

Family Ties

Five Christian teachers answer knotty questions about family relationships.

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You may be a parent, a son, a daughter, a husband or a wife. You may be a grandson, a single adult contemplating marriage or a single parent. No matter which one or combination of these describes you, there certainly remain unanswered questions about family life and how to relate to each other within a family.

To get answers to some tough questions, Michele Buckingham, a frequent writer in *Charisma*, interviewed five Christian leaders who have experience in this area. She talked with Larry Christenson, an ordained Lutheran pastor and director of the International Lutheran Renewal Center in St. Paul, Minnesota. Author of *The Christian Family*, Christenson and his wife, Nordis, travel widely speaking about the renewal of family life.

Mrs. Buckingham caught up with Edwin Louis Cole, who founded Manhood Ministries. Cole wrote the book *Maximized Manhood: A Guide to Family Survival* and often conducts men-only seminars.

Marilyn Hickey added her insights. A regular columnist in *Charisma*, she travels widely as a Bible teacher and seminar speaker primarily for women. Her husband, Wally, is pastor of the Happy Church in Denver, Colorado.

Ray Mossholder also talked with Mrs. Buckingham. He holds "Marriage Plus" seminars around the world with the goal of "canceling divorces." Mossholder, who lives in Chatsworth, California, hosts a daily radio program and is a frequent television talk show guest.

Mrs. Buckingham then interviewed Paula Sandford, who, along with her husband, John, founded Elijah House, a counseling ministry headquartered in Coeur D'Alene, Idaho, and Spokane, Washington. As a team, the Sandfords conduct seminars on marriage and family, inner healing and related subjects. Their books include *Restoring the Christian Family*.

Charisma editor-at-large Jamie Buckingham compiled and edited the interviews, creating this forum.

Charisma: What should a single person look for in a mate?

Cole: Character, integrity and faithfulness. You don't marry personality, you marry character.

Mossholder: Number one: Christian commitment. It is the relationship with Christ which saves marriages when rough moments come. Matthew 7:24-27 declares the difference between homes that make it and homes that fail is whether you have your home built on the rock. Number two: compatibility. I don't mean partners have to be alike, because pieces of a puzzle are not alike but they fit together. No girl should marry a boy until she knows how he will react when she drops the soup in his lap.

Mrs. Hickey: I believe God created one right mate for each person. You put scar tissue on your soul if you try first this one and then that one. Eve was created perfectly for Adam. This has nothing to do with the color of hair or the kind of college degree. Soul love should come first. Before I fell in love with Wally he was my friend, my soul mate. We should love first with our minds, then we should commit with our bodies.



Christenson: I counsel a young person to look at his or her partner's life goal. What is his or her vocational commitment? Marriage involves commitment to a commitment as well as to each other.

Charisma: Do you encourage a long engagement period?

Christenson: Not necessarily. When my oldest son went off to college I told him, "Now if you find the girl you want to marry and have another year of college to complete, I'd rather you come to me and ask for help to start a home and finish school than to subject yourself to unreasonable temptations." There is a time when families need to step in and help. Back in pioneer days the father would give his son a team of horses and a wagon, and the family would help with a barn raising. Getting help when you need it is more important than waiting until you have enough money to get married.

Mrs. Sandford: The engagement should be long enough for the couple to get to know each other—and to give the Lord time to heal any hurts of the past.

Mossholder: If the love is real it must move toward a point of marriage. I recommend a year, but no more than two.

Charisma: What is the first advice you give newlyweds?

Mossholder: Pray together. In our nation one of two marriages ends in divorce. Among Roman Catholics it is one in five. If the husband and wife pray together it is one out of 1,172.

Mrs. Hickey: Wally and I learned how to compliment each other rather than criticize each other. He would criticize my Sunday school lesson; I would criticize his sermons. It was destroying our marriage. When we started looking at the good in each other, things turned around.

Mrs. Sandford: Most couples carry into marriage certain attitudes, judgments, unforgiveness and expectations which have been formed in relation to their parents. These will be projected onto their mates. In the process of premarital counseling each couple should search their hearts prayerfully, asking the Lord to reveal areas of resentment that could be hidden roots of bitterness. They need

to know that it takes time after marriage before they are vulnerable enough to one another to get into the process of grinding. There can be such a thing as a good fight if we don't identify the enemy as being the other person.

Charisma: How can a wife encourage her husband to take his place in spiritual leadership?

Cole: If I had a formula for that I'd be a multimillionaire. The advice I give in my books is this: Don't try to take the place of the Holy Ghost in your husband's life. The Holy Ghost is the one to lead and convict him, not you.

Christenson: Men thrive on being looked up to and respected. Women thrive on being cared for, watched over and protected. If you reverse those roles you're in trouble. The man's headship is controversial, but when you get right down to it, what is the alternative?

Agreement up front is the best posture. This is arrived at by consensus. Otherwise each goes his own way.

Mossholder: Some wives think, "If I

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don't do it, it won't get done." That's an error. If she doesn't do it, the only one left to do it is the husband. That's a different approach. It assumes trust that God is working in him.

Mrs. Sandford: A wife needs to back off from manipulating and pray that every demand that is in her heart be placed on the cross. She should pray for an invitational quality of relating to her husband, asking the Lord to make her sensitive to his needs for encouragement, upbuilding and affirmation.

Charisma: What does submission to the husband really mean?

Mrs. Hickey: Submission is a military term. It means to submit in rank, not importance. Everything needs a head. Schoolteachers head their classes. Pastors head the church. God said the husband was to head the home. I travel all over the world, often without my husband. I do it because he has released me to travel. If he told me tomorrow, "Marilyn, I don't want you to travel anymore," I would quit—and not have a problem. Wally loves me, he hears from God, he is my head.

Christenson: A submissive wife is not a doormat. If her husband loves her as "Christ loves the church," it makes submission natural. The problem is not that women are oppressed or men neglectful of responsibility. The problem is we are all sinners, not that the structure is wrong.

Mossholder: Submission is an attitude, not an act. It wants to obey, but only that which is fitting to the Lord. Sin is never fitting to the Lord. If a husband wants a wife to sin with him, she has the right to say, "Under God, I cannot!"

Cole: Submission is God's way of saying, "This is how you become one."

Charisma: If only one partner is a Christian, what can he or she do to bring the non-Christian to the Lord?

Mrs. Hickey: The best way to win your mate is with little talk and lots of good behavior. My mother became a Christian when I was 19. My father was violently angry. He told her she couldn't go to church. "If you go to church I'll kill you," he said. She replied, "Well, I'm going to church and you're not going to kill me. I'm going Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. In between I will keep your home perfectly. Your meals will always be on the table, your clothes will always be clean, the house will always be in order. Because of Christ I will be a wonderful wife—but I will go to church." She went. One time I saw my father try to strike her. She looked at him

and said, "In the name of Jesus, you cannot touch me!" He fell to the floor and when he got up he asked, "What did you do to me?"

Later she had him admitted to a mental hospital. The social worker told her, "Your religion put him here." "No," she said, "my religion will take him out of here." He did come out and was born again. My mother kept her Lord first, but won her husband by her love and behavior.

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Charisma: What is the best way to keep the spark in your marriage?

Christenson: Husbands and wives need to take time to talk to each other. Find out what is important to your mate. You'll never know if you don't keep talking.

Mrs. Sandford: Couples who don't pray together wear each other out.

Cole: You must pray. Pornography and other distractions are cheap substitutes for prayer. They try to stimulate sexually what only prayer can give and keep in intimacy in a righteous way.

Mossholder: I give my wife priority on my calendar. I never cancel her out just because something "more important" comes along. She is the most important thing in my life. Once a month we have a "surprise date" when I take her someplace special she doesn't anticipate.

Charisma: How do you feel about a wife-mother working outside the home?

Mossholder: Basically, I discourage it. Of course if she is working during school hours and it is fun, exciting and fulfilling, that is another question. She needs to remember, however, that her basic ministry is to her husband, and if working makes her less of a wife then it is not good. At that point she needs to consider: Is it worth it? We have millions of latch-key kids who fall apart because mother is not there when they come home from school. The big question is this: What

will this mean to the generation to come?

Mrs. Sandford: I discourage it, especially during the first six years of a child's life. Nobody can give a child what he needs better than mother can.

Cole: A lot of men have taken a strong stand that wives should not work. But a woman has her own uniqueness and that has to be satisfied. If her husband does not minister to that uniqueness she will have to satisfy it elsewhere.

Christenson: Joanne Woodward, Paul Newman's actress wife who has five children, said: "I have come to the conclusion you cannot be a mother and a career person and do justice to both. Choose one, and the other will get short-changed—or you simply shortchange both of them a little." Of course there are exceptions, but a mother will have a far greater influence in the world by shaping the lives of three or four children than she could ever have by working in an office. It's simply a question of priorities: Which is the most important?

Charisma: Should Christian parents spank their children?

Mrs. Hickey: We spanked both of ours, but we always gave full warning. If they broke a rule three times we spanked them.

Christenson: Parents are primarily teachers. Spanking is an appropriate discipline when a child has been well taught and clearly understands what the expectation of the parent is. If he then deliberately disobeys, a spanking should follow. A rebellious child needs to be spanked, which teaches the child that a parent means business.

Cole: The principle for balancing is to reward in public and punish in private. To punish in public degrades and embarrasses the child, breeding resentment. Punishment is only to reinforce truth. To punish without giving an understanding of truth is in error.

Mrs. Sandford: There is a difference between a spanking and a beating. When the parent gives a spanking and brings a little bit of pain, it teaches the child the relationship between sowing and reaping. But a spanking should always be administered with open arms, communicating to the child that while he is being corrected, he is not being rejected.

Mossholder: I spend a large amount of time in my seminars teaching on how to give a spanking in Jesus' name. It's far better to give a physical spanking than angry verbal abuse—calling him or her lazy, stupid or clumsy—which destroys a child's feeling of worth.

Charisma: Many children are being

raised in single-parent households. What can a single parent do to help his or her child grow up healthy and normal?

Cole: You're talking about households where 95 percent of the single parents are women—meaning 46 percent of the boys are growing up without a father. I salute those women who try to provide both nurturing and discipline which should be met by mother and father. The church has an obligation to help here. There needs to be a man in the nursery, children's church and right on through every graded program in the church to help offset what is happening in American families.

Mossholder: Single-parent households may not be as dreadful as one might think as long as the child has real love and firm guidelines. Timothy, for instance, was raised by his mother and grandmother, and Paul seemed to play a key male role in his life. Singles are a vital part of society. In fact, Luke 8:3 suggests single women traveled with Jesus and His disciples.

Mrs. Hickey: A woman who works for me is a single mother. Both of her daughters are Christian scholars—the oldest one is a straight-A student at Oral Roberts University. Sandy has done better than a lot of full-time mothers with husbands. She was available and compassionate and built a strong self-image in each of her daughters.

Charisma: Do you think parents should enroll their children in Christian schools rather than public schools?

Mrs. Sandford: A lot of parents are sending their children to Christian schools to protect them from the pollution of the world rather than training them by teaching, "I know it's rough out there, but we have a God who can give you strength to stand." A lot of Christian schools operate on "performance orientation" in which a child grows up believing he or she is O.K. only if he or she lives up to a standard. Rigidity and punishment replace unconditional love.

Mossholder: We live in a real world and to shelter our children by keeping them in a Christian environment until they reach college age could be terribly destructive. Our children attended Christian elementary schools and public high schools. But it was not the schools that shaped their lives—it was mom and dad.

Mrs. Hickey: It depends on the city. Denver is terrible since drugs are so widespread. Children don't need that kind of exposure.

Charisma: How should a parent handle a teenager who doesn't want to go to church?

Mossholder: We've told our children, "This is not a hotel, it is a home. There are rules each of us must keep and one rule, no exception, is we go to church as a family." They can't play hookey from school, why from church?

Christenson: We had a cantankerous 85-year-old widow who came to live with us before she died. We told her when she moved in, "In this house we all go to church. That's the rule of the house. What you do with what you get at church is between you and the Lord, but church attendance is not open for discussion." Whether it's an 18-year-old or an 85-year-old, those who live under our roof follow our rules.

Cole: I don't think children should be forced to do anything. They should be encouraged to do certain things. If there are reasons a teenager does not want to attend that particular church or youth group, I urge parents to change churches to find a youth group the teenager will go to. It's almost necessary for the parents to let him or her go where he or she can find acceptance.

Mrs. Sandford: My husband was a pastor and we simply said, "This is what our family does. We are going to stand together. You are part of our family and we want you to be there with us." Five out of our six children responded to this positively. The other child was wounded by hypocrisy in the church. We gave him the freedom to withdraw. But we constantly told him, "You are important to the Lord." He kept on with his prayer life and Bible reading and finally came back to the church, but not until he was able to forgive the people for what they had done to him.

Charisma: Should parents withhold their blessing if a grown child wants to marry someone they don't approve of, such as a non-Christian?

Cole: Righteousness has to prevail. If you make an exception for your child you make an exception for everyone.

Christenson: There is a difference between a child's marrying a Christian you don't approve of and marrying a non-Christian. The Bible says we shouldn't marry outside the faith.

Mrs. Sandford: To pray a blessing does not mean "I approve." You can say, "I do not approve, but I will stand with you. I am going to pray for God to bless you and fulfill the two of you to become what God wants you to be."

Mossholder: A parent should never withdraw his or her love, just as God does not. We need to speak the truth, but show unconditional love. ■