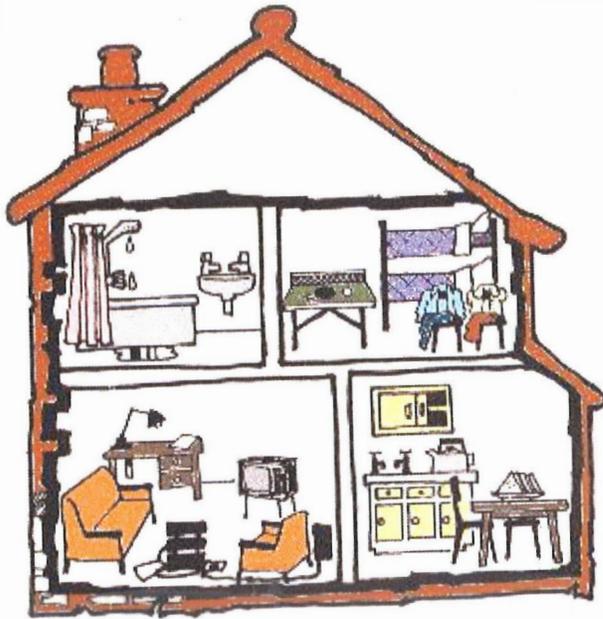


CHAPTER 3

Looking at my Family

In the last chapter we looked in the mirror. In this chapter we want to take a close look at our home and our family. Instead of standing in front of the mirror, we will think of ourselves as sitting in our living room looking at our home and family. We also want to take a look at another family that we belong to – **our Church family**.

As you look at family and your home, you need to remember that there is a difference between a house and a home. A house is a place of shelter (large or small, in the city or in the woods). A home is more than bricks and wood and walls and ceilings. It is a place where people belong together because they make up a family.

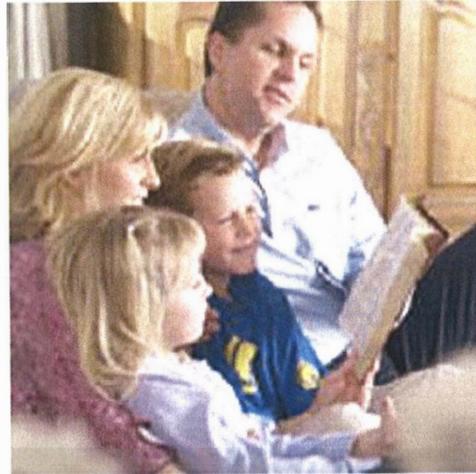


A HOUSE

A HOUSE could be an apartment, an igloo, a tepee, a hut, a shack or something else. It is merely a building or a structure where people live. Often a house will have an address such as "35 Maple Road." A house could cost millions of dollars or it could be built in a very simple way, like a hut in the jungle with dirt floors.

We say "Home sweet home," but we would never say "House sweet house"! We might say, "There is no place like **home**", but we would never say, "There is no place like **house**!" Anyone can live in a house, but it takes some work to make a house become a home. Are you doing your part?

*Is a Church more than just a **building**? Is a Church more than just something that is made of brick, wood, and cement? In what ways is a Church like a home?*



A HOME

A HOME involves a family. It is the place where members of the family can be together, hopefully in the atmosphere of love. It is the place where family members talk to each other and read to each other and help each other. It involves personal relationships between family members, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters.

How many live or stay at your house? _____ Identify them: Mother (first name):

Father (first name): _____ Brothers (give first names):

Sisters (give first names):

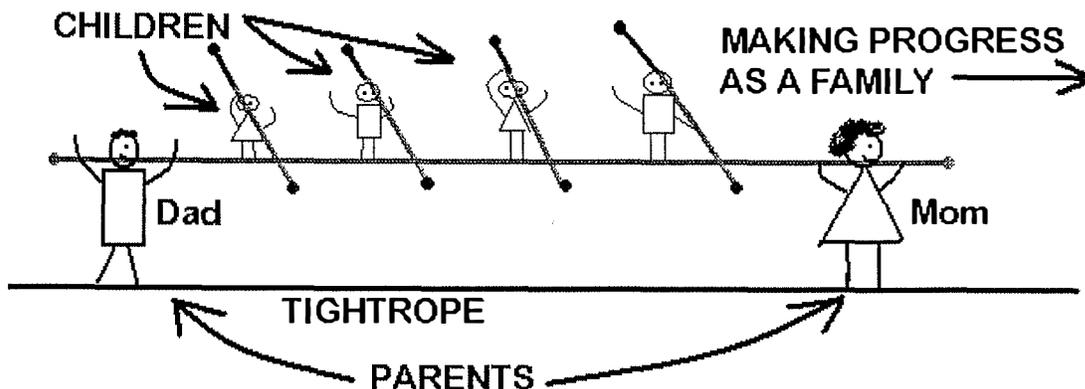
Others living in your house: _____

How many are there in your Church family? What towns do they come from? How often do you see them each week?

There are some young people who have only one parent. There are different reasons for this: sometimes death, sometimes divorce, sometimes desertion (a father or mother **leaving** the family). It is not easy to have only one parent (or no parents), but this is where God is able to help in a very special way. God is a H _____ of the fatherless (Psalm 10:14)! In the Bible we learn of different people who did not have both parents. Did Benjamin ever know his mother (Genesis 35:16-19)? _____ When Joseph was only _____ years old (Genesis 37:2), he was carried away from his father into Egypt (Genesis 37:28,36). Did God take care of him? _____ How often did Samuel see his parents (1 Samuel 2:19)? _____ Those visits were not very often. What does the Bible tell us about Esther's parents (Esther 2:7)? _____

In the Church there are young people who are in different situations when it comes to their parents. Some young people have parents who are both saved. Other young people have one parent who is saved and one parent who is not saved. There may be some young people who go to your Church who do not have any saved parents (and perhaps their parents do not even want them to come to Church). Is God able to help in each of these situations?

Each member of the family is a person and yet they all must be together and live together under the same roof. We can compare this to a balancing act at the circus (on a tightrope). Each person is important and each person must stay in balance or else everyone might fall:



Each member of the family has his or her **own special...**

- **needs** (one member of the family might need to be on a special diet because of a physical problem; another member might need a lot of help with school work)
- **interests** (one member might like cooking, another might like art or music, another might like sports and Dad might like to fix things with his tools)

- **rights** (each member of the family has a right to privacy – a time when he or she can be alone by themselves; Dad has the right to decide how the family money will be spent)
- **duties** (sister's duty might be to wash the dishes or sweep the floor; brother's duty might be to take out the trash or empty the waste)
- **desires** (one member might want to take a hike in the woods; another might want to go to the beach)

Yes, every member of the family has his or her **own special needs, interests, rights, duties, desires**, etc. Suppose that every person in your family has three things that really interest him (or her). Now multiply: $3 \times \underline{\hspace{2cm}}$ (number of people in your family) = $\underline{\hspace{2cm}}$. For example, suppose there are 5 in your family: $3 \times 5 = 15$. Your family has 15 things which are of interest to them! You see, each time we add another person, the number of interests, desires, duties, etc. is multiplied. The number would be multiplied even more if we were to add relatives, neighbors and all the people in your town or city!

Think of the people in your Church. Do they have different needs, interests, rights, duties and desires? Every person in the Church is different and the believers need to learn to stay in balance and learn to live together under the same God and under the same Bible.

There are also practical matters that every family member must be concerned about. There are clothes that need to be washed and ironed. There are meals that need to be cooked and dishes that must be washed. There is shopping that must be done. There is cleaning and housework. There is money to be earned and there are bills to be paid. There are broken things that need to be repaired. There is school for some and work for others. There may be the need to take care of baby brother or sister. How do you help in your home?

Can you think of some practical things that the Church family should think about? Does the Church ever need to be cleaned? Does grass ever need to be cut or does snow ever need to be shoveled? Are there bills that need to be paid? Are there babies that need to be cared for? Are there people that need to be visited? Are there people that need to be invited to come to Church?

The family must be in balance if the family is to go forward in a good and right way (think of the tightrope). One person off balance can make everyone else topple and and perhaps even fall.

If one believer is not right with the Lord, can this hurt the whole Church? Compare 1 Corinthians 12:26. Suppose you had a bad sore throat or a bad stomach ache. Would this hurt your whole body? The same is true with Christ's body, the Church. One sick member (physically, mentally, spiritually) affects the whole body!

Remember, each family fits into the larger number of **families**. Your family is only one family. But how many families are there in your church? In your town or city? In your state? In your country? In the world? If your family were to somehow disappear then there would be one less family in your Church, one less family in your town or city, one less family in your country, and one less family in the world. Healthy families are what make a nation and a country strong and a good place to live. When good and healthy families become fewer and fewer, then the city and country we live in gets worse and worse and it is not a very good place to live in. Can you find any family **problems** described in 2 Timothy 3:1-5?

Do strong and healthy families help to make a strong Church? Does a strong Church help to make strong families? Should the leaders of the Church have families that are in balance (see 1 Timothy 3:1-2, 4-5, 12)? _____

Each member of the family **counts** and is very important. Who you are, what you do, and how you do it makes an important difference for good or for bad. **Your** family is important and **your part** in that family is important and has long lasting effects.

Is every member of the Church important? Does every believer count? Does it make a difference who you are, and what you do, and how you do it? Every believer is a member of Christ's body. Think of the members of your body (tongue, liver, heart, fingers, etc.). Are they all important? Are they all needed? Do they all have a part to play to make the body work as it should?

The family should give protection and strength for the children. Why is this so? When we are young we have less strength on the inside to protect us against loneliness, fears, worries and other problems. In time we learn to grow stronger on the inside. Therefore, it is important for a young person to **belong** to a family where he or she can be protected and strengthened.

Belonging is important.

*Does the Church give protection and strength for the children of God (the believers)? What do believers need to be protected from? Why do believers need to be strong? What dangers do they face? How important is it for a believer to **belong** to a local Church?*

The family is the place to practice how to get along with people (membership skills): how to share with others, how to take turns (everyone can't use the bathroom at the same time), how to have a right kind of loyalty to other people, how to adjust to other people (how to adjust to their words, ideas, actions and feelings). In this way we can learn the **give** and **take** of sharing with each other.

Is the Church a good place to practice how to get along with people? Do people always get along well in the Church or are there sometimes problems (see 1 Corinthians 3:3; Galatians 5:15)?

Each member of the family must **care** about each other. The home should be a place of caring and sharing. If we truly care then it makes our good days and bad days much easier for everyone in the family. Our failures are easier to bear and our victories are better to enjoy.

Love still continues (see 1 Corinthians 13:13 where the word "charity" means "love" and "abideth" means "continues").

Should the Church be a place of caring and sharing? 1 John 3:14 says, We know that we have passed from death unto life because we... (circle the right answer)

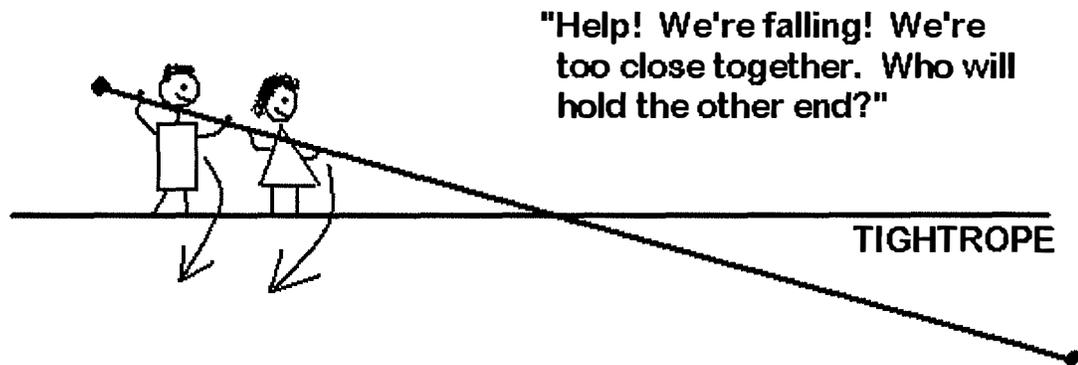
- a. ...fight with the brethren
- b. ...hate the brethren
- c. ...love the brethren
- d. ...are jealous of the brethren

We are very **close** to those we live with. **Closeness** to each other brings comfort but it also brings conflicts. Your Mom brings **comfort** to you when you are sick. You have a **conflict** with your brother when he borrows something from your room which you did not want him to have or which he refuses to return. Sometimes there are hurt feelings. We should **not** be surprised to find that our family life may contain plenty of tears, times when we will not speak, heated quarrels and arguments, and gloomy thoughts of revenge. ("If Mom and Dad won't let me sleep over at my friend's house then I'm going to find some way to punish them!")

Should we always expect things to go smoothly in the Church? If families have conflicts and difficulties, should we not also find these in the Church? The only Church that doesn't have problems is the Church that doesn't have people!

There is much that goes on within a family member. It is contained on the inside. A family member may have difficulties at school or at work. Certain thoughts and feelings might be contained on the inside **until** the family member comes home. Then it all pours out and overflows (like damned up waters when the dam breaks!). For example, if father had a hard day at work, he may not explode at his boss at work, but he may wrongly explode at someone when he gets home! An older brother or sister may have a hard day at school. They may not explode at their teacher, but they might explode **at you** when they get home! Those of us who are believers have a big advantage. Why? Instead of exploding, what can we do (Psalm 62:8; 1 Peter 5:7)?

All kinds of people make up the family. **Moms** and **Dads** are different, but this can be for the good. Differences make for a good **balance**. If both **Mom** and **Dad** were good cooks, but neither of them could fix cars, then who would repair the cars? If both **Mom** and **Dad** could fix cars but neither of them could cook, then who would prepare the meals? It is much better if his strengths can help her weaknesses and if her strengths can help his weaknesses. If they both have the same strengths and weaknesses, then this would be a problem (**out of balance**):

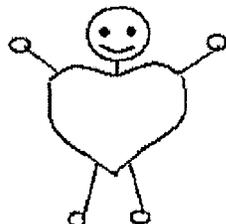


The same is true in the Church. What if everyone played the piano, but no one could sing? Could you have a Choir? What if everyone was shy and afraid of meeting people. Who would welcome the visitors?

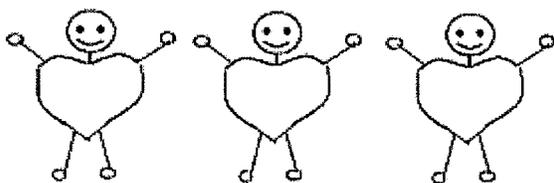
You have your differences too, along with your brothers and sisters, etc. All of these differences can be of help to the family and make for a stronger family team. Differences may also lead to some strong family discussions and arguments to find out the right thing to do, the right thing to say, the right place to go, etc.

Thus the important balancing act gets more and more difficult and complicated. There are many things that are hard to see and hard to work out.

Those bad times — when I am out of balance — need to be fixed. I must remember the **importance of the family** and the importance of staying in balance and keeping in my position on the tightrope.



"This is me! to take me is to get the good with the bad. I'm not a perfect person, but God can help me to be the person I need to be."



So it is with each one in the family.
 If
 they can learn to put up with me
 then I can
 learn to put up with them! I must
 forbear* my family members in
 love (see Ephesians 4:2)

***Forbear** means to put up with someone even though it may be hard to do; it's like when you get a wound, and you have to put up with it even though it really hurts, and give it time to heal. Sometimes other people wound us and hurt us, but we need to love them anyway and we need to learn to do good to them even if they might do evil to us. See Romans 12:17-21.

Persons are different but differences must be **balanced**. The bad side of me apart from the Lord needs to be replaced with and by **the new** (2 Corinthians 5:17). If I fail to fix things and fail to replace the bad side of me with **the new**, then nothing is left but **despair** (losing hope, a terrible feeling that nothing good can happen to me).

How can these bad things be fixed and repaired? Here are some suggestions that will help:

- Talk things over (have a family chat)
- Think things through (put on your thinking cap!).
- Pray things out (talk to God about the problems).
- Keep everything on the top of the table (don't keep it within you and don't let it bother you forever, but bring it out into the open so that you can see it and so that others that **need to see** it can see it also).
- Encourage the other members of your family to tackle the problem as a team whenever you can. The more you do this the better it will be for all the family.
- Don't forget that **you** play an important role. You have an important part. A Father once said, "I don't know how anyone learns to be an adult without children to teach him!"

How should problems be fixed and repaired in the Church? Can these same suggestions be followed? Have you done wrong to anyone in the Church? Is there any person in the church with whom you need to fix things?