

Characteristics of Healthy Families Resolving Conflicts, A Spiritual Commitment

In this chapter we will look at the remaining two building blocks in the house of oneness. In our previous chapters we have examined the importance of commitment in the family, the value of spending time together, the need to express appreciation to one another, and the power of positive communication. Our final two building blocks consist of problem solving and being spiritually committed.

5. Problem solving

Every family faces times of crises and conflict. There are no exceptions. Christian families encounter financial crises, relationship strains and health issues, as do non-Christian families. The difference is that Christians have the resources to overcome these unexpected crises times more effectively than those who don't know the Lord.

Some people are looking for an illusion that they will never find! They are longing for a hurt-free environment. We want a hurt-free marriage, a hurt-free church and hurt-free friendships. If they encounter any hurt or pain in these relationships, they conclude that something is wrong. They feel the need to change marriage partners, go to a different church or find new friends. Often, however, the solution lies, not in a new relationship, but rather, in a change of heart. Pain is not necessarily an indication that it is time to end a relationship.

Many young couples lack the skills, support, and necessary resources to successfully cope with conflicts and traumatic events. Marriages struggle because couples have an immature view of life and relationships. Newlyweds have been led to believe that life should be easy and relatively pain-free. Thus, when they encounter the pains and realities of life they are simply not prepared to deal with them.

Good marriages are not always conflict-free. Healthy couples choose to face their problems realistically instead of running away from them or denying them. They are committed to resolving their problems and will find healthy ways to overcome them. Obviously, there are situations where a person must leave a relationship because of the level of violence or abuse they are experiencing. In the majority of cases, however, violent abuse is not present and the best option is to face the issue and resolve it. It is better for partners to change, rather than to change partners.

Tragically, the way the Gospel has been presented by some people has contributed to an immature and unrealistic outlook on life. There are those who would have us believe that once we come to Jesus, all our problems will be over. He will resolve all our family conflicts, immediately heal all our diseases, pay all our bills, and find us a great marriage partner. He will give us a good job and our children will obey us the first time we tell them to do something. Anything that falls short of this expectation indicates that we lack faith or that there is sin in our life. If we would just have more faith our problems would disappear.

When life's crises and difficulties knock at our door, we quickly conclude that the Lord doesn't love us anymore or that our faith is insufficient. We respond like the rocky soil in Matthew 13. We experience an initial, rapid, response when we hear the Word of God, but we quickly wilt under the intensity of persecutions and difficulties. Like the soil in Jesus' parable we dry up because of a lack depth in our life. Following Jesus involves some degree of suffering, disappointment, and pain. Jesus does promise to heal us, protect us and deliver us, but He does not shield us from every trial in life.

A young woman made a visit into China many years ago. She stayed in a Chinese home where she heard this incredible story.

At one time the mother of this family had been mentally disturbed. The father was afraid the mother might hurt the children in her frequent times of anger and rages. So, he locked her up in one of the rooms of the house. Her youngest son was her caregiver. He helped meet her needs by bringing her daily meals.

One night, she started having dreams. She dreamed a doctor, named Jesus, was coming to her village to heal her. She told her youngest son about her dreams, begging him to go in search of Doctor Jesus. The boy ignored her crazy request until his heart changed just enough to begin a search in the village to see if anyone had even heard of Doctor Jesus.

When he came to the village store, his last stop, the owner of the store said that some foreigners were staying at the hostel and they were speaking the name of Jesus. He did not know if Jesus was a doctor, but he told the boy to go and ask the foreigners. When the boy was introduced to the foreigners, they were very surprised and blessed that he was looking for Doctor Jesus. They told the boy Jesus was not with them "in person" but they represented him and would be glad to see his mother.

The foreigners prayed for healing in Doctor Jesus' name over this woman's disturbed mind. She was instantly healed and remained so, growing daily in the knowledge of God. She no longer was a danger to her family and she led each one of them to salvation and peace through Jesus. Her story became a powerful testimony that touched many people for Jesus in her village.

This story illustrates that Jesus is our source for everything, including our healing. We are his creation and his love for us is unconditional. We experience God's unconditional love when we suffer and go through various struggles in life. This is how we grow in character. Even Jesus had to learn obedience through suffering. (Hebrews 4:8-9) "Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

In times of trauma, healthy families look outside themselves to find solutions to their problems. They see the value of supportive friendships and they will reach out to them in times of need. These external resources are vital to the family and they help them successfully solve their problems. Extended family members, neighbors and professional services all may play a role in helping the family make it through a crisis.

Healthy families actually become stronger and closer to one another during difficult times. They bond with one another in the crucible of suffering and in the fires of affliction. Thus, rather than being destroyed by their problems, healthy families become stronger.

Resolving Conflicts

Resolving conflicts quickly and effectively prevents a major crisis from developing. The best advice for resolving conflicts quickly is found in Ephesians 4:26:

“In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”

The key is to not let things build up in a relationship. Many marriages struggle because there are so many unresolved issues between the husband and wife. When something comes up between them, these unresolved issues come to the surface. They bring up things that happened twenty-five years ago! He brings up something that happened with his mother-in-law! She brings up a financial issue that happened in the first year of their marriage! Past grievances emerge that they thought were resolved. So many things surface that the couple can't even remember what started the original argument! Matthew 5:21-26 tells us to clear up any offence as quickly as possible. Otherwise, things will go from bad to worse.

There are two things Matthew 5:24-26 tells us we should do. (1) “First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” (2) “Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court.” Jesus does not mention the other person in this passage. He says for you to go, regardless of what the other person does.

In other words, in order for reconciliation to take place, we have to recognize that it is our responsibility, not the other person's. We need to change our attitude from an attitude of condemnation to an attitude of acceptance. The Bible says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We all make mistakes and fall short in our relationship with God and with one another. Acceptance of one another, even if we offend each other is the key to a healthy relationship.

One man confessed that when his wife did something that offended him he never said anything to her about it. Instead, he just put it into a file. When she did something else, he never said anything about that either. He put that item in the file also. Eventually, the file got full and then, when his wife did something that offended him, he emptied the whole file! Tragically, his approach to dealing with conflict is typical for many people. Obviously, this approach destroys relationships rather than builds them.

My wife and I were both Christians when we got married and we committed ourselves, at the beginning of our marriage, to apply the principle expressed in Ephesians 4:26. We agreed not to retire at night if we were angry at one another. Since neither of us had explosive personalities we never screamed or became violent with each other during an argument. My way of dealing with conflict in the early days of their marriage was to go for long walks. Upon my return home, we would have, what I would describe as a “cold war”. There would be tension in the air and we wouldn't say much to one another for a couple of days. Our cold war would gradually cease and things would appear to return to normal.

After forty-five years of marriage, I have good news to report! Things have changed. Now, instead of going for long walks, I take short walks! In fact, some of my walks are VERY short. As I start to walk away from a conflict, the Lord convicts me about my pride and my stubbornness. Before I reach the door of the room, the Lord changes my heart. I turn around, humble myself, and seek forgiveness from my wife. We can then resume our conversation and move toward resolving the issue that surfaced.

My wife Violet and I have actually had many late night discussions trying to clear up the issues and misunderstandings of each day. Sometimes I felt like Ephesians 4:26 should have been rewritten to say, "Don't let the sun come UP while you are still angry!" I wondered if the sun was going to come up before we resolved the issue we were dealing with! Our discussions would sometimes go on until 11:00 p.m., midnight, and beyond.

To be honest, we did not always successfully resolve everything in a 24-hour time period. Sometimes we were too tired. Sometimes our emotions were too stirred up. Sometimes we just needed to sleep on the issue and let the Lord work in both of our hearts before continuing the conversation. The important thing is not to get everything settled in twenty four hours. The point is to resolve things as quickly as possible. If we couldn't get something resolved at the end of the day, my wife and I agreed to talk about it again at the earliest possible moment.

Let's look in the Bible at a passage we mentioned earlier; Matthew 5:21-26.

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Murder, as we all know, destroys people and is clearly condemned in the Bible. Jesus states in this passage that an unjustified, outburst of anger also destroys people. A person's spirit can be destroyed by the way we react to them. They may not be physically harmed, but inwardly they have been destroyed. Calling someone names and yelling at them is destructive and such outbursts are not to be tolerated in our families.

If you have yelled at your spouse or your child in unjustified anger, Jesus instructs you to clear this issue up as quickly as possible. If you don't deal with this problem, it is going to go from bad to worse. Addressing this issue needs to take priority over everything else, including worship

and offerings to the Lord. You will end up in a place of torment and bondage if you fail to clear up these offences. Emotional bondage, spiritual bondage and physical bondage are just some of the consequences of unresolved offences. “Settle these matters quickly,” Jesus warned us.

A number of years ago I was the leader of a Christian community that included several families living together in a large building. One of the families in the community had relationship problems with the other families in the community so they had been asked to move somewhere else. Since I was the leader of the community at that time, I was the one who had to tell this family they needed to move elsewhere. I was also responsible to help them pack up their personal items before they left. The day of their departure came and it was filled with tension and pressure. They were struggling to accept the decision that had been made requiring them to leave the community.

I was feeling the tension and was looking forward to the moment when their van was packed and they were finally on their way to their new home. I would be so relieved when they were on their way. As I was helping them pack their things, a twelve-year old boy from another family in the community came to watch us load the van. He began doing some things that irritated me and he wouldn't stop. This went on for most of the day.

The boy was not intentionally trying to upset me but I became increasingly upset by his actions. Finally, the van was loaded with this family's possessions and they were ready to depart. I was going to pray a blessing over them and send them on their way. Just before I could offer my prayer, this 12-year old boy that had been irritating me all day, jumped up into their van and he wouldn't get out!

I lost my temper, yelled angrily at the boy, and ordered him out of the vehicle immediately! He quickly jumped out and ran off to play somewhere else. I then turned to the family, raised my “holy” hands, and prayed a prayer of blessing over them. However, inside my heart, I knew that what I had done was wrong. I had offended this young boy with my outburst of anger.

I didn't, however, go immediately and apologize for my outburst. Instead, I thought, “He's only 12 years old. Maybe he didn't notice that I was angry.” “After all, twelve-year old boys aren't that sensitive.” Then I thought, “He was wrong and he deserved to be rebuked for his behavior!” I justified myself by believing that my response was the righteous anger of the Lord. But I finally had to acknowledge that it was the “anger of LARRY” and NOT the “anger of the Lord!” Yet, I still didn't go and talk to the young man about the incident.

The following Sunday, I was preaching at the weekly church service for our community. The 12-year old boy was sitting in the meeting with his family. He had his head down and would not make eye contact with me. He was not getting anything out of my message. I was getting a lot out of HIS message!” The Holy Spirit was convicting me. I knew that I had sinned against this boy and that I had to immediately clear things up with him before they got worse.

So, as soon as it was appropriate, I went to the boy and asked for his forgiveness. He quickly forgave me and seemed to minimize the incident. He said, “It's no big deal. Don't worry about it.” And then he ran off to play with his friends. For me, however, it was a big issue and I knew

that it was vital for me to make things right with this boy.

Let's stop and reflect for a moment about what might have happened if I had NOT apologized to this boy. What might have been the consequence of not apologizing? First of all my relationship with him had already broken down. I had lost respect in his eyes and he couldn't receive input from me. I had lost my ability to influence this boy in a positive way. His response to me in the weekly church service made that abundantly clear.

His respect for other Christian leaders could have been permanently damaged through this incident. This twelve-year old boy might have concluded that all Christian leaders are hypocrites. His trust of Christians, in general, could have been damaged for the rest of his life. His relationship with the Lord could have broken down. He could have rejected Christianity, all together, as a result of how I treated him. Of course, it is possible that none of these would have happened, but there is a very strong likelihood that they would have.

Twenty years after this incident took place with the twelve-year old boy, I was teaching in a Youth With A Mission Discipleship Training School in the USA. I shared this story with the students during one of the teaching sessions and it had a powerful impact on a particular Christian leader that was attending the school. When the school was over, this leader returned to his ministry and shared what he had learned at the school to a small home group. He told the story about how I had apologized to a twelve-year old boy at one point in my life. When he finished sharing the story, one of the men in the group raised his hand and said, "I was that twelve-year old boy!" The leader could hardly believe his ears!

As soon as this man heard the story, he remembered the incident vividly, even though it had happened twenty years earlier. He shared with the group further details about the incident and they were exactly the same as what I had shared in the school. Remember the response of that twelve-year old boy when I apologized? He minimized the event and said it was no big deal. He didn't seem to be impacted very much by what had happened. However, these experiences have a life-long impact upon our lives. They don't just go away or clear up with time. For this reason the Bible admonishes us to clear up our offenses as quickly as possible. When I heard this man was in the meeting, I was so glad I had apologized to him twenty years earlier.

I have heard these tragic statements from children whose fathers were pastors, elders, or missionaries, "My dad was a pastor and I never heard him ask forgiveness about anything!" "My dad was an elder but I never once heard him apologize when I was growing up." Is it any wonder that some of these children eventually reject the faith of their fathers when they grow up? We don't have to be perfect as parents, but we do have to be honest and humble.

In the 1930's there was a missionary who shared a message of reconciliation in a Chinese church. In the message, the missionary talked about how we as Christians have been given the "message of reconciliation." (2 Corinthians 5:19) "That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation." The scripture says that God didn't count men's sins against them. In other words, God didn't shame us into correct behavior. He accepts us as we are, with our weaknesses and sin. As the missionary shared this message, it really spoke to the pastor's heart. At the end of

the service the pastor, with tears in his eyes, shared with the people that he had shamed his two daughters to correct behavior, and he publicly asked for his daughter's forgiveness. The people were stunned at what the pastor had shared. They had never before heard their pastor humble himself in this way. Shortly after that, people began to come forward for prayer for reconciliation in their own families.

God is in the business of change. He wants to change our condemning attitude into an attitude of acceptance and grace. When we, as God's children, can get a hold of that, then we can begin to experience revival in our own lives and in our families.

Violet and I were not perfect when we raised our son. We made many mistakes. There were occasions when we reacted angrily at his attitudes and actions. We disciplined him too harshly at times and we said things that we very much regret. As I said, we were not perfect. However, we did consistently apologize when we failed and we asked our son's forgiveness. We were committed to the truth expressed in Ephesians 4 and Matthew 5. My wife, Violet, was especially quick to acknowledge her sinful reactions and would immediately go to Jonathan and ask his forgiveness.

As Jonathan became a teenager, we noticed something remarkable taking place in his life. He too, would often come to us at the end of the day and ask forgiveness for his bad attitudes. We were impressed that our son would take such steps, because we didn't see this response in other teenagers. We wondered what caused our son's actions. We eventually concluded that it was the example he saw in us that influenced him to embrace this principle in his own life. If we want our children to humble themselves and ask forgiveness, we, as their parents, must first humble ourselves. We must ask their forgiveness when we are wrong. We need to provide a model for them to follow.

Our example affected Jonathan's behavior, not only at home, but also after he left home and began working. When he was seventeen years old he got a job working for a Christian friend of ours. One day Jonathan's boss called us and commended us for the way we had raised our son. He told us that, earlier in the day, he and Jonathan were riding in the car together after completing their day of work. As they were riding together, Jonathan asked his boss to forgive him for the bad attitudes he had throughout the workday. Jonathan's boss told us, "I have never had any of my employees ask forgiveness before!" He was amazed that a teenage boy would have the humility and maturity to take responsibility for his actions as Jonathan had done. "Whatever you did in raising your son, I want to commend you for the good job" he said.

6. A Spiritual Commitment!

We have now come to the final building block in the house of oneness. This block is more important than all the others. Healthy families have a spiritual commitment. Many of us are familiar with the truths presented in this book. We have probably heard these concepts preached in church or studied them in Bible studies. Most of us are aware of the need to be committed to our families. We realize that we need to walk in humility. We acknowledge the need to spend more time with our families. We know that we should express greater appreciation to our spouses, our children and our parents.

The issue is not, knowing what we should do; the issue is actually doing it! I know I should ask forgiveness when I am wrong. I know I should humble myself. The problem is I DON'T WANT TO! I am stubborn! I am selfish! I want my own way. I struggle with pride. I need the grace of repentance in my life. I need a change of heart. I need the power to do what I cannot do by myself. Building a healthy and godly family requires the transforming power of God in our lives. We cannot do this in our own strength. It is "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit says the Lord Almighty." Zechariah 4:6

The best thing you can do for your family is to give yourself fully to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other foundation upon which to build, as we mentioned previously. Colossians 1:17, says, "In Him all things hold together." Christ is the glue that holds families together. As long as a husband remains "in Christ" and his wife remains "in Christ" their marriage will be successful.

The reality for many **Asian** marriages is that only one spouse is a Christian and usually it is the wife. How can that one spouse represent Christ in their marriage relationship? 1 Peter 3:1 says, "Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives." The word "behavior" literally means lifestyle.

So, in other words, if the wife has an unsaved husband and she represents the principles that we have been discussing, there is hope for their relationship because of the lifestyle that is represented by the Christian wife. Even though her husband may not be a Christian, she can still win her husband, not by condemning him, but by accepting him. The Bible refers to this as the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit (verse 4).

Of course one of the greatest blessings in life is to have a partner that fears the Lord. This is one of the things I so appreciate about my wife; she fears the Lord. I fear the Lord also. As I mentioned earlier, we are both strong-willed. We are selfish. We each want our own way. We say things to each other that are hurtful. We do things that we shouldn't, but the wonderful thing is that eventually we bow our knees at the cross. We humble ourselves and repent because we both have submitted our lives to the Lord.

When we were first married and conflicts arose between us, we often blamed each other for the difficulties we were having. I was convinced that if Violet would just be more "submissive" we wouldn't be having all these problems. I often reminded her that she needed to be more submissive. I often shared scripture verses with her that agreed with my perspective. Violet, on the other hand, didn't think that she was the problem. She thought I was the problem! From her perspective, I was just being too stubborn and I didn't love her the way "Christ loved the church." So, she reminded me of the scriptures that encouraged husband's to be more like the Lord. We would often get stuck during such times.

However, we both feared the Lord, so we agreed that we needed to pray and seek the Lord's help. Since we were too upset to pray together we decided to seek the Lord in separate rooms. I would go into one room by myself and Violet would go into another room.

When I got in my room and would begin praying, "Lord, help my wife to be more submissive!" I

prayed fervently like this for several minutes. My focus was on my wife changing. Eventually, however, the Lord began to speak to my heart. Often the Holy Spirit led me to I Corinthians 13 where the scripture says that love is patient and kind. Love does not insist on its own way. Love is not proud and it doesn't keep a record of wrongs. The Lord convicted me about my lack of love toward Violet. I had spoken unkind words to her. I had been impatient with her and I was stubbornly insisting on my own way. The Lord changed my heart and attitude and I came out of the room a different man.

Of course, the Holy Spirit was speaking to Violet during her time of prayer, as well. The two of us came away from our prayer times changed, because of our willingness to yield to the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. Even though we had said things that were hurtful and did things that were selfish, eventually we came to the foot of the cross and found, in Christ, the power to change. Our spiritual commitment gave us the power to live the way we wanted to.

Families with a strong spiritual commitment share a common faith together and have a regular devotional life. They express this commitment through their participation in church activities outside the home. Even more significantly, however, is the fact that their spiritual commitment expresses itself through the values and the lifestyles they embrace. These values promote good relationships and conflict resolution skills. Committed families do not depend upon their own resources, but they find strength in turning to God.

It is absolutely essential that Jesus Christ be given the central place in our homes and that we recognize our utter dependence upon His grace and power. Christ is the key for keeping families together. That is especially true in a time when families are breaking down more than ever before. Successful marriages come about, as we continually go back to the Lord to seek His grace. He alone can empower us to love one another in the same way He loves us. The Holy Spirit wants to pour God's love into our hearts. His love endures forever.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:14-18, that, through the cross, Jesus Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility. There is a great need to see dividing walls broken down in families. So many families are suffering from broken relationships. Brothers are alienated from brothers. Parents are alienated from their children. Husbands are alienated from their wives. Reconciliation and lasting peace will only be found in the cross. Apart from the forgiveness available through Jesus Christ, there will be no true reconciliation in the home.

As I said earlier, the best thing you can do for your family is to give yourself totally to Jesus Christ. Submitting your life to the Lord will make you a better husband, a better wife and a better parent. You will also be able to relate to your own parents in a more honorable and respectful way. The Christian graces of humility, forgiveness, mercy, and patience all become available to those who turn from their own ways and yield to the power of God's redeeming love.

You will also discover your purpose and destiny, as you commit yourself fully to the Lord. God wants to bless your family so that you can be a blessing to others. He wants your family to participate in bringing the Gospel to the unreached families in the world.

When my wife and I stood before the Lord and committed ourselves to one another in Christian

marriage, we clearly sensed the call of God upon our lives. Both of us were committed Christians, prior to our marriage. The will of God was the decisive factor in our decision to get married. Our wedding cake was made in the form of an open Bible as a statement to our friends and family of this commitment. On top of the cake was a parchment with the scripture, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" (Joshua 24:15) That scripture is the mission statement for our marriage. It has been a guiding principle throughout our married life.

The story of Mike and Ann

Mike and Ann had the worst marriage you could ever imagine! They screamed at each other. They threw things. They cursed and often ran away from one another in anger. Finally, they decided divorce was the only way out, since nothing was changing and everything seemed hopeless. **Ann** decided that, once the divorce was finalized, she would drive her motorcycle onto the highway and run into an oncoming truck to end her life. Her marriage was over! Her life was over and there was nothing left to live for!

Nine days before their divorce was finalized, some Christian friends convinced **Mike and Ann** to attend a weekend marriage seminar for couples. Finally they reluctantly agreed to go. They later confessed that they didn't think that the seminar could help them. However, on the second evening, God met both of them in a powerful way. They repented of their sins and of their selfishness. They gave their lives to Jesus Christ. They forgave one another and committed themselves to their marriage. They agreed that when future conflicts arose, instead of screaming and yelling at each other, they would reach out, hold hands and pray together. Their lives were transformed and they returned home with new hope for the future.

One year later they returned to the same seminar and this time they brought FORTY couples with them! All their friends decided that, if **Mike and Ann's** lives could change so radically, that they would attend the seminar, also. Their dramatic change was a powerful witness to everyone who knew them. God had done far beyond what anyone had dreamed could ever happen.

A few years later **Mike and Ann's** teenage daughter was asked to describe what had happened in her parent's lives. She was asked, "What was it like in your family before your parents went to the seminar?" She described her family life as, "Hell on earth!" She lived in constant fear and anxiety. She was then asked, "What was different when your parents came back from the seminar?"

She said, "When my parents came home from the seminar, instead of screaming and cursing one another when they had an argument, they would reach out, hold hands, and PRAY!" She couldn't believe the difference! "Sometimes," she acknowledged, "they prayed through clenched teeth and restrained words, but nevertheless they PRAYED!"

This couple discovered that, by calling on the Lord, they could make it through their times of conflict. They acknowledged their utter dependence upon the power of God to change them. At times, they didn't want to forgive, but they cried out to the Lord and He filled them with His forgiveness. They didn't want to humble themselves, but they asked the Lord to fill them with His humility. Calling upon the Lord and praying together transformed this couple and healed their marriage. They were spared the pain of a tragic and destructive divorce.

In conclusion, let's look at a sample mission statement for families. This statement is based on the teachings in this book. It is called, "Our Commitment as a Family of Light." There are seven statements in this document. Each one is followed by some scripture verses. At the end of the statements there is a space to write the date. There are also spaces for you and your family members to sign the document.

I want to encourage you to consider adopting this mission statement for your marriage and for your family. If you and your partner are both Christians, pray over these statements and sign the commitment together. If your children are old enough, you can invite them to discuss this mission statement with you. Signing this document is a way to declare your commitment to be a family of light. If you are in agreement as a family, I encourage you to sign this mission statement and display it in your home as a reminder of the kind of family you wish to create.

If your spouse or children are not Christians this document can be a faith declaration on your part before the Lord. You can proclaim this commitment as something you are believing the Lord to accomplish in your family.

Our Commitment as a Family of Light

"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!" Joshua 24:15

1. We will seek to honor the Lord in our family life and give Him the place He deserves. Colossians. 1:17-18.
2. We will seek to honor each family member as a unique individual, created in the image of God. Romans. 12:10.
3. We will seek to give our family life a priority and commit ourselves to spending time together building close family bonds. Malachi 4:6
4. We will seek God-honoring, biblical patterns of communication in our home. Colossians 4:6; Ephesians 4:29
5. We will seek to resolve our conflicts quickly and extend unlimited forgiveness to one another. Ephesians 4:26; Matthew 5:21-26; Matthew 18:21-22
6. We will seek to reach out to the lost and needy families in our neighborhood, our country and the nations of the world. Acts 1:8.
7. We will seek to discover our God-given purpose and destiny as a family. Philippians 3:12

Date _____

Here is an additional exercise you can do with your family or with your spouse.

Review the six characteristics of healthy families that you have read about in the past three chapters. Choose the characteristic that you think is the strongest in your family. Then choose the one that is the weakest.

Share with your spouse or your family which characteristics you picked and why you picked them. Discuss together ways that you can strengthen the weakest characteristic in your family.

Conclude your time by praying together as a couple or as a family. Ask God to help you to build a godly and healthy family.

Application Prayer

Father, I commit myself to keep short accounts in my relationships. I want to quickly resolve any conflicts that come up and I commit myself to be the first one to take steps toward reconciliation. I want to be the “peacemaker” in my family. I will not let pride keep me from taking the necessary steps to heal broken relationships.

I realize that it is “not by power, not by might, but by your Spirit” that changes will come in my life. I cannot do what is necessary to have a healthy family in my own strength. I ask you, therefore, to fill me with your Spirit’s power. I need the grace of repentance, the grace of humility, and the grace of forgiveness. I trust you to do what I cannot do in my own strength.

Make our family a “Family of Light” in the midst of the darkness around us. Help us to show the world what a godly home is like. May we be an expression of the Kingdom Of God on earth. In Jesus Name! Amen