

Making Life Work



The Good News *expanded edition*

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WORLDWIDE MAILING ADDRESSES

United States:

United Church of God,
an International Association
P.O. Box 541027
Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027
Phone: (513) 576-9796
Fax: (513) 576-9795
Web site address: www.ucg.org/

Australia:

United Church of God—Australia
GPO Box 535
Brisbane, Qld. 4001, Australia
Phone: 07 55 202 111
Free call: 1800 356 202
Fax: 07 55 202 122
Web site address:
www.ucg.org.au
E-mail: info@ucg.org.au

Bahamas: United Church of God
P.O. Box N8873, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: (242) 324-3169
Fax: (242) 364-5566

British Isles: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4052,
Milton Keynes, Bucks, MK13 7ZF, England
Phone: 0181-386-8467
Fax: 01257-453978

Canada: United Church of God—Canada
Box 144, Station D
Etobicoke, ON M9A 4X1, Canada
Phone: (416) 231-9379, (800) 338-7779
Fax: (416) 231-8238
Web site address: www.ucg.ca

French-speaking areas:

Église de Dieu Unie – France
B.P. 51254
45002 Orléans Cedex 1
France

Germany:

Vereinte Kirche Gottes/Gute Nachrichten
Postfach 30 15 09
D-53195 Bonn, Germany
Phone: 0228-9454636
Fax: 0228-9454637

Italy:

La Buona Notizia, Chiesa di Dio Unita
Casella Postale 187, 24100 Bergamo, Italy.
Phone: 0039-035583474
Fax: 0039-035582140
Web site address:
www.labuonanotizia.org

New Zealand: United Church of God
P.O. Box 22, Auckland 1015, New Zealand
Phone: Toll free 0508-463-763

South Africa: United Church of God
P.O. Box 4345
2125 Randburg, South Africa
Phone: 011 886-4650 Fax: 011 886-7610
Web site address: www.ucg.org.za

Spanish-speaking areas:

United Church of God
P.O. Box 458, Big Sandy, TX 75755, U.S.A.
Phone: (903) 636-4928

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Authors: "How Can We Make Life Work?": David Treybig, Scott Ashley

"Marriage: Foundation of the Family": David Treybig

"Child Rearing: Building the Right Foundation": Larry Neff

"Finding the Path to a Happy Family": Bill Jahns

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"Keys to a Healthy, Long Life": Noel Hornor

"Does Life Have Greater Meaning and Purpose?" Noel Hornor, Roger Foster

Editorial reviewers: John Bald, Bruce Gore, Paul Kieffer, Graemme Marshall, Burk McNair,
Richard Thompson, Leon Walker, Donald Ward, Lyle Welty, Dean Wilson *Design:* Shaun Venish

How Can We Make Life Work?

Frankly, life just isn't working for some people. Maybe you have noticed the incredible proliferation of self-help books on store and library bookshelves.

Why are so many self-help books published? Could it be simply because people recognize they need help with the many problems, challenges and stresses of everyday life? Writers and publishers recognize this, and their books fly off the shelves by the thousands.

You may not realize that most families already own the best self-help book ever published. Millions of copies have been published, and it's been translated into hundreds of languages. Its words have been around for thousands of years. This book is *your Bible*.

Although it's a perpetual best-seller, few people take the time to read and study the Bible. Most think it's nice to have around and that everybody should have one, but few seem to accept that it means much to us. After all, how could something written thousands of years ago apply to our fast-paced, technologically advanced world? Still others think the Bible is a book for theologians and cannot be understood by the average person.

Those who take the time to study the Bible, however, find it is a *timeless* book. It addresses the ageless issues and questions: Why are we here? Where are we going? What are the solutions to perpetual human problems? How can we learn to live together in peace? How can we live rewarding, fulfilling lives?

The Bible is filled with practical, down-to-earth advice from our Creator. It can help us see and avoid the pitfalls that come with doing things our way (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). It records for us vital and profound lessons from real people.

The Bible clearly shows the principle of *cause and effect*—that our choices and actions, good and bad, produce good and bad results. It's filled with sound counsel on how to have happy families, marriages and friendships, how to properly rear children, how to manage family finances and succeed on the job, how to maintain your health, and so much more. In short, it tells us how to *make life work*.

In this booklet we have gathered and summarized some of the Bible's advice on these topics. But in many ways we've only scratched the surface; the Bible easily contains a lifetime's education just waiting for us to search out its priceless gems and treasures. It's a source of spiritual and practical help that you cannot afford to be without.

The challenge of living the truth you learn

Keep in mind, however, that just because the advice is there doesn't mean it's easy to follow. It takes *effort*. Trying to live by the Bible's instruction is a challenge.

Our natural inclination is to go a different direction from what the Bible teaches (Romans 8:7). We're surrounded by a secular world largely oblivious to biblical values, and those who wish to obey God often find themselves swimming upstream against popular thinking and ways of doing things. Nor does it help when we see that many who profess to be Christian display little or no commitment to living by God's instructions.

Also, we need to be aware that things don't always work out the way we expect, even when we do try to follow God's instruction. Scripture tells us that "time and chance happen to [us] all" (Ecclesiastes 9:11).

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In other words, in spite of our best efforts, other circumstances and situations beyond our control will affect us—sometimes for the better, at times for the worse. Although we can control our own actions, we sometimes have little or no control the actions of others that spill over and affect us.

God doesn't tell us this life will be perfect when we put His instruction into practice. In fact, He tells us to expect adversities (2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 2:20). He assures us, though, that in spite of difficulties and disappointments, "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

Is living this way worth it?

In the face of such difficulties, some may question whether it is worth the effort to live a godly life. But the Bible assures us that "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life *that now is* and of *that which is to come*" (1 Timothy 4:8, emphasis added throughout).

Some people recognize that living God's way holds great promise "of the life . . . which is to come." Far fewer understand that living a godly life also has benefits in "the life that now is"—that is, our present physical lives. They misperceive God's way as

restrictive and detrimental to a happy, fulfilled life.

God's way of life, however, is not a burden; it is most assuredly a blessing.

After all, God's purpose for sending Jesus Christ to earth was to give us the opportunity for eternal life. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

God is concerned about our eternal well-being. But Jesus revealed another reason for His coming when He said, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus came so we can have eternal life, but He came also to help us understand how we can enjoy fulfilled, productive lives *right now*.

Even though living by God's instruction can bring trials and suffering (John 16:33; Acts 14:22), Jesus promised tangible blessings in the here and now for following God's way of life and then, in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29-30). We can experience definite blessings in this life for following the instructions found in God's Word.

Since following God's way is worth the effort, what must we do to please Him? This booklet addresses some of the common issues we face—marriage, child rearing, health, employment, finances—and explains how we can structure our lives according to many principles brought out in the Bible. Continue reading to begin learning how you can live by the rules that *make life work*.

Marriage: Foundation of the Family

God's Word declares that "he who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favour from the LORD" (Proverbs 18:22, New International Version). The same is true for women who find loving and responsible husbands. Marriages are the building blocks of communities, societies and, ultimately, civilizations. A society is only as strong as its marriages and families.

From the beginning God taught that "a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This special arrangement, this bond between a man and woman, was intended to last, as traditional marriage ceremonies put it, "until death do us part." It was designed to be a life-long relationship (Romans 7:2-3) that would produce godly children (Malachi 2:15) and help both mates better understand the deep, loving relationship between Jesus Christ and the members of "the household of God," His Church (Ephesians 5:25-32; 2:19-22).

A happy marriage is one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. God intended for couples to live happily ever after once they exchanged their marriage vows. To this end Ecclesiastes 9:9 instructs husbands to "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life, and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun" (New American Standard Bible). Likewise, wives should enjoy life with their husbands.

Yet, judging by the divorce rates in many countries, mankind has not learned how to do this. Everyone wants

a good marriage, but few are willing to follow God's instructions that, if followed, would produce loving, committed relationships.

God designed marriage and wants us to be happily married (Genesis 2:24). For success in this area of life, we need to learn from the Creator of marriage the principles that lead to happy, successful unions. In short, we need to understand and apply concepts that work rather than following modern paths that so often lead to failure.

Dating: preparation for marriage

According to God's Word, the foundation for a good marriage is laid long before the wedding ceremony. It is established when two people begin dating.

As children grow older, "When can I begin dating?" is a question they commonly ask their parents. Though the Bible gives no specific age when dating is appropriate, wise parents will teach their maturing children sound biblical principles that will help them follow God's standards of behavior. Parents should determine when their children are ready to date based on their maturity and readiness to accept responsibility for their actions. Before parents allow dating, they should teach and encourage their children to follow biblical standards rather than turning them loose to do whatever comes naturally.

Teaching children God's standards before allowing them to date may sound terribly old-fashioned and restrictive to some with supposedly enlightened ways of thinking. But most governments do not allow people to drive automobiles until they demonstrate the knowledge and ability to do so in a safe manner. No responsible

parent would put his or her adolescent child in an automobile in the middle of a busy highway without having given that child instruction on how to drive.

Dating in our modern world is not without its dangers. Without proper instruction, too many youths become promiscuous, contract sexually transmissible diseases, experience unwanted pregnancies and choose wrong paths that seem enjoyable and right at the time but lead to untold anguish (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). They need instruction early and interactive discussions on why and how biblical values can protect them from such suffering.

Without this proper instruction, many people will never experience a happy marriage. Loving parents would never wish misery on their children! But leaving them ignorant is a sure path to heartache. A thorough understanding of God's standards for dating and marriage is one of the greatest blessings children can receive from their parents.

Some people, however, are far past that point, having



already reached adulthood and possibly already married and divorced. Teaching young people proper behavior for dating is obviously ideal. But what about adults? Do the principles change? Because adults are older, does that give them license for more liberties than adolescents may take? Are all things appropriate for consenting adults?

As we shall see, God's standards for dating apply to people of all ages. He does not have two sets of guidelines, one for adults and one for youths. *Following* the biblical laws is equally beneficial no matter one's age. *Breaking* God's laws is equally disastrous for people of all ages.

Modern standards of dating

To understand the difference between God's way and the world's, consider the dating practices common in the Western world.

Many assume that when people are dating, sexual intercourse is appropriate to determine if they are compatible. They believe sex is simply a natural expression of love between two people and thereby the natural thing to do for individuals living together or "going together" in an exclusive dating relationship. If such a couple then breaks up and the two start dating others, the

common assumption is that they are then free to have sexual relations with their new partners.

This practice of serial monogamy—being sexually active with only one unmarried person at a time—is widely considered to a suitable way to date and find a future mate.

In the United States about two thirds of married women in their 20s cohabited with their future mates before marriage (Robert Moeller, "America's Morality Report Card," *Christian Reader*, November-December 1995, pp. 97-100). This dubious practice is followed by all too many young adults in the Western world.

Another honorable principle, according to current standards, is that partners should disclose any sexually transmissible diseases before intercourse so appropriate protection can be employed. In addition, practicing "safe sex" (using contraceptives to avoid disease and unwanted pregnancies) is touted as the right thing to do. These practices are so widely accepted that increasing numbers of school systems provide free contraceptives to students, no questions asked.

Although these approaches may appear to be logical, they do not measure up to God's standards. What many do not understand is that such faulty logic is precisely the *cause* of so many unhappy relationships and failed marriages. Let's consider what God says.

God's standards for dating

Historical records, like those of the ancient city of Corinth, reveal that in the heart of the Roman Empire, the most technologically advanced civilization of its day, the sexual values of the first century were similar to the modern concepts of dating today. Standards were so skewed that sexual relations with temple prostitutes were not looked upon as scandalous but considered an appropriate form of worship.

Through the apostle Paul, God taught the Corinthians a better way.

"*Flee sexual immorality*," he wrote. "Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

How could Paul dare to address others' private behavior? He could be so bold because he understood God sanctions sexual relations *only within the marriage relationship* (Genesis 2:24; Hebrews 13:4). Sexual relations in any other situation were and are immoral.

Later Paul addressed relationships between members of the opposite sex even more directly. Urging the brethren to live their lives in a way pleasing to God (1 Thessalonians 4:1), he wrote:

"This is the will of God, that you should be holy: you must abstain from fornication; each one of you must learn to gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honour it, not giving way to lust like the pagans who know nothing of God; no one must do his fellow-Christian wrong in this matter, or infringe his rights.

“As we impressed on you before, the Lord punishes all such offences. For God called us to holiness, not to impurity. Anyone therefore who flouts these rules is flouting not man but the God who bestows on you his Holy Spirit” (verses 3-8, Revised English Bible).

The custom and practice of dating—which leads to marriage—should be conducted with honor. It should not be devalued into an excuse for sexual gratification. God expects us to enter marriage as virgins. This approach shows respect for God, our bodies, our future mates and the divine institution of marriage.

God’s way is the best for making marriage work. Sociologists have found that God’s standard for dating is the one that produces marriages that last. “After analyzing cohabitation and marriage patterns among some 13,000 adults, two University of Wisconsin-Madison sociologists have concluded that couples who live together before marriage experience higher levels of marital conflict and do not communicate as well. Such couples were less committed to marriage and saw divorce as more likely than those who had not cohabited prior to marriage” (*Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 54, 1992).

Dating: Teach the right way

How can concerned parents counteract pressure on their children to engage in immoral dating practices?

The first step, as noted earlier, is to teach them godly principles of dating and friendship. When their teens are ready, many families have found group dating to be a good way for youths to enter their next stage of life.

Since teenagers are generally not ready for marriage—because of immaturity and the need for educational and occupational training—some of the pressures and temptations of one-on-one dating can be avoided through group dates. Social development and learning to have fun in the company of the opposite sex are healthy experiences for teens in a safe environment.

Dating for marriage

When two mature people begin dating each other with an eye toward marriage, they must consider many things. What values does the other person hold? Does he believe in God? Does she obey God? What is this person’s background and personal standards and values? What are his preferences, dislikes, character and personality? Will this person be a complementary match? Can I love and respect her?

Often in modern dating little thought is given to a potential partner for life—other than whether the two enjoy their sexual activity. Yet, when two people refrain from the emotionally charged arena of sexual relations as God instructs, they can much more rationally consider the values and traits of a potential mate.

Finding a mate with similar religious values is an especially important consideration. The ancient nation of Israel repeatedly lost its spiritual moorings when its citizens intermarried with people with different religious convictions and practices (Numbers 25:1-3; Nehemiah 13:23-26). Marrying within one’s faith is still just as important.

Ideally children should have two parents who believe, practice and teach the same religious principles. When children have parents with different values, they are confused. Even if children are not involved, clashes between two competing value systems can be painful. Through bitter experience, many wish that when they were dating they had followed the apostle Paul’s advice against being “unequally yoked together” with someone of different religious beliefs (2 Corinthians 6:14).

As two people consider getting engaged to be married, if they are wise they will seek premarital counseling. Such counsel can help couples consider their strengths and



weaknesses before marriage. In addition to an objective review, they can discuss their relationship skills.

Although the decision to marry is a personal one, this kind of information can help couples make wiser choices about whom they marry. For those who choose to proceed with marriage, insights gained through premarital counseling can lay a foundation for a relationship that will last.

A foundation for marriage

Within marriage God gives husbands and wives specific instructions that will produce peace and happiness. Whether or not one has followed God’s instructions regarding dating, these principles can help any marriage.

Although the best course of action is always to follow all of God’s instructions, God also allows and encourages everyone to turn from past sins and begin obeying Him (Ezekiel 18:21; Acts 2:38; 26:18). (If you would like to know more about the purpose of human life and how to commit your life to God, request our free booklets *What is Your Destiny?* and *The Road to Eternal Life*.)

Although solid relationships are built more quickly when both husband and wife accept and practice God’s laws, God expects each of us to respond to Him regardless of the circumstances of our marriage (James 4:17). Even when only one mate commits his life to God and His standards, He can bless both partners (1 Corinthians 7:13-14). A positive, loving example of obedience to God by a husband or wife may influence the other to

want to please God (1 Peter 3:1-4). One person *can* make a difference.

Let us consider some biblical principles that when followed make marriages work.

A lifelong commitment

Early in the book of Genesis God tells us that it is appropriate for a man to “leave his father and his mother” and “cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, King James Version). The Hebrew word translated “cleave” is *dabaq*, meaning “to cling, cleave, keep close.”

“Used in modern Hebrew in the sense of ‘to stick to, adhere to,’ *dabaq* yields the noun form for ‘glue’ and also the more abstract ideas of ‘loyalty, devotion’” (*Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1985, “To Cleave, Cling”).

When a husband and wife obey the biblical command to cleave to each other, they will literally join together. Having sexual relations, being “one flesh,” is part of commitment to each other in marriage. Commitment

When two people exchange wedding vows, they make a life-long commitment. Biblically speaking, this is a covenant—a solemn promise to God and one’s mate to be faithful.

includes fidelity, trust and the character to act properly when under pressure or temptation. Yet too often people engage in sex without commitment—a contradiction of this foundational principle for successful marriages.

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This commitment should not be taken lightly or maintained only when we feel like it. We need to understand that our feelings can mislead us. God does not advocate only occasional bursts of loyalty and obedience to Him whenever it is convenient for us. Similarly, people who desire good marriages do not look for people who will stay committed to them only *most* of the time.

Good relationships stand on long-term, trustworthy commitments—even under trying circumstances. When two people commit to follow God and His instructions within their marriage, they take the first steps to a happy, lasting relationship.

What is love?

To love and be loved is one of the most exhilarating experiences humans can enjoy. Writers and poets ancient and modern speak of the power and emotion of romantic love. Yet the Bible reveals that love, in its broadest sense, is a *choice*. Love is something we *choose* to do.

God tells husbands to love their wives (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Colossians 3:19)—and not just if they feel like it. Lacking a foundational understanding, many couples have tragically assumed they have no control

over their feelings. Concluding that love just magically appears or disappears, too many have suffered and even dissolved relationships over difficulties that could have been resolved.

In a beautiful explanation of the love God expects of us, the apostle Paul describes the nature and qualities of love: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, NIV).

Love is much more than a vague emotion or physical attraction. Practicing real love requires conscious choice and determination. Genuine love resolves to show kindness and patience in the face of suffering. It does not return evil for evil (Romans 12:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:15). People who exemplify this kind of love follow the example of God Himself, who “is kind to the unthankful and evil” (Luke 6:35).

Full, complete love is the love God expects husbands to show their wives. It is the foundation of godly leadership. Without it husbands cannot properly fulfill the leadership God expects from them within marriage (Ephesians 5:23). When a husband demonstrates godly love, his whole family benefits. His wife and children feel secure. When they know they are honored and loved, it is much easier for them to respect him as the leader of the family.

Husbands must understand that even though God has given them responsibility within the family, their position of leadership is to be used only for the good of the family. It should never be used for selfish reasons. This kind of leadership flows from the understanding that first and foremost the husband, too, is under authority—God’s authority (1 Corinthians 11:3).

Because husbands historically have not lived up to God’s expectations for them, some have concluded that a father’s leadership position within the family is evil and outdated. The real problem, however, is with husbands who neglect or reject the character traits of godliness—not with God’s model for families. If we accept God’s instructions, we must accept His teaching on the marriage model.

God places on a husband’s shoulders immense responsibility for leading his wife and children in gentleness and love. God gives him no mandate to use his position harshly or selfishly, nor the right to neglect his family’s well-being. Humility, the opposite of pride and arrogance, is essential in godly leadership.

In a poignant letter to Titus, Paul explained that God’s structure for families is a foundational biblical teaching: “But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior . . . —that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that

