

## The Best Single's Ministry

### SINGLE'S MINISTRIES ARE GREAT!

Single's ministries are popular all over the country. That's great! But if we are not careful, single's ministries can isolate singles from the whole family of God.

### SINGLE PEOPLE NEED GOD'S FAMILY

Being only one person has draw backs single people, even those completely content to be single, recognize. For instance, "Have you ever tried to play checkers with yourself? How about tic tac toe?"

There are things you can't do alone like ride on a teeter totter. You need another person and God's Church is full of other people. Sadly, in an effort to offer ministry to meet the specific needs of singles, congregations can unwittingly separate them from the family of God in their congregation.

Experts tell us that the needs of single people are different from married people. So, it is easy to see why congregations try to meet the needs of singles separately. Yet, if singles are invited to do things *in* the congregation and *for* the congregation, but not *with* the congregation, an important need of singles to be part of God's family is missed.

United Intergenerational Ministry or UIM is about ministry to all generations, every age and situation including singles - at the same time - all together. This year UIM Resources focus on "Building Christian Character" in every age and situation. This UIM article not only alerts congregations to the need to include singles in congregational ministry to receive the benefits and blessings of being members of God's family, it also leads them to put on the character of Christ that enables them to do so.

### CHRISTIAN CHARACTER IS BETTER

Those involved in UIM this year will hear how building good character is good but building Christian character is better. They will learn about how Christ not only teaches us, but He strengthens us in His Word us to be more like Him, patient, kind, etc. (Colossians 3:12-17). Christian character places the needs of others above our own like Jesus does and as God commands (Philippians 2:3). Through UIM, singles and married, along with every generation and age, will be equipped through the wisdom and power of God's Word to place the needs of others above their own and know that as they do, God will meet all of their needs through Christ (Philippians 4:19). All will be reminded of the words Jesus Himself said,; "*It is better to give than to receive.*" Acts 20:35.

### SUCCESSFUL MINISTRY

For successful ministry to singles, meet the specific needs of singles and make them part of the whole family of God by offering UIM Resources that minister to all ages. UIM welcomes all ages not only *by name*, but also *in God's name!* It transforms congregations into the family of God. Members welcome, care for, and pray for one another as they minister together as one family in Christ.

This is exactly the kind of ministry that grows God's Church on earth and in congregations.

#### TRY THIS Family of God ACTIVITY

Take pictures of or request recent pictures from members of your congregation. Construct a bulletin board with the words: WE ARE MEMBERS OF GOD'S FAMILY printed boldly across the top. Attach member's pictures with names printed beneath each picture. If you do not have a picture, put up names in large print. You can put up pictures of families or of a group of members from your church's family as long as names are printed for each member. Display this bulletin board in your church to emphasize everyone's membership in God's family. Be sure to keep it up-to-date and use it to welcome new members into the family of God in your congregation!

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## Faith, Character, and Love Help Stepparents Succeed!

### STEPPARENT SURVIVAL

Becoming "stepparent of the year" is a commendable goal, but most stepparents just pray to survive. Some stepparents have suffered the failure of their marriage and others have suffered the loss of a beloved spouse through death. There are others who face the instant family drama of parenting their spouses children. The reality is that there is precious little time to think about becoming "stepparent of the year," but we all have to have dreams. Right?

### GET RID OF GUILT

Yes divorces carry guilt, but bringing it into a stepparent relationship only increases the stress already present. So, get rid of all guilt by seeking the forgiveness God promises to all who confess their sins to Him. We all sin. Our confession and forgiveness open our hearts and lives up to faith and the character of Christ. He both equips and empowers stepparents to be the forgiven children He has made it possible for them to be for their stepchildren.

### GET RID OF SORROW

The death of a spouse can leave the spouse who remains in deep grief. Sorrow, even if you try to keep it hidden, can hinder you from being the best stepparent you can be. So cling to Christ and His Word that can turn your grief into the joy and peace of Christ that will bless both you and your stepchildren.

### SEEK GOD'S GUIDANCE

If you desire to be the best stepparent you can be, seek God's guidance in His Word, ask for His help in prayer. Stay close to Him in Worship, and He will help you to be more like Him in all that you say and do. Through the power of His Holy Spirit, He will strengthen and fashion you in faith and character to be exactly the right stepparent your stepchildren need for their faith and lives.

STEPPARENT TIPS: From some who have traveled the stepparent road:

- Loving a person does not mean feelings of love will come immediately for each of that person's children. You must choose to love another person's children and ask God to help you. Then, trust and know that God will hear and answer your prayer.
- Never try to replace a parent. Rather, be one more person who gives your stepchildren support and love.
- Get rid of all bitterness from past and present relationships. If necessary, seek the help of your pastor, a strong Christian friend, or professional Christian counseling. Bitterness can quickly destroy a stepparent/child relationship and every relationship.
- Support both parents of your stepchild unless it harms your stepchild. Never condemn or speak ill of the parent your spouse divorced.
  - Allow the parent you marry to be primary care-giver to his or her children, especially in discipline matters. Back up both parents in discipline and never contradict or step between discipline administered unless it is abusive.
  - Seek to be a model of Christian faith and character for your stepchildren by being kind, compassionate, forgiving, firm, and loving through the faith God gives you.
- If you have children of your own, show them and your stepchildren so very much of God's unconditional love that your children will feel they are your favorite, and your stepchildren will feel they are your favorite too.

You may never be "stepparent of the year" but, then again, through Christ's love, maybe you will.



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## Christian Forgiveness with Thanksgiving

### FORGIVE WITH THANKSGIVING?

When people hurt us deeply, it is hard to forgive at all, much less forgive with thanksgiving in our hearts. Yet forgiveness, while it is hard to offer, fills us with God's peace that surpasses all human understanding. We receive His peace as we partake of His Word and Sacraments and as we pray. His peace living in us overpowers the sin of others that has hurt us - it heals the pain in our souls and lifts up our hearts in thanksgiving to the only God who can give us this kind of peace through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### FORGIVE AS GOD FORGIVES YOU

Forgiving as God has forgiven us through Christ requires a relationship with God through Christ that will not allow us to do anything but forgive all people - those who hurt us - even our enemies. This relationship gives us the character of Christ - the mind of Christ. We can think like Jesus, and not like those who refuse to forgive. The problem is that God offers us this relationship through Christ but as sinners we are not always willing to live in this kind of a relationship with God. We have the desire to go our own sinful way. Our way leaves us unable to forgive others and sometimes even unable to be forgiven ourselves. We need to be reminded that where lack of forgiveness exists, sin and hate can and do destroy hearts and faith and lives. Over generations, some families do not even remember why they refuse to forgive each other, but their hatred won't let them stop. Anger and hatred in place of God's love works inside them and through them to destroy all that is good by the horrible things they say and do.

### IT IS TIME TO FORGIVE!

Because of all anger and hatred has and is doing in the world today, it's critical for every Christian to be an example of God's love and forgiveness through everything we say and do every day. When people see us and wonder at the love and forgiveness in us, it's time to share Christ the One who loves and forgives us.

### FORGIVING OTHERS BLESSES US!

We also need to understand that forgiving people who hurt us does not let these people "off the hook." Until they confess and repent, their sins remain for now and for eternity. Our forgiving them does not save them. It is not something we do for them. It is something we do for ourselves - to receive peace from God, peace that can fill our hearts with thankfulness and praise this Thanksgiving and always.

### BUT OUR HEARTS ARE UNWORTHY

While we need to forgive, we and all sinners cannot possess a heart worthy of Christ's forgiveness or God's peace until we recognize our sins and our great need for a Savior. We must confess our sins and, as we do, our amazing God will not only forgive us,

He will strengthen us to forgive others with hearts that are thankful for His help and strength to do so.



### NEW CREATIONS FORGIVE WITH THANKSGIVING

The truth is, forgiving with a thankful heart is not normal for sinners. It is a gift from God, who through His Son forgives all our sins - makes us new creations - more like Jesus. We may not even recognize ourselves as we put on the character of Christ. We will see ourselves make studying God's Word a priority; make worship in His House a firm commitment, and prayer constant. We will forgive freely and everyone with a thankful heart. The more Jesus works in us, the more we will become filled with His peace and love and joy in both good times and bad. This is, after all, God's rich reward for our being able to forgive with a thankful heart as He gives us the faith and strength to do so.

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## Joyful Christmas Christian Character

### THE TRUE JOY OF CHRISTMAS

*"...let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us."* Hebrews 12:1 is rarely emphasized during the Christmas season. Still, it becomes a wonderfully appropriate passage for creating joyful Christmas Christian character that lays aside everything that hinders us from letting Christ into our hearts and homes. This article will help us consider what keeps us from Christ and joyful Christmas Christian character.

### REMINDERS OF CHRIST

First, there is absolutely no need for us to get rid of all the beautiful things that remind us of Christmas, only the things that keep us from Christ. Glitter can remind us of the stars that twinkled that first Christmas night. Lights can symbolize Christ "The Light of the World." Presents can share the love of God. Anything that reminds us of Christ can bring us closer to Him and a better understanding of His character.



### MEANINGLESS TRADITIONS

However, it is another story when Christmas traditions lead us away from Christ. Glitter can draw us to Christmas parties instead of to the manger. Lights can tempt us to throw caution to the wind and say, "It's Christmas after all" as we buy what we cannot afford. Presents can produce wanting more instead of the love of giving. The stress of Christmas can also lead us to display non-Christian character in a crowded mall when need a present NOW!

### MAKE ROOM IN YOUR HEART FOR CHRIST

At the same time, it doesn't matter if you put up lights or don't put up lights, spread glitter all around the house or keep the glitter in the bag it came in, buy presents or make presents or skip presents all together. What matters is the condition of your faith in Christ and the room you make for Him in your heart.

### INVITE CHRIST INTO YOUR HOME

This Christmas, ask God to help you make room for Him and put on His joyful character. Get rid of all sinful desires for material things by preparing your heart for Christ and His love to move into your home. Then, announce to your family that Christ is coming and invite your whole family to prepare for Him. If members do not want to prepare, that's OK. Your faith will welcome Christ and bless your home.

### AN AWESOME GUEST

To prepare your heart and home for your awesome Guest: Read Advent devotions. Buy all presents with Christ's approval in mind. Pray for faith and strength to display joyful Christmas Christian character in all that you say and do. Even set an empty chair aside for Jesus at your dinner table. Read the entire Christmas story before gifts are opened. Thank not only gift givers, but God who supplies all the gifts given, and always thank Him for the gift of His Son. Host a "Baby Jesus" Birthday Party and give Jesus your heart!

### AN UNFORGETTABLE CHRISTMAS

Some members of your family will think your joyful Christmas Christian preparations strange. Do not be discouraged. Yours will be a Christmas that no one will ever forget. And, don't hesitate to do it all over again next year and every year in joyful Christmas Christian character!

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## A Grandparents Guide To Character Building

### IT'S GOOD TO BE A GRANDPARENT

It's good to be a grandparent. It is different than being a parent. You may actually be able to accomplish much more as a grandparent than you did as a parent. Children tend to have a better relationship with grandparents than they do with their parents. Parents make lots of rules children often do not like. Grandparents, while they need to enforce the rules made by parents, do not actually make the rules. In fact, grandparents can often have a wonderful time making everything including rules fun. *"If we can't go outside, let's have fun inside."* Problem solved!

### SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN

Actually, one good way to help build Christian character in your grandchildren is to support the decisions your children make regarding their children. You may not agree with every decision your children make, but unless it causes your grandchildren harm, support them. You may find your children more open to any ideas you may have that can help to build Christian character in their children and your grandchildren.



### HERE'S HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILDREN

- When you visit their home or they visit yours, compliment your children in front of their children. Let all your words and actions tell your grandchildren that you and their parents agree and love each other.
- Ask your children for advice on how to care for their children, what foods they can eat, what TV programs they can watch, etc. and be sure to always follow their instructions.
- When you visit, try to find a project, a job that needs doing, that you and your grandchildren can do together. Have great fun with your grandchildren and do something helpful for their parents at the same time: clean, bake, or even fix something, etc.

**ABOVE ALL:** To build Christian character in your grandchildren, display Christian character. Let your grandchildren see it as they spend time with you.

### IDEAS FOR SPENDING CHARACTER BUILDING TIME WITH YOUR GRANDCHILDREN

Plan a special time to be with each grandchild and display Christian character like taking them out to eat and pray before the meal, play games and teach them to play fairly and kindly, talk about Christian character as you walk, bake, ride bike, etc. Discover and take note of things your grandchildren like to do. Each grandchild may be different. Fill out a 3X5 card with their name on it and add notes about how you can help to build Christian character when doing activities they like with them.

### PROVIDE A SPECIAL PLACE

If you don't have a special corner (table and chairs, toys, etc.) for grandchildren when they visit, help them make a special box. Put toys and games they like into the box. You may need a different box for different ages of grandchildren. Get the box out when they come.

When they leave, put it back into storage, but not before you jot notes of new ways to use the items in the box to help build Christian character during their next visit.

### PLAN SPECIAL CELEBRATIONS!

Let a grandchild eat from a special plate at your house when a grandchild displays Christian character: obeys, is kind, patient, etc. "You Are Special" plates can be purchased or designate any plate special. **MOST IMPORTANTLY:** Use the times spent with your grandchildren to build Christian character by sharing your faith in Christ, who alone is able to build and strengthen Christian character in grandchildren, parents, and grandparents alike.

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## “Jesus” Hugs Build Christian Character

### BE GENTLE

The gentleness of our touch helps to instill gentleness in all ages. It is also one of the best ways to heal the kind of violence children learn when they lack gentle touches. Gentle touches can help prevent bad behavior and build good behavior simply because they show kindness and uplift the spirit deep within.

### GIVE APPROPRIATE HUGS

Sadly, there are bad and degrading hugs that should never be given to children. These hugs touch children in ways children never should be touched. They are inappropriate and send children down a path of rebellious sin and destruction. Anyone who causes a child to sin faces God’s condemnation in Matthew 18:6. Touching children in the wrong way is also criminal behavior. Because wrong touches are prevalent, it is important for us to know about “Jesus” hugs that help to prevent and heal bad touches and build not just good, but Christian character.

### JESUS HUGGED CHILDREN

God’s Word encourages hugs. In Mark 10:13-16 Jesus invites little children to come to Him...*and He took the little children in His arms and blessed them.* This loving example set by our Savior should inspire and lead us to pick children up in our arms and hug them. Yet, today, we can’t always do that because a child hurt by a bad hug or touch can misinterpret and be hurt by our good hug.

### DIFFERENT KINDS OF “JESUS” HUGS

When we can’t wrap our arms around a child, we may be able to hold a hand. When we do it out of love for Jesus it becomes a “Jesus” hug. A gentle squeeze of the hand can assure a child of your caring presence and love. Any way we assure a child of God’s love and ours most definitely is a “Jesus” hug. Brushing their hair may not be a “Jesus” hug, but when given out of love for God and them, it can help children feel loved and it is definitely Jesus approved.

### STUFFED BEAR and BLANKET HUGS

The gift of a stuffed animal that plays “Jesus Loves Me” or actually says prayers can be a “Jesus” hug. A blanket from a person they see the love of Jesus in can be a “Jesus” hugs. A knitted blanket with a note the says, “Each stitch is a stitch of Jesus’ love and mine” can produce feelings that build faith and Christian character in children.

### HUGS CHILDREN CAN HEAR

Likewise, falling asleep hearing the sound of someone singing Christian hymns or having someone to say prayers with covers children with the warmth and security of a “Jesus” hug. We can hug children with our praise. When they know we love Jesus, our praise can wrap a child tightly in His arms and ours.

### LIKE A HUG

A quick kiss on the forehead has been described as a wet, gushy hug. A pat on the back, even a soft punch in the shoulder can be a hug. When these are done gently and out of love for Jesus, they can be “Jesus” hugs. Hugs are not always obvious. Did you know that seeing their parents happy can be a hug that builds security and stability in children? Seeing a parent’s faith is a “Jesus” hug that can build even stronger security and stability.



### FAITH AND CHRISTIAN CHARACTER HUGS

*Sometimes children want, even need, to be hugged.* When we can’t hug them in our arms, we can give them a “Jesus” hug. *Sometimes children don’t want to be hugged, but desperately need hugs.* Give them “Jesus” hugs so they won’t think they are being hugged, but they will still feel and be blessed. **So will you!**

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## Loving Discipline Builds Christian Character

There are excellent Christian books to help parents discipline their children successfully. The best Book, however, is the Bible. Not only does it offer the wisdom and knowledge of God, it strengthens parents to be His instruments of loving discipline, and empowers them to put on Christ, to have His character, the Christian character needed to handle the frustrations that so often overwhelm parents and their children today. Bad behavior in children can tear an entire family apart. Reading God's Word helps parents depend on God's wisdom and strength, not their own, in matters of discipline. As they do, God makes discipline successful even when families fail miserably in giving and receiving it.

### SET DOWN RULES

With God and His Word firmly planted in your mind and heart, specifically plan guidelines and rules to help your child BEFORE it becomes necessary for you to use them. Decide what you will do if this behavior happens or that problem occurs - What kinds of behavior will you reward? - What consequences will you allow your child to suffer? What punishments will you use to correct bad behavior?



### DISCIPLINE IN LOVE

The "rod of correction" in Proverbs 13:24 administered physically (spanking) out of love for God and children can calm out-of-control children. However, parents can easily spank in frustration or even anger over bad behavior. Children punished in anger become angry. If parents feel angry or appear angry, a spanking is more likely to hurt than help a child. And there are other means of administering the "rod of correction" that may work much better.

### UNDERSTAND THE ROD OF LOVE

The "rod of correction" does not need to be physical discipline. This rod can require a child to think of ways to turn the wrong done into right or good. More than one child not wanting to think of the good they should do has pleaded, "Just spank me and get it over with!"

### LOVING DISCIPLINE CAN HURT

Not allowing a child to attend a fun activity, taking away a toy, a cell phone, etc. until behavior improves, making a child work to pay to replace a broken item, etc. have been called *spanking a child where it hurts*. And, yes, it can hurt parents more or at least as much as their child when loving discipline means they must give up something they like to carry out the discipline of their child needs. At the same time, loving discipline does not always need to hurt or be about consequences or punishment.

### PRAISE WORKS

Begin constantly watching for good behavior, even if it is hard to see and occurrences are few and far between. Praising even the tiniest good behavior has proven to be a *rod of correction* that grows more good behavior. Compliments are uplifting and can improve behavior all by themselves. Adding God's love to the equation works wonders on the behavior and the character of parents and children alike.

### BE TRANSPARENT

As children see God's love in their parents, they recognize their parents's discipline as love. So be sure your children see God's love in you through all you say and do. Let them see you in worship, reading God's Word, and praying with them and for them. As you do these things, God will grow your faith and character to discipline in His love. Your children will see His love in your discipline and pass God's loving discipline on for generations.

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## Christian Character Leads Teens to Good Choices

### PARENTS INFLUENCE TEENS

Much emphasis is placed on the things teens see on television, at the movies, at school, and hear from their friends. In fact, these are thought to be a major influence on the lives of teenagers. Yet, recent studies suggest that parents and families continue to have as much or more influence on teenagers than media, school, and friends, especially when it comes to building Christian faith and character.

### TEENS ARE WATCHING

My personal experience as a youth worker for almost 40 years has shown me that teens watch adults closely. They hear what we say and analyze it, especially when we think they aren't listening.

I cannot count the times I have heard, "Remember when you said...?" from a teenager I never thought was listening. Teens watch to see if what we say in some way contradicts what we said earlier. Teenagers really keep you on the straight and narrow. If you have done a good job teaching teens to do what's right, they will watch to see if you always do what's right. And, they will make their decisions and choices based on what they see and hear.

### DON'T JUST SAY IT - DO IT!

Be advised, the things adults do wrong do not have to be all that bad to raise questions in the eyes of teens. Teens pick at the very foundation of our faith and lives. They take careful note when we speed. They keep records of when we put someone down, especially if we constantly tell them not to put others down. When we stay up too late, don't get our work done, act crabby, don't keep a promise or fulfill a responsibility, they remind us. If we want to influence teens to save their money, they better see us saving our money. If we desire to build Christian character that leads to good choices, we had better not only display Christian character, it must permeate our lives and our souls for the whole world to see because our teens are watching us!

### TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

It is easy to pin the blame for the bad choices some teens are making on a bad world. Violence is out of control. Sex is running rampant. Alcohol and drugs flow freely. Lying and cheating have become a way of life for too many people. Certainly seeing all of this bad behavior takes its toll on teenagers. But the bad behavior and non-Christian character of others is not the only behavior that influences teenagers. If teens see their parents making bad choices, they can be more influenced and likely to contemplate doing the same.

More importantly or dangerously is the fact that when teens see parents making bad choices they question the value of what parents say. They are less likely to listen to their parents, and more likely to make bad choices. The good news is that teens can also be influenced by Christian character. With all of the bad choices made today, teens need Christians whose faithful behavior can lead them to Christ for faith and strength to make good choices.



### CONFESS WRONGS

For parents and other Christians to be faithful witnesses to teens we need to confess our sins to God and to our teens. We may not appreciate it when teens catch us making a bad choice, but we can be thankful for the opportunity to say, "I'm sorry... I was wrong" because these are the words that can help teens make good choices. It may seem unnecessary and certainly isn't easy to confess our sins to teens. Yet, when we do, we display Christian character, make the line between right and wrong clear, and help our teens make good choices.

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## Christian Character Does What Is Good and Right

### PARENTING REQUIRES EXPLAINING

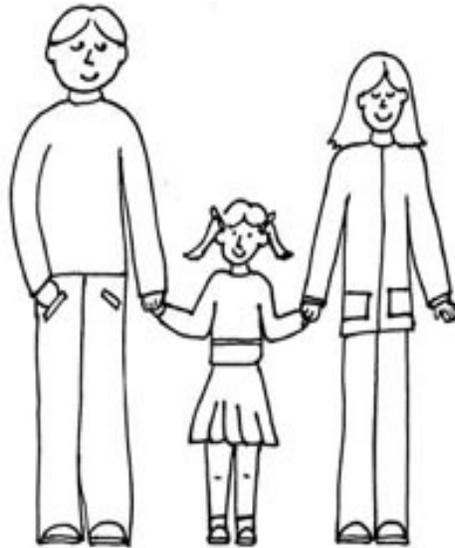
When we were kids, our parents told us to do something and we did it (most of the time) without a question. Back then, no one thought of questioning their parents. Today, many children not only question their parents, but expect their parents to explain in great detail why something needs to be done, and they debate over whether they have to do it. This can be annoying for those of us who were not given any choice. Yet, it is a good parental practice that keeps kids safe today.

### CHILDREN HAVE CHOICES

In the past, parents and society made good choices for their children. There were set rules to follow. Some obeyed. Others didn't. But the rules were there. Today, parents help their children make good choices because society doesn't always teach what is good. Of course, it doesn't matter if parents make good choices for their children or help their children make good choices, as long as good choices are being made. The problem in every generation has to do with children knowing what is good, choosing good, and actually being able to do what is good.

### CHOICES ARE MORE DIFFICULT

I think it was easier for me *not* to have a choice. And I surely and thankful I did not have to make the choices children have to make today. The world didn't tell me, "You can choose to have sex or abstain." The world didn't shout, "It's OK to cheat. Everyone is doing it!" I thought everyone was suppose to abstain and be honest. The right choices today are not as definite about right and wrong. Small children have to be able to make the right choices to stay safe amidst media hype that too often teaches them right is wrong and wrong is right. This confusion has made it essential for parents to do a lot of explaining about the difference between right and wrong and also why people need to do what is right.



### CHILDREN NEED JESUS

And, we must face facts. Even parents who do an exceptional job of explaining the difference between right and wrong can fail at one small point that turns out to be very important. Problems and horrendous tragedies can arise because parents simply cannot teach their children enough about how to stay safe from every single danger. There are so many dangers. And they cannot always be present when their children need to make the right decisions. This is exactly why

parents need to teach their children about the One who can guide and strengthen their children to not only know but do what is right - Jesus! He is always present 24/7. He will always lead them in the way of righteousness - to do all that is right and good. Those who learn of Him and follow Him will be helped to have His character - Christian character that is able to make the right choices.

### THE WORLD IS BLESSED

Finally, children of the past whose parents made good choices for them did not do what was right all the time. Today, children who are given many choices and have choices explained to them, may not make the right choices all the time. But children whose parents teach them about Jesus can be sure He will help them not just to know but He will strengthen them to choose and do what is good and right and safe for themselves, for others, and ultimately for the world for generations.

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## Christian Character Strengthens Commitment

### CHOOSE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

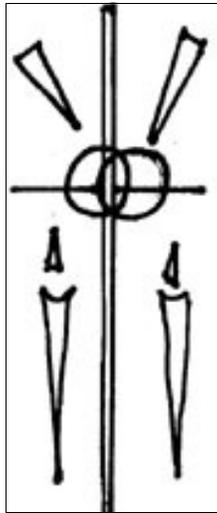
“Love is not an emotion. It's a choice!” The first time I heard that statement, I couldn't wait for an opportunity to use it. It is so beautiful - so profound - and so absolutely true! When we make a commitment to love another person for the rest of our lives, it cannot be based on emotions. Our emotions change constantly. Just ask my husband. My mood can change from nice to nasty in a second. He surely doesn't FEEL love for me when I am nasty. He chooses to love me and I love him more for making that choice. If you want your marriage to last, right now make a commitment to love each other and read on to discover how you can keep that commitment *“until death do us part.”*

### KEEP YOUR COMMITMENT

Making a choice to love another person for the rest of our lives doesn't mean we will always feel love for that person. It does mean we have committed to love that person; not because we have to; not because we pretend to; not because we valiantly attempt to, but because we choose to especially, I might add, when that person is completely unlovable. Right now, you are thinking that's impossible! Simply choosing to love another person does not make it so. Well, actually, it does. However, if you fear you cannot make that choice or that commitment, help is available. God offers strength of faith through Christ to help us choose to love one another. This is the same faith and strength from which strong Christian character emerges, character that is able to make a vow and commitment and stand by it until death.

### MAKE YOUR JOY COMPLETE

It is true that some marriages do last without faith and love for God as their foundation. But, they do not last in the same way marriages founded on Christ last. They may be happy, but their joy is not complete. They may have love, but they do not rest in God's love, a love deeper and stronger than any other love, a love that molds marriage into a chord that cannot be broken!



### COMMIT YOURSELVES TO GOD

My husband and I fell in love in college. Instead of going steady with a ring as was the custom, we exchanged crosses. Our love for each other was firmly grounded in our love for God. In our marriage vows, we did not only commit ourselves to each other, we committed ourselves to God. Today, forty-six years later, God has grown His love in us, especially during times when we felt less than love for each other. As our love for God and each other grew so did our Christian character and commitment to our marriage and the Lord. We can say with even more certainty each day that we will always be married as long as we both shall live. And, we can promise you that if you commit yourselves to God and to each other, He will do the same for you.

### YOUR MARRIAGE WILL LAST

Whether you just became engaged or have been married for years, talk and pray together about ways you can make God the most important part of your marriage and family life. Grow in faith and in love for God and each other by worshiping and studying God's Word together. God will help you grow stronger in love every day. He will surely bless both of you and your relationship with power from on High to remain faithful to Him and each other. Then, no matter what life may throw your way, your marriage will last as a strong testament of your faith and life for your children and your children's children.

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## Christian Character Saves Marriages

### DON'T BE TOO LATE

The problems in most marriages develop slowly, almost without knowing it. Except, couples do know it, most of them anyway. They feel it. One partner may try to improve their relationship at one time with no success. The other partner will try at another time with no success. A marriage counselor may try to help them improve their relationship but there seems to be no help not help that works anyway. Except, there is help. Read on.

### MAINTAIN YOUR MARRIAGE

Maintaining your marriage requires constant attention, and it can and needs to be done even as a marriage is falling apart. Inattention can lead to divorce and all of the pain that comes with it. God unites one man and one woman in marriage - they become one spiritually. Divorce tears their souls apart. Overcome by the pain of divorce, most couples do not realize the painful effects their divorce has on so many others like: children who fear they caused the divorce, friends who fear they may get a divorce because the divorced couple's marriage look better than their own marriage, etc. Thankfully, there are many things we can do to prevent divorce and building strong Christian character that simply will not allow divorce as an option is one of them.



### DON'T ALLOW DIVORCE

How many of us have lamented that there doesn't seem to be anything we can do about the rising divorce rate? How many of us believe that not allowing divorce can prevent it? We know divorce was allowed in the Old Testament because of hardness of hearts (Matthew 19:8) and it is still allowed today. But, what if it wasn't? What if there was something that would take away the hardness of people's hearts? Because, there is something or more correctly Someone who gave up His life to save us from all sin that hurts and hardens our hearts, including the sin of divorce.

### PUT ON THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

When we put on the character of Christ, we put on love, compassion, forgiveness, understanding, and all of the thoughts and actions of Christ that can help to keep marriages strong. But wait, there's more. God Himself also helps us. We do not have to put on Christ by our own strength, which is good because we would fail miserably. God's love melts the hardness of our hearts through the forgiveness of Christ. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, His love fills us with faith that produces Christian character deep in our souls, character that does not even think of divorce much less consider divorce an option.

**Play a game of pretend with me:** Pretend Christ is present in your life and home and marriage for a few days. Couples trying this report they talk and act like they have a guest in the house - and the truth is, they do. But there's no need to pretend Jesus is with us every day to save or maintain our marriage, because He is. What we need is to remember He is with us and that He is a Guest who can see us more personally than any other guest. He is also a Guest who can help us - heal us - forgive us - melt our hard hearts, and give us His character, with all of the blessings that come with Christian character.

### ENJOY THE BEST MARRIAGE

While good character can help couples through the big and little problems of married life, Christian character can do so much more. Through the extraordinary love of God that covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8), Christian character can empower couples to forgive each other over and over, and never stop. Christian character can give couples all they need to make both good and horrible marriages better, NO, the best. Not only does Christian character leave no option for divorce, it keeps couples far too busy showing God's love to each other and others. There is no space or place for divorce in their faith and married lives.

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## Christian Character to Cope With College Stress

### PARENTING DOESN'T STOP

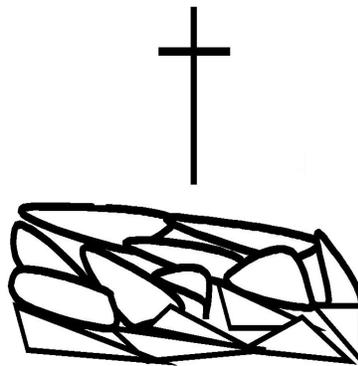
Parenting doesn't stop when our kids go off to college. In fact, it can become more crucial. It's a scary world out there. The percentage of children moving back home to live with their parents after trying to succeed in a difficult world is increasing. When kids go off to college, parents may find themselves praying harder than they have prayed before, asking for God to help them.

### COLLEGE STUDENT FEARS

Some youth can't wait to leave home and others never want to leave home, but all of them can be afraid. Those who fear leaving home may also fear living at home forever because they have seen it happen to others. Even those excited to go off to college can fear leaving the security of their homes. So, find out how your college student feels about leaving home. College bound students want to and need to be independent. They just fear not being able to be independent. So talk to them about how they feel as they prepare to leave home. Address their fears by sharing your faith in God who will always be with them and help them.

### COLLEGE STUDENT'S STRESS

It is important to understand that students who leave for college are no more free of their parents than their parents are free of them. They can pretend to be free and even practice being free by staying up late, getting up late, not cleaning their rooms, etc. They can even venture into areas where they shouldn't go. Reality, of course, sets in when they suffer the consequences of their choices. That is when they usually discover they are far from free - they discover college stress - and their need for their parents.



### COLLEGE PARENT'S STRESS

Parents can stress out hearing it's finals week and either their student hasn't slept in three nights or is not studying at all. Most college students have to hold down jobs to make it financially, so parents stress over students being able to balance a job and studies and still eat and sleep. On top of this, money is already tight and college just gets more expensive every year. How are parents going to cope? How are you going to cope?

### BE PREPARED

If you are a parent sending a student off to college or a student going off to college, realize stress will happen. Show concern for each other's needs: emotional, financial, and above all spiritual. Prepare yourselves to cope with both of your individual college stressors by talking and, most importantly, by praying together. Relationships that have a solid foundation of love and trust in God possess the faith that builds strong Christian character. This kind of character helps students and parents cast all of their burdens on the Lord, and He helps them all through college.

### TRUST THE LORD

God has sent many students off to college and He remains with both students and parents 24/7. This is something no one else can do. Trust Him. "He's got you covered." If you have any fears, take them to Him in prayer. Ask for His protection and guidance and strength and wisdom but, most of all, ask Him for the faith and Christian character that not only helps you cope with the stress that comes with college, but to make you stronger in your faith and life because of it.

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