

Characteristics of Healthy Families Commitment, Time Together

In Genesis 2:24 the Lord gave us His plan for marriage:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

God’s plan for marriage is “oneness”. He wants to build godly homes that experience the same kind of unity that Jesus experienced with the Father. He wants to build a house of oneness. Refer again to the diagram entitled, “Building The House of Oneness.” We have looked at the foundation for this house, which is Jesus Christ. We have also looked at the four pillars that hold up the house of oneness; Unconditional Love, Trust, Respect, and Understanding.

Now let’s turn our attention to the remaining building blocks for this house of oneness. Notice that there are six blocks resting on top of the four pillars. These blocks are present in every godly family. Several years ago some researchers studied families that were healthy. This 25-year study was conducted to find the common characteristics of healthy families. After studying over 14,000 healthy families from 27 different ethnic backgrounds the researchers concluded that healthy families had six common characteristics. These six characteristics make up the building blocks in our house of oneness diagram.

1. Commitment to the Family

Commitment to the family is the cornerstone for building a godly home. Godly families demonstrate a strong commitment to one another. They are committed to serve each other, to love each other, and to sacrifice for each other. Family members seek to promote the well being of the other members of their family and the well being of the family, as a whole.

People can be committed to many different things. Some people are committed to making lots of money. Others are committed to becoming famous and to achieving a position of importance and influence. Some are pursuing their own personal pleasure and fulfillment. There are those who dream of building the largest church in their city or having a successful evangelistic ministry.

Every four years the Olympics is held somewhere in the world. It is fascinating to watch these young and gifted athletes compete for the highest sporting honors in the world. It is always amazing to listen to their stories and to discover how they arrived at this point in their life. To become an Olympic competitor you have to be extremely committed. Often these athletes begin their Olympic quest at a very early age, sometimes as early as three years old.

They get up early in the morning and practice before they go to school. They practice in the evening after school. They deny themselves the normal pleasures their peers enjoy because of their dream of competing in the Olympics. Their parents must make great sacrifices, as well. There are practices to attend, trips to take, equipment to purchase and sometimes, extended

separations from one another. Special trainers need to be hired and training camps need to be attended. It can be a demanding and expensive journey for the entire family. Becoming an Olympic champion does not happen easily. It requires a huge commitment.

The question you need ask yourself is, “What am I committed to?” You can be committed to your own personal fulfillment, to your own pleasure, to gaining power, to obtaining wealth or to becoming a famous person. But, focusing on such self-centered goals is detrimental to healthy family life. Your marriage will suffer and your children will grow up feeling misplaced and neglected.

The lack of commitment is a major source of wounding for many families. Children and spouses sense that other people, other things or other activities are more important than they are. A husband can be so caught up in his job or his recreational activities that his wife feels like she doesn’t have her rightful place in his life. Children can feel that dad’s golf game, for example, is more important than they are. He seems to have the time and resources for everyone else except his wife and his children.

Commitment to the family stands in sharp contrast to the emphasis in some cultures on independence, on meeting your own needs, and on finding personal fulfillment. Family, by its very nature, requires people to give up their independent and self-centered ways. They have to put the needs of others in front of their own. Those who are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices find themselves resenting the intrusions that children and marriage partners impose upon their lifestyle. Our homes are to be a place where Christ’s command to love others as ourselves is manifested in the choices we make daily.

Jesus is portrayed in Philippians 2:3-8 as one who demonstrated such a selfless commitment. His example should inspire us to embrace this same attitude and lifestyle. We are encouraged to, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit...Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Later on in that chapter, Paul states that Timothy was one, “who takes a genuine interest in your welfare...everyone else looks out for his own interests...” (Verses 21-22)

We too, live in a time where people are preoccupied with their own interests and not those of Jesus Christ! God wants families whose members are sacrificially committed to the well being of the other members of the family. He wants us to lay down our lives for one another and to follow the example that Jesus gave us when He embraced the life of the cross.

Someone has said that your life changes more with the arrival of your first child than any other event in life. A new baby in the family impacts every facet of your life and requires major adjustments on the part of both parents. Schedules are disrupted, sleeping habits are changed, finances are stretched and you are no longer free to come and go as you please. Your relationship, as a couple, becomes strained. Your life now revolves around meeting the needs of this vulnerable, new, infant living in your home. However, the rewards and blessings of having a child far outweigh the sacrifices made during those first, intensive months of its life.

I want to direct your attention to the last two verses in the Old Testament, Malachi 4:5-6. These verses contain one of the strongest statements in the Bible concerning commitment to the family.

“ See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

This scripture confirms to us that the family is the building block of society. The survival of a nation is related to the strength of the family. When the family is strong, a nation is strong. When the family breaks down a nation breaks down. Strong churches require strong families. Weak families create weak churches. The ingredients that hold families together are the same ingredients that hold other social networks together.

There are two critical issues that determine the destiny of a nation. The first one is whether or not a nation fears the Lord. Does a nation honor the Lord and give him his rightful place? A nation will suffer painful consequences to the degree it turns away from the Lord and walks in wickedness. The second critical issue is the health of the families in a nation. The breakdown of the family will lead to the land being struck “with a curse.” Many of the social “curses” and problems that nations struggle with have their roots in the breakdown of the family.

The most basic issue in a society is not drugs, crime, violence, poverty, nor the AIDS epidemic; it is the breakup of the family. As the family is restored, a nation will be restored. If we want to reach nations with the Gospel, we need to reach the families in those nations. Dr. Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade for Christ once said, “If we reach the family, we reach the world.” We need to see an outpouring of the Spirit of the Lord to turn the hearts of family members back to one another.

The Lord is speaking to us prophetically through the prophet Malachi. He is telling us that, before the return of the Lord, a ministry will be released into the world that will turn the hearts of family members back to one another. Fathers will turn their hearts back to their children. Children will turn their hearts back to their fathers. Husbands and wives will be reconciled to one another. Walls and barriers will be broken down. Families will be restored! God desires restoration and reconciliation.

The family is the socializing agent of a culture. The family shapes our values and it prepares us to be a functioning member of society. It is in the family that we learn language skills. It is in the family that the most basic questions of life are answered, “Who am I?” “Where did I come from?” We discover the meaning of maleness or femaleness in the family. The roles of husbands, wives, children, grandchildren, and siblings and are defined. We observe communication patterns and we learn how to deal with conflict. All of these basic issues are established as we grow up in our families.

I became a Christian at the age of 19, and within two years of committing my life to the Lord, I knew that God had called me to serve in Christian ministry. When I met my future wife Violet she seemed to share my fervent zeal to “sell all and follow Jesus”. We were married in our mid

twenty's and during the first year of our marriage Violet continued working as a nurse while I finished up my university education.

During our second year of marriage the Lord opened up the opportunity for us to work in a Christian home for recovering drug addicts. I left the university and Violet gave up her nursing career. The two of us moved into the home and became house parents for those living in the facility. We were both excited to be serving the Lord and, for me, it was a dream-come true. I had wanted to be in Christian ministry for several years and now, at last, I was able to fulfill my dream.

I plunged into my responsibilities enthusiastically and committed myself totally to the task at hand. There were evangelistic outreaches to conduct, Bible studies to lead, personal counseling sessions to be set up and a host of other exciting activities. It was a twenty-four hour, seven-day a week commitment, and I was more than willing to make that commitment.

After several months of serving in this intense environment some tension began to develop between my wife and me. She felt that I had time for everyone else in the world except her. She felt as though she no longer had her rightful place in my heart. It seemed to her like I was either too busy or too tired to give any attention to her or to our relationship. She would often ask to talk to me when I returned to our room late at night after an intensive day of ministry. However, I would tell her that I was too tired from my busy day and that I couldn't talk to her right then.

On several occasions after I told my wife I was too tired to talk to her, one of the young people would knock on our apartment door and request to talk with me. My response to this request was always positive and enthusiastic, even though I had just told Violet I was too tired to talk to her. I would often spend an hour with one of the young people, ministering to them and then return to our room all excited at what the Lord had done in their life. When I returned to our room and tried to share my excitement with my wife, she was less than enthusiastic about what had happened.

Violet began to develop resentments toward the ministry and was struggling to maintain a positive attitude toward the work we were involved in. I tried to encourage her by telling her that she needed to "die to her self," "take up her cross," and sacrificially follow the Lord. Such advice, however, did not address the basic issue we were dealing with. We increasingly argued about the role of the ministry and the importance of our own marriage. I didn't see clearly the issues involved and I didn't realize what was happening at the time. Thankfully, the Lord knew what was going on and He initiated some changes.

He led us to leave the ministry to drug addicts and to join another ministry in the city where we were living. This ministry, however, did not have room for us at their facility in the city so they asked us to move to a family camp they operated. It was located in the forest about a four-hour drive from where we were. They had a very active summer camp ministry there, but we moved there at the end of the summer camping season. So, there was not a lot of ministry activity during the first few months we lived there.

The leaders of the camp were very committed to the wellbeing of their staff families. They

wanted family life preserved in the midst of the demands that the ministry made upon the families. So they had established a mandatory “family time” each evening for all their staff families. Every evening the individual family units were to gather alone for a one-hour time of devotion, fun, and fellowship. For the first time in our married life my wife and I found ourselves alone in a room together every evening for one hour. There were no drug addicts knocking on the door. There were no Bible studies to lead. There were no evangelistic meetings to conduct. We were together, just as a couple; every night, for a whole hour! We were not used to doing this.

Initially, we encountered some struggles when we got together. We read the Bible to each other. We tried praying together. But sometimes one of us would pray too long and the other one would get irritated. At other times one of us would pray too loud and the other one would get irritated. There were even times when we started praying “at each other”. I would pray that Violet would be more “submissive” while she would pray that the Lord would convict me for hurting her earlier in the day. Our “family time” was just not working out the way we anticipated.

Through this process, however, the Lord began to show me that my relationship with Violet was foundational to my walk with the Lord. I was reminded of I John 4:20, which says, “If anyone says, “I love God, yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” I realized that my love for the Lord, “whom I had not seen” was revealed through the way that I loved my wife, “whom I could see”.

I also realized that if I didn’t learn how to love my wife, who was closest to me, I wouldn’t be able to love others more removed from me. I discovered that it is easier to love people you haven’t seen than to love the people you see regularly. The people you see daily can disappoint you and hurt you, but the people you have never met don’t have a chance interacted with you in hurtful ways.

I have told people that I have a great love for the people of Mongolia, even though I have never been to their country or met any Mongolians. Then I say that the reason I love them so much is because they ARE ALL IN MONGOLIA! I have never been hurt by a Mongolian. I have never had a conflict with a Mongolian. I have never had to forgive a Mongolian. I just have warm feelings in my heart whenever I think about them. Of course, all these things are true because I have never met a Mongolian.

However, I have worked closely with some other people in my life for over thirty-five years. We lived together, served the Lord together, were on leadership teams together and raised our children together. Those people are NOT like the Mongolians. They are much harder to love. I have had several conflicts with them. Some of them have hurt me. I have some painful memories to overcome from my regular interaction with them.

The Lord showed me that my relationship with my wife is a laboratory for character development. If I want to go deeper in relationships with other people, I need to go deeper in my relationship with my wife first. If I don’t learn how to humble myself at home I won’t be able to humble myself before the people on my leadership team.

If I don't learn how to communicate effectively with my wife, my communication with the leaders in my church will suffer. The key to loving others more removed from my life is to love my wife who is closest to me. This realization caused me to turn my heart toward my wife and to focus on deepening my relationship with her.

Eventually, Violet became convinced of my love for her and she was assured of her rightful place in my life. She knew that other people and other things would never push her out of my heart. Our relationship deepened and became more secure. As it did, our ability to minister to others grew. Now, instead of the ministry tearing our marriage apart, it actually brought us together. We took on more responsibilities and reached out to more people than ever before. The ministry became a joy and a delight to both of us. We both rejoiced in our newfound freedom in serving the Lord together as a team. The ministry was no longer a threat to the health of our marriage. Instead, the ministry enhanced our marriage.

If your spouse or your children feel something, or someone is replacing them in your heart, they will resent whatever threatens to push them out of their rightful place. Some children resent the ministry for this very reason. They see the ministry pushing them out of their father or mother's heart. In such situations a child's parent has become "ministry-centered" instead of "God-centered". This wrong focus leads to a life that is out of balance. God does not want to destroy our families for the sake of the ministry. He wants to strengthen our families, so that we can be more effective in our ministries.

We must be willing to forsake our families for the sake of the Gospel as the scripture says. But, seeking first the kingdom of God does not mean we neglect our families or that we turn away from our God-given responsibilities. The scriptures tell us that if we neglect our own families and don't provide for them, we are worse than unbelievers. (I Timothy 5:8)

The hardest place in the world for me to be spiritual is in my own home. I have to repent at home more often than any other place. I feel less competent at home than at any where else. I feel less anointed and am often at a loss as to what to do about the challenges I face at home. I sometimes find it easier to pray with other men in the church than to pray alone with my own wife. I feel more anointed and free when I am with them. When I am with my wife I encounter more tensions and struggles.

One of the privileges I have is traveling around the world and teaching in different seminars and training programs. For example, I have traveled to Korea over thirty times since my first trip there in 1986. Usually before I arrive, people are praying for me and are waiting with great anticipation. When I arrive, people are excited to see me and are expecting the Lord to do great things while I am there. They receive me as a man of God and respect me as an international YWAM Family Ministries leader.

The Lord works in a powerful way during the seminar and He touches many lives. I often pray for people and there is a sense of God's presence and anointing in the meeting. People get set free from bondages and lives are changed. It is great! I am blessed and the people are blessed. When I finish the seminar I fly back across the Pacific Ocean and return home to the USA. When I walk into my house, my wife is waiting for me. She loves me and welcomes me home, but life

is different at home than it is at the seminar.

I can't expect to walk into my house and say to my wife, "Hi honey, your mighty man of God has just returned home!" Look, I have anointing oil dripping off my fingers! Do you want to touch me?" My wife receives me graciously, but quickly reminds me that the garbage needs to be taken out in the morning. It is my responsibility to see that it gets taken out. What a let down! I am a mighty man of God in Korea and here I am taking out the garbage. Things are definitely different at home.

Then my wife might say something like this to me, "While you were gone our teenage son was very disrespectful and I told him that when dad returns home he will talk to you." So, now I have to talk to my disrespectful son. I feel inadequate, insecure and I don't know what to say to him. He is not interested in talking with me. He doesn't want to listen to me. So, I cry out to the Lord and ask Him to give me wisdom. When I walk into my son's room, he doesn't respond to me like they did in the Korean seminar and excitedly say, "Welcome, mighty YWAM international family ministry leader." Instead, he is resistive and not open to my input into his life.

When I finish this difficult and frustrating conversation with my son, my wife might tell me that some additional bills came due while I was gone. She points out the fact that we don't have enough money to pay them. She wants to know what I am going to do about this problem. So now I have to deal with the financial pressures we are facing. "What am I going to do? Where are we going to get this money?" I feel frustrated, powerless and not very successful. Right at this moment in time I can be tempted to think like this, "I NEED TO GO BACK TO KOREA!" "I am a mighty man of God in Korea!" I am admired in Korea. I am successful in Korea.

This story illustrates one of the big temptations we face, especially those of us who are in Christian ministry. We can feel more successful outside the home than inside the home. People affirm our ministry and they respond to us in positive ways when we are serving the Lord. The Lord's blessing and presence is evident and lives are touched and transformed. We feel anointed and fulfilled in what we are doing and there is a sense of pleasing the Lord.

Then we return home to a non-Christian spouse, to children that don't respect us, and to unresolved conflicts and tensions. We find ourselves frustrated and lacking the grace to deal with the problems at home. We don't feel victorious anymore and we quickly become discouraged as we see our own failings and shortcomings.

The lack of godliness in the lives of our family members discourages us. We don't feel accepted and we don't feel that the Lord is honored by what is happening in our home. It is easy, at this point, to turn our hearts away from our home and pour our lives into our ministries or our church work. The ministry then, becomes an escape from the challenges we face at home.

For those of us working in the market place we can sometimes feel more affirmed and accepted at our jobs than we do in our homes. We feel more competent and successful at work. People tell us we are such a compassionate nurse or such a gifted administrator. People respond positively to us and to our work. But at home we are met with criticism, frustrations and a sense of inadequacy. It is easy for our hearts to be drawn away from our family if this is the case.

For this reason, it is critical that our commitment to the family remains solid. We need to turn our hearts back to our home, so that we can maintain a strong and godly family. Our hearts must be anchored in the Lord and in our home. If we are not firmly anchored there, we will be swept away by the allurements that a successful ministry can bring into our lives.

As we conclude this section about commitment, let's stop and ponder these two questions before the Lord:

Do your family members have their proper place in your life?
Does your heart need to be turned to your home?

2. Spending Time Together

Strong families spend time together and they enjoy one another's company. Strong families build memories together through celebrations, picnics, camping trips, and common projects. They have devotional times together and they take time to communicate with one another. They share numerous common experiences together.

Most of us respond to the suggestion of spending more time with our families by thinking that we don't have any time to spend. Our lives are already so busy that we can't envision how we could possibly add anything more to our schedule. Our jobs are demanding, our church life is intensive, and we find ourselves exhausted just keeping up with the commitments we already have in life. Have you ever felt like your life was so busy that you couldn't find one more hour in your week for anything else?

When I was a university student I was extremely busy. People would come to me and ask me to help out on a project or to attend a special meeting. My response was, "I can't!" "I am too busy!" "I don't have one more free hour in my week!" "I have a full academic load." "I have a part-time job to pay for my education, and I have to study hard to keep up my grades."

However, at the beginning of my fourth year at the university, I met my future wife Violet. Once I met her, I was amazed at how much time I had! I could talk to her on the phone every evening for two hours and, of course, the weekends were completely free. I could get together with her anytime. No problem! What happened? Where did all this time come from?

What I discovered was that the real issue in life is not having enough time. The real issue is one of priority. The bottom line is, "How important is something to you?" If something is really important, you will somehow find time to fit it into your busy schedule. So when you think about time with your family, the question is not, "Do I have the time?" The question is, "How important is my family to me?"

Several years after we were married, my wife and I were leaders of a Christian community with many responsibilities and demands upon our time. However, I didn't want my son, Jonathan, to grow up feeling neglected and ignored while I was busy teaching other men how to become responsible fathers. I felt the Lord directed me to get up each morning and make breakfast for my son before sending him off to school each day. I wanted to build memories in my son's life of

some special father-son times together. A breakfast time together each day was one of the ways I could do so.

So Jonathan and I regularly ate breakfast together in our apartment before he boarded the bus early in the morning for the one-hour bus ride to school. It was a sacrifice for me to do this, because I am not naturally a morning person. I am not very alert and talkative early in the day. During breakfast, my son and I usually shared briefly about our day and I would then pray for him before he headed off to school. Many times, however, we ate our breakfast in silence because we were both still waking up. Other times we had to hurry because the bus was coming soon. The important thing was not so much what we did, but rather the fact that we spent time together regularly. Those times brought a bonding between us that would not have happened apart from those daily breakfast meals. I wanted to deposit a memory in my son's life of regularly having breakfast with his father as he grew up.

Another commitment I made, as my son grew older and became a teenager, was to always welcome him home at night. I never went to bed before he came home from his evening activities. Often I would be in our family room reading when my son arrived home late at night. My purpose was not to check up on Jonathan or interrogate him about his evening. Rather I just wanted to welcome my son home and be with him for the close of the day.

I discovered that often, Jonathan would start getting ready for bed and then he would come out and engage me in some conversation about his day. He would go back to brush his teeth, but before long he was out in the living room again, asking me a question about something that had happened that day. Some of our most meaningful conversations as a father and son took place during those late night exchanges. It was a good time of closure for my son at the end of the day.

The key to those interactions was the fact that I was accessible and interested in my son's life. It wasn't a structured father/son time. The fact that I was available opened the door for communication that would not have taken place. Some times parents think the most important thing they can give to their child is an education. Education is very important in **Asian** cultures. **Asian** parents sacrifice a lot financially to ensure that their children get a good education. Education is important and it is commendable for parents to sacrifice for their child in this way.

However, the most important thing you can give your child is not an education. The most important thing you can give him or her is yourself. The Bible says that Jesus gave Himself for the church. (Ephesians 5:25) Time together for the family is like oxygen for the body. Families need a certain amount of time just to survive. It is not enough to have just quality time. Large quantities of time are important, as well.

One reason spending time together is so important is that child-raising does not happen in a classroom or in a structured setting. It happens in the midst of our daily life. Often our planned and structured times are the least effective means of imparting our values to our children. Deuteronomy 6:4-6 captures the essence of this process by describing what can be called an "In-Life Seminar".

From this passage we see that, first of all, we are admonished to love the Lord with all our heart,

with all our soul and with all our strength. If we want our children to love God passionately then WE need to love God passionately as parents. Secondly, we are called upon to have the Word of God in our hearts. The Word of God must not just be in our heads. It must be in our hearts and it must become a part of our lives.

Then, we are called upon to impart a way of life to our children. The Word of God is to flow out of our lives in the midst of our daily life. Our love for the Lord is to touch every aspect of how we live. In this way we are to pass on the ways of the God to our children, as we sit at home, as we walk along the road, when we lie down, and when we get up. Parenting involves incorporating the ways of God into every aspect of life. It requires spending large portions of time together with our children.

I gave one of my most important inputs into my son's life during a five-minute commercial break while we were watching a television program together! We were watching a program one evening and during a break, my son turned to me and asked me a question about sexuality. I didn't have time to prepare an extensive answer or to pray about what I should say. Instead, I just offered a quick, silent prayer to the Lord and then answered my son's question. He was satisfied with the answer and when the television program came back on, he turned his attention back to the program.

I thought, "Wait a minute! Turn off the T.V.! This is important! This is what I have been waiting for! It's time for our father/son discussion about sexuality!" However my son had gotten his question answered adequately and he turned his attention back to the program. It is impossible to plan such unexpected moments. They happen in the context of being with each other. This is the reason it is important to spend unstructured time with our family.

When my son was a teenager, he loved basketball. He was on a basketball team at his high school and was very passionate about being on the team. I was praying about how to connect with him more closely and I felt the Lord speaking to me that I should enter into the activities that my son enjoyed. So I decided to attend my son's basketball games. The high school basketball season consists of seventeen games that are played over a four-month period of time. I was quite busy as a Christian leader and my speaking schedule was often set several months ahead of time. In order to attend my son's basketball games, I had find out the team's schedule six months before the season started.

Once I received the schedule, I entered each of my son's games into my planning calendar before I made any speaking commitments. When invitations then came to speak at conferences and seminars, I checked my schedule to see if the invitation conflicted with my son's ball games. I arranged my schedule so that I could attend the games my son played in.

Jonathan was not a very skilled player, so there were several times, especially during the first two years of being on the team that he didn't get to play in the games at all. Thus, I would drive two hours to watch my son sit on the bench. Then I would drive two hours to return home after the game. I didn't get to see him play at all! At times I was tempted to think, "What am I doing here?" "My son is just sitting on the bench!" "I am wasting my time!" "What does this have to do with the Kingdom of God?" "No one is getting saved!" "I am not asked to pray at half time"

“There are more important things I could be doing with my time!”

But then I was reminded that I was there for my son. I didn't love basketball. I loved him! I wanted Jonathan to know that, in spite of all the demands upon my time, I still had time to participate in the things that were meaningful to him. Churches and ministries can get other speakers for their conferences and seminars, but my son cannot get another father! If I am not present at the basketball game, his father is not there.

During this time, a memory came back to me from my high school years that really touched me deeply. My father was a very good athlete when he was a young man and he had great expectations for me as his first-born son. I was not a very good athlete, so he was disappointed with me in that area. However, I did discover that I was good at running long distances. So I participated in track and field events. I ran the 400-meter race for my high school track team and I did quite well. I won several races and had the fastest time in my school district. My father had never been able to see me run in these races because his job did not allow him to be present when the track meets took place.

One day when I was 17 years old, I was preparing to run my final race of the day. I was part of a relay team and I was the starting runner for the team. I was just getting into the starting blocks when I looked up into the stands, and to my surprise and amazement, I saw my FATHER! He knew I would be running that afternoon and he was able to get off work early that day. So he quickly drove over to the track field in order to see me run. He had never seen me run. That day I ran the fastest race I had ever run in my life!

I was running for only one person that afternoon. I was running for my father. I wanted him to be proud of me. “Look at me!” “I'm your son,” “I'm running for you!” I thought as I raced around the track. The presence of my father inspired me that afternoon. It brought out the best in me. It gave me motivation to run faster than I had ever run. Your presence inspires your child and will motivate them to excel in whatever they do. Commit yourself to spending time with him and make yourself available to your family.

I want to close this chapter by challenging you to commit yourselves to three time investments. How important is your family to you? Your time investment is a measure of the importance you place on your family. As I mentioned earlier, we always find time for the things that are really important in our lives.

The first investment is to have regular “family times” with your entire family. Spend time praying, reading the Bible, and worshiping together. Do fun things together. Take walks together. Communicate with one another. Clear up any conflicts that may be in your relationships. Set aside time to regularly connect with each other and celebrate being a family. You cannot build a close family unless you spend regular time together.

The second investment, if you are married, is to have regular time together as a couple. You need time to communicate together alone, without your children. Find time to have fun together. Establish a regular “date night” where you can do something special and celebrate your love for one another. Plan times where you can communicate without interruptions.

Your time together doesn't need to involve a lot of money. You can be creative in setting aside time as a couple, in spite of limited budgets and crowded living conditions. Tragically, some couples pour all their time and energy into raising their children but neglect their own relationship. When their children leave home the couple looks at each other and says, "Who are you?" They don't know each other anymore because they neglected their own relationship as they raised their children.

The third investment I want to challenge you to make is to regularly spend time alone with each child. Focused attention by a child's father or mother makes that child feel special and important. A child will share more intimately when they are alone with you and their brothers or sisters are not present. These special times help bond a child to its parent. Time with our families is an investment that is well worth the effort. The benefits are priceless. Strong families spend time together.

As you finish this chapter you may be carrying wounds in your heart over the fact that your own father did not spend time with you and that he was not present for you as you grew up. The story about my father coming to see me run in the track meet may have touched this issue in your heart.

I would encourage you to take a few minutes to bring this issue to the Lord. Bring your disappointments and pains to Him. If you need to forgive your father for neglecting you, speak out that forgiveness right now. God will release you from this past wound so that you can move forward into the future with faith and confidence. He wants to heal your broken heart.

Application Prayer

Father, I acknowledge that it is so easy to turn my heart away from my home and to let other things fill my life. Please forgive me where I have not given my family members their rightful place in my heart. I repent of allowing other people and other activities to push family members out of their rightful place in my heart.

Jesus gave himself for the church and I want to follow His example and give myself to my family. I want to give the most important gift I have to offer my family, which is myself. I choose to turn my heart back to my home and I commit myself to spending time with my family.

Help me to establish regular times together with my family, regular times with my spouse, regular times with my children, and regular times with my parents. I commit myself to establishing right priorities in my life.

Heal any memories I have in my past where I felt neglected and unimportant to my parents. I bring to you the rejection I experienced when my father and mother were too busy to spend time with me. I forgive them for any ways they hurt me in this area. Thank you that you are never too busy to spend time with me. "Even though my father and my mother forsake me", you have promised to receive me. I praise you for your acceptance! Amen.