Mary. Mary was frightened of God. She would never be perfect enough to please Him. As tears rolled down her face, Mary drew God with an angry face.

When you picture God in your mind, who do you see?

WHAT’S YOUR PICTURE OF GOD?

When you picture God in your mind, do you see a smiling, warm, and loving Father? Or an angry and disappointed Judge who is wondering how to punish you? Who shaped your picture of God? How does the way Jesus treated people correct your damaged picture of God and demonstrate His extravagant and gracious love? When we experience God as loving, accepting, forgiving, and comforting toward us, it helps us parent our children in ways that demonstrate God’s love for them. When they experience God’s extravagant love for them, they are more likely to fall in love with Him forever. We love God—and others too—because He first loved us (1 John 4:19; Matthew 22:37–39).

SPEAKING WELL OF GOD

Children need a true and healthy picture of God’s strong and steady love for them. God’s love for them overflows with patience and kindness (1 Corinthians 13:4). He will never leave His children or abandon them (Deuteronomy 31:8). He forgives their sins and does not hold their sins against them (Psalm 103:9–12). He comforts their tears (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4). When we give children a picture of God as a kind, compassionate, forgiving, and accepting Father, we help them trust Him when life is complicated and distressing (1 Peter 5:7). Their anxieties are soothed because perfect love and fear cannot co-exist (1 John 4:18).

*All names are pseudonyms.



Be careful about the stories you tell children about God, especially during the children's story time during church. Don't tell scary stories with the theme "Be sure your sins will find you out!" Tell them surprising stories of God's extravagant and gracious love for them and fill them with wonder, love, joy, and peace (Isaiah 26:3).

When children hear the message that God is angry with them or disappointed in their behavior, they are filled with fear. Graphic stories of end-times and posters of strange beasts can frighten children and teenagers and make them anxious and distressed. When we misrepresent God so that children conform out of fear, we are telling them lies about God's character. Many young people have given up trying to please this very distorted picture of God because it is impossible to be perfect; they feel overwhelmed by despair. When we distort the loving image of God to manipulate children's emotions and behavior, they experience spiritual abuse and are more likely to feel anxious, depressed, guilty, and even suicidal.

JESUS WELCOMED CHILDREN

Jesus came to live God's love among us. He welcomed little children! They ran into His arms because they felt safe with Him. They clambered onto His lap, clutched Him with their sticky fingers, and listened to His beautiful stories of God. He hugged them in His strong and gentle arms and blessed them with loving words they would never forget. He didn't speak harshly to them or express His disappointment in them. He never made them afraid because He wanted them to welcome Him into their childish and innocent hearts. He did, however, say very harsh words about those who place obstacles between innocent children and their loving heavenly Father (Matthew 18:6).

Before we can help children feel safe with God, we need to experience the security of God's love for us.

HELPING CHILDREN FEEL SPIRITUALLY SECURE


Before we can help children feel safe with God, we need to experience the security of God's love for us. Write twenty words that describe God. What do they say about your understanding of God's character? Where did you learn these ideas about God? Do they reflect the truth about Him?

Study God's character. Explore the many ways that God loves you. Search the Bible for verses about God's love and listen to what God is saying to you. Then rewrite the verses in your own words. Write each fruit of the Spirit on a different piece of paper: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Look for stories in the Bible where God demonstrates these traits. List what you are doing well in showing these fruits in your parenting. Write specific ways your parenting can show your children these fruits and help them experience these traits in their relationship with God.

Create an alphabet of God's love with your spouse or family.

Gather at least one hundred words to describe God's love for you. Sit quietly and let God's love soak into your heart. Then hold the hands of your spouse or child and look lovingly into their eyes. Tell them they are God's beloved child, and He delights in them (Zephaniah 3:17).

Explore God's goodness with your children. Ask them what they like about God and what they don't like. If they have any fears, help your child experience the truth about our safe, welcoming, and loving Father in heaven.

Parents, pastors, teachers, and grandparents play an important role in building a child's picture of God. When responsible adults hurt children, make them feel afraid, or abuse them, it can lead to lifelong fear, distrust, sadness, stress, self-loathing, discouragement, anxiety, and guilt. But when adults have a positive, loving, trusting, and worshiping relationship with their loving Father in heaven, they can help children flourish spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. This prepares their heart for loving and compassionate relationships with God and each other—fulfilling the greatest commandments of Jesus. 

RESOURCES

Karen's webinars for Christian parents:

- Nurturing the faith of babies and children
<https://ted.adventist.org/family/nurturing-the-faith-of-babies-and-toddlers/>
- Spiritual nurture of children
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_r1QSgt-g5A
- Loving discipline
<https://ted.adventist.org/family/loving-limits-positive-and-effective-discipline/>

A helpful paper on how Christian parents might use counter-productive strategies and distort a child's experience of God:
<https://www.sabu.no/assets/files/documents/Barn-og-Familie/vaer-varsom/spiritual-abuse-and-counter-productive-strategies.pdf>

Karen Holford lives in England. Every day she notices how God is loving her, and she tries to love others similarly. This fills her with great peace and joy!





SCAN FOR AUDIO



SHARING THE *love*

HOW TO NAVIGATE LIFE WHEN TWO BECOME THREE . . .

I SAT ON THE FLOOR, surrounded by diapers and baby toys. It was time to start preparing dinner, and I was still in my nightclothes. All day long I had been feeding and changing a fussy baby. Now, before I could start cooking, I had to get washed and dressed and take our tiny baby into town to buy food.

I sighed. I was too tired to move. I didn't want to go anywhere. I just wanted to sleep. More than anything, I needed someone to come and take care of me so I could have enough strength to take care of our infant. *Is this it?* I thought. *Is this what it means to be a mother? Sheer, mind-numbing, body-wringing exhaustion?*

Most mothers are conditioned through nine months of pregnancy to be totally focused on their helpless infant. The baby is their main priority, and making sure their little one is comforted, fed, loved, clean, laughing, healthy, and happy can take many hours of caring attention. It's not easy to do all this on your own. Furthermore, many new mothers experience postnatal depression after the birth because of hormonal changes, multiple responsibilities, disillusionment, exhaustion, and a lack of social and family support.

Fathers can also feel confused. If their wives ask for help, they don't always know what to do with a baby. They may feel very competent when they are at work but useless when they are at home. They come home tired from a long workday and just want to rest. Or they're concerned they'll be too tired to do their job if they have to attend to the baby during the night.

I was too tired to move. I just wanted to sleep.

My husband, Bernie, was running a Revelation seminar shortly after the birth of our first child. I guess we naively thought life would carry on as usual, even though we had a young baby! So he encouraged me to come along and show my support to the local church.

For one week I prepared our baby to go out every evening. I sat in a side room at church, feeding and changing her. She was tired and fussy. I felt like a mess. I couldn't focus on the lessons. I was exhausted. She didn't want to sleep, and if she did, as soon as we got home she woke up and it took another two hours to settle her again. Life was no longer normal. It was much too disruptive to my life and my baby's routine to go to a midweek evening church program every night.

It's easy for husbands to feel rejected after the birth of the baby. They're no longer the focus of their wife's attention, and they need to shift their expectations. When I was nursing my babies, my body was often too tired or too overstimulated from hours of physical contact with them to be touched by Bernie. I loved him, and I wanted to be hugged and cared for, but I felt like my body wasn't my own anymore. It seemed to belong more to my babies than to me or Bernie, so we struggled.

LET'S STICK TOGETHER

It's all too easy for each partner to feel resentful and uncared for. Instead of their new baby deepening the bond between them, their new role as co-parents can often threaten their relationship and distract them from loving each other well.

Harry Benson promotes Christian marriage and family values through relevant research, writing, and

teaching. His desire to strengthen families comes from his own steep learning curve. When he and his wife, Kate, had very young children, Harry was immersed in his work. Kate became increasingly lonely and resentful as she cared for the home and the family with very little input, encouragement, or support from Harry. One day she hit rock bottom and almost walked away from the marriage.

Now, many years later, they teach brand-new parents the skills for staying close and strong through the ups and downs of life with babies and toddlers. You can read some of their experience in their book *Let's Stick Together: The Relationship Book for New Parents*.

When Harry asked a significant number of new mothers what they most wanted from their husbands, 95 percent wanted him to be a friend, 97 percent wanted him to be interested in her as a person and show that her needs are important to him, and 98 percent wanted him to take an active interest in the children, playing with them, caring for their everyday needs, and being significantly and positively involved in their lives.


The kind of love that mothers need is active. It's not just a warm and loving glow in the heart—it needs to be expressed in practical ways. They need their husband to be a caring friend and a supportive companion in this challenging journey of parenting a newborn. Babies are 100 percent dependent on their parents for 100 percent of the time. That's an intense degree of work, day after day. Mothers need to be topped up by the father with loving care and joy and peace so it can bubble over into the home and every relationship.

TRY THIS

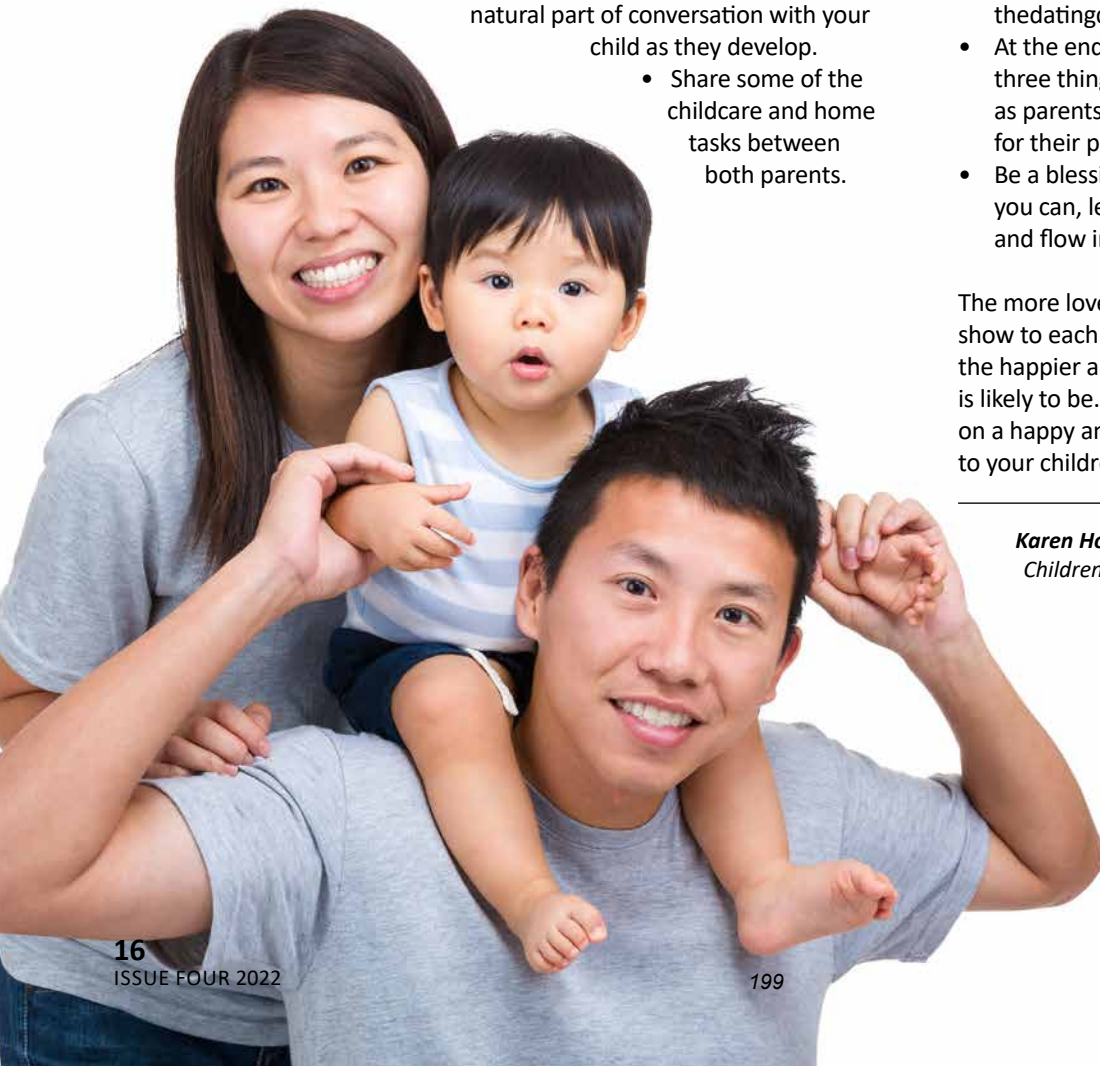
Here are some suggestions from new parents who are learning to navigate this new stage in their relationship:

- Ask your spouse for three things you can pray about for them every day. Then say a simple prayer for each other or hold hands while you pray silently for the other person's requests.

- Study a short book like Philippians. Write one or two verses on a sheet of paper and add your reflections throughout the day. Read your notes together at bedtime.
- Set aside regular time to talk about each of your current joys and challenges.
- Empathize with each other's emotions: "It sounds like you are feeling . . . Help me to understand more about that and how I can help you."
- Write a list of ways you can show care to each other in five minutes or less and try to do some of these every day.
- Take turns telling your spouse what you appreciate about them as a spouse and parent.
- Create a daily routine together for the baby so both you and your spouse know what needs to be done when and how to do it.
- Have a short worship with your baby at the same time each day. Sing a happy song, read a Bible verse from a picture book written for babies, and say a very short prayer. Talk about God as you go about your everyday activities so it becomes a natural part of conversation with your child as they develop.
 - Share some of the childcare and home tasks between both parents.
- Take time to play with your baby every day. Give them your full attention, smiles, and eye contact. Play simple and safe, repetitive games with them.
- Swap roles occasionally so the parent who is less involved with the baby experiences what it's like to care for a baby all day.
- Show care and kindness as often as possible to bring love and joy into the home. Your baby will benefit from the peaceful and caring atmosphere you create.
- Dads, show your wife that she is still the number one priority in your life. Surprise her with acts of thoughtful love and service.
- Take time to have fun and relax together as friends. It takes more creativity when you have a baby. Go for a walk together and chat while baby sleeps, buy a ready-made meal you can eat together at home, and make a list of fun things you can do in an hour at home. Find creative ideas for all kinds of free dates at www.thedatingdivas.com.
- At the end of each day, write down three things each of you have done well as parents, and appreciate your spouse for their part in the parenting.
- Be a blessing to each other as often as you can, letting God's love fill your heart and flow into your marriage and home.

The more love, kindness, and support you show to each other at this challenging time, the happier and stronger your relationship is likely to be. In this way you can also pass on a happy and healthy model of family life to your children. 

Karen Holford is the Family, Women's and Children's Ministry Director for the Trans-European Division.





WHEN OUR CHILDREN “TAKE A BREAK” FROM CHURCH

WHEN OUR CHILDREN ARE YOUNG we can find masses of books, articles, websites, and parenting seminars to help us whenever we don't know what to do. Once our children become adults, all this helpful support seems to evaporate. But sometimes parenting adult children can be even more complex when they make challenging choices about faith, relationships, and lifestyles. Fortunately, the Bible is a useful GPS system to help us navigate this unpredictable and sometimes hostile territory.

THEY'RE IN GOD'S HANDS

Whenever we're relating to our adult children we need to remember they will always be God's children too. They may make unwise choices and wander around in the wilderness for many years, but He still loves them and watches over them. Some children need to leave the church to find God, and sometimes they discover God in amazing and unexpected places. We have all taken wrong turns and wandered through various deserts. But He keeps leading and guiding all of us. He can use our wanderings to bring us into a closer relationship with Him.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide them, in His way, into God's purpose for their lives. Let the Holy Spirit prompt you when to speak, what to say, and when to stay silent. Our children will experience more of God's love and grace through our loving silence than through our critical words. Make each word a gift (Ephesians 4:29).

LOVE FIRST

Our adult children need to know, without a shadow of a doubt, that we will never stop loving them and being there for them, whatever choices they make. Jesus accepted people who were struggling because of their poor life choices. He lifted them up and showed them His love and forgiveness. His incredible love inspired them to turn their lives around and follow Him.

According to Paul, love never fails, and it starts with our patience toward those who are not growing as fast as we want them to. God is continually patient with us, slow to anger, and abounding in love (Psalm 103:8). We can be more patient with our adult children when we reflect on God's patience with us. As we read through 1 Corinthians

13:4-8 we can find plenty of good advice for experiencing a loving relationship with our adult children: be humble, be respectful, don't keep score of wrongs, delight in the good, always protect, always hope, and always persevere.

NOTICE WHERE GOD IS AT WORK

Christian parents struggle with a deep sense of loss, shame, inadequacy, and hopelessness when their children take a break from church and make other challenging lifestyle choices. We are not God. It is not our responsibility to save our children; instead, it is our responsibility to love them and take away their aloneness (Genesis 2:18). We can help them experience the rich dimensions of God's grace and love. We can teach them what we know about God. Then the choice is theirs.

If our children sense our sadness and anxiety, or feel that we are critical of their lives, it can deeply hurt our relationship with them. Alternatively, we can focus on their positive values and character strengths and see this as evidence that God is at work in their lives (Philippians 4:8). If they are loving, joyful, peaceful, kind, patient, good, gentle, generous, and humble, then they are showing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23). We can look for the effects of His Spirit blowing through their lives and thank God.

NURTURE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

Stay connected with your adult children through their favorite means of communication. Accept them with open arms, especially when their lives are messy, and offer help and support when they're struggling. Respect their choices and beliefs.

Reflect on each interaction and ask yourself: "Did this strengthen my relationship with my adult child or weaken it?" Let your children know that nothing could ever weaken your love for them.

BE CREATIVELY GENEROUS

Our heavenly Father blesses all His children with sunshine and rain whether they follow Him or not. His love inspires us to keep blessing our children as fairly and generously as possible. Surprise them with little gifts and treats to brighten up their days. The surprises don't have to be expensive. Kathy sends fully stamped loyalty cards to her children. Adam saves points on his airline card and uses them to buy plane

tickets for his sons. Pop some money into their bank accounts when they're going through a tough time. These little expressions of love and generosity can speak powerfully to their hearts.


RESPOND COMPASSIONATELY

Be generously compassionate with parents whose children are taking a break from church. Most people who choose to leave the church do so because they haven't experienced the love and care that they needed, especially in a time of crisis. We don't know all the complex and painful stories behind other people's choices. We need to check that we are not carrying an attitude of self-righteousness because our children are still choosing to come to an Adventist church, or an attitude of judgment that they must have been less spiritual parents. Don't add to their pain and grief. Listen compassionately and encourage them. Pray for them and their children and show loving acceptance to the whole family.

REFLECT SPIRITUALLY

Revisit the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the parable of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32). Both tell stories of "obedient" sons who didn't have a positive attitude toward their father, and "disobedient" sons who understood their father's love and responded positively in the end. The parables of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13), the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31-46), and the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) also have powerful and encouraging messages from God that can comfort the hearts of hurting parents if we dig deep into their treasures.

PRAYER AND LOVE SAVES (PALS)

Why not start a PALS group in your local church? This is a resource for parents whose children are taking a break from church and encourages parents to pray together with their children and find fresh ways to love them. It was created by Dorothy Eaton Watts and is available through your local Women's Ministries department or from AdventSource (<https://www.adventsource.org>). 

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