

HOPE FOR
Today's Families

WILLIE & ELAINE OLIVER



REVIEW AND HERALD® PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION
Since 1861 | www.reviewandherald.com

1

The Family: God's Invention

Family is a wonderful word that stirs up warm feelings in most people around the world. It is the first thing people think about when in danger and also when there is something good to share or celebrate. Family is the first thing in our thoughts after being away for school or work for a period. Most people think about wanting to hug loved ones and enjoy the familiar surroundings of home after being away for some time. The truth is that, after God, family is consistently the most significant group that makes us feel safe, secure, and warm.

The experience of family did not happen by chance. Family was God's plan for the human race from the very beginning of time. It is the group from which we get our identity, our name, and our traditions. Family are the people we have a long-term relationship with, and, frequently, we feel the most comfortable with them. Family is almost always where we get the inner driving force that influences our goals and aspirations, and even our sense of well-being—who we really are or who we want to become.

When we think of family, we reflect on our parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, spouse, and children. Sometimes we even consider good friends to be family, because

- we grew up together in the same church or neighborhood;
- we are from the same city or country;
- we belong to the same tribe or region;
- we adopted each other or connected in some special way; or
- we share similar values, goals, or affinities.

What may come to mind when we think of family are our memories of faces, shapes, smells, or conversations; private and public spaces; a house or apartment; a city or a suburb; a farm

or a village; a church or a school; a kitchen and food.

Genesis 1:27, 28 describes the beginnings of the family like this: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’ ”

The Bible—the inspired literature that describes God’s conversation with human beings—shares in the first chapter of the first book that God created the family, emphasizing the high importance this basic unit in society has for God, and consequently should have for us.

Despite God’s plan for the happiness of the family, we all know things have not always worked as well as they were supposed to. Husbands and wives often do not get along. The marriage that was meant to last until death often ends in divorce—or the relationship doesn’t even get to marriage before giving birth to children, separating, and causing lots of pain. Parents and children are often angry at each other. Parents feel disrespected, while children feel controlled or abandoned by the ones who were supposed to be taking care of them.

These experiences are often confusing because what we anticipated would bring a sense of happiness, warm feelings, and security has been the

complete opposite for many people in our world today, perhaps even for the person reading this book right now.

In the face of disappointment and distress we are pleased to share that there is hope for today's family. Left to the popular attitudes in our society of thinking about ourselves first, second, and always—what can I get, rather than what can I give—families will continue to experience anguish, depression, gloom, hopelessness, and misery. The hope is in taking another look at the principles God meant for people to follow so that their families could be what He created them to be. Beyond just taking a look, putting these principles into practice enables us to experience the joy, warmth, and peace that family was designed to bring.

So how would you describe your family relationships? Is there peace and a sense of satisfaction in your home each day, or does your family life feel more like a street fight you are trying to get away from or simply attempting to survive every day? Do you think you are making progress in your quest for developing a stronger and healthier family, or are you feeling angry, frustrated, irritated, and more helpless with every passing day?

What can be done to improve your relationships from apparent failure to working relationships where family members truly communicate?

Glad you asked. The truth is that there are no perfect families because there are no perfect people. So when we talk about a family that feels connected, we are not talking about a family without any problems. Rather, we are describing a family that enjoys relatively high levels of satisfaction and stability among its members. A family that is connected in a healthy way—spouses, parents, and children—are intentional about managing conflict in a timely manner and are committed to being patient, kind, understanding, and forgiving. While this kind of commitment is not easy, it is worthwhile and will contribute to the happiness, health, and quality of life of every family who puts it into practice.

For families to make it through the years with a high probability of success, it is important for family members to be committed to making it through each day—one at a time. Every member of the family must be purposeful about getting along with each other in meaningful ways every day—listening to each other, practicing being patient with each other when doing the opposite is so much easier because it comes naturally.

These are the habits that, if practiced daily, build stronger and healthier families over the years and make the members of the family feel safe, cared for, and secure, making it so much easier to deal with the difficulties that will inevitably

be experienced by every family. This kind of family relationship is better than any insurance policy when it comes to protecting a family from unexpected events.

Family specialists often say that the quality of a family depends on the quality of their communication. Trying to grow a strong family relationship without healthy communication is like attempting to make grape juice without grapes. It is simply impossible. Healthy communication is the primary skill needed for maintaining a strong sense of family. The closer the family relationship becomes, the more caring and respectful the communication must be.

Stephen R. Covey, a leading family expert, shares in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*,¹ the concept “be proactive” as a skill to be used for effective communication. In essence, the idea indicates that between a stimulus and the response—what someone says to you, and how you respond—there is a space. And in that space each family member has the freedom and power to choose their response—what they say, and how they say it. And that response is truly at the foundation of their growth and happiness as a family. For this concept to work so a family is able to communicate effectively, however, the skill has to be practiced so that it can be learned. To be sure, three things *must* happen in the space

between what a family member says to you and how you respond:

1. You must *pause*—instead of responding immediately to what your father or mother, daughter or son, husband or wife, is saying, allow yourself to calm down.
2. You must then *think* about what you should or should not say.
3. You must *choose* the correct response: what will bring peace, rather than war, to the situation at hand.

The quality of your family life will have much to do with the quality of your communication. Families who speak with each other regularly and lovingly experience a level of closeness that families who rarely or unkindly communicate with each other can never achieve.

It takes determination to build a great family. But anything that is worth doing is worth doing well. So make the commitment to communicate well, and watch your family blossom and grow in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

1. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997).