

Searching for Family Togetherness

By Zoica Lascu, Family Ministries Director
Ion Lascu, Pastor
Andreea Lascu, Media & Communications Student
Israel Field
Trans-European Division

Part 1 Dramatic Monologues – Family Togetherness?

Michael's Monologue

“Another busy day! I am awake earlier than usual, so I'm going to head out. I have to go to a computer store and buy some ram memory for the computer . . . The computer's so slow! Sometimes it freezes up right in the middle of our poor Benjamin's 'Command and Conquer' video game. He gets so frustrated. After that, I have to go by the cable company office to sign the contract so we can have more channels available to watch the news about the conflict in the Gulf region.

“My mobile phone is ringing! So early! Every client it seems wants my fast and affordable services—right now! What a day! I can't even remember if I kissed Elisabeth good bye this morning . . . She was still asleep, and I know I didn't go by the kids' room. But, I will be home before they leave and I will go straight to the kitchen to help Elisabeth prepare for Friday evening's supper. We've invited so many friends. . . . The phone is ringing again! Oh, yes, it's Mr. George. His son is getting married and he wants the apartment remodeled. He is such a good man, and pays well. I will go visit him tonight.

“I am so busy! I can't handle this ringing phone. I think I will just turn it off.

“Let's see, where was I? I can't remember! All I can see before my eyes right now is a long list of to-do things for this whole week. I have to prepare a Family Togetherness seminar for the weekend at church. I know a lot of my friends will be there . . . I can't wait for them to hear my great ideas. I will bewilder them with my originality.

“It's early, but there's already traffic. I have to drive across this big intersection by the park . . . Move ahead, sir! What are you waiting for? This traffic is so slow!

“What's that over there? Big, heavy machines! Being installed in the park! A sign that says it's a new project—a commercial center. Chopping up the park!! I am furious! They can't do that! This park has been here for ages, since the town was built. This is where we go out on picnics. This is where I met my wife, where we first kissed! I asked her to marry me here—right by that old oak there while we watched stars together one night. They can't take down that tree!! They can't!! Here in this park I taught my kids to ride their bikes. I taught them

about different trees. Here is where we come every Saturday evening during the summer to play volleyball with our church friends.

“Hmm. I met an old gentleman in this park. He is a professor at Bar-Ilan University. I asked him what was the greatest need of this country, and he answered without hesitation: a “parentology” school. ‘Parents don’t know anymore how to raise their children,’ he said. ‘They must be taught how.’

“Whew! Glad that part of the drive is over! Say, that computer store must be close! What? The way is blocked! Police and road blocks! Let me ask this officer.... Could be they’re expecting some visiting foreign officials. I can’t believe it!! He tells me they are preparing for the Gay Parade!

“I am a father! I’m in a great hurry to get things done so I can get back to my family before everyone leaves the house! Here I am, stuck in traffic because the city is interested in increasing its income and in promoting ‘social tolerance!’”

Elisabeth’s Monologue

“Michael! Michael!? Honey?

“I wake up and Michael is not in bed. Maybe he’s in our home office. Let me go and see I want to tell him about my weird, but interesting dream. No, he’s not in the office. . . . He’s not in the bathroom Not in the kitchen. Oh! His shoes are gone from the hallway and the safety chain on the door is open: he must have left early today! I hope he remembers to buy fruit; we have the pastor coming over for supper today. Oh! I do hope he remembers the pastor is coming; he himself invited him. . . . Maybe I should call him and remind him.

“He’s not answering the phone! Maybe the battery died. Anyway, I’ll try later. I’ve got so much to do I have to make breakfast and wake up the kids. And clean! And iron the Sabbath clothes; tomorrow I’ll have no time for that.

“What a family we are! We teach others about how to accomplish family unity and harmony and we are so scattered ourselves. The kids go around with earphones and I have to yell at them so they can hear me. Benji is spending all his free time in his room playing at the computer. Just the other day he put a sticker on his door which says, ‘Keep out. Leave me alone!’ I see light in his room until late at night. I hardly can wake him up in the morning. He’s always late for school. Mary is still young, but does whatever her brother does. She copies him so well, as if he were her hero. She listens to him more than she listens to me.

“We’re almost out of breakfast cereal; I have to write down a list of things we need to buy before Sabbath.

“The TV!! Well, that’s another thing. We bought the TV and a VCR to watch sermon tapes of Mark Finley and Doug Batchelor, but now the TV is turned on 24/7 it seems. The kids skip through all the channels watching movies and cartoons

“Michael works so much and is always coming home late. He barely sees the kids And I feel so alone!

“I should make a list of things we should discuss with the pastor tonight. I hope Michael comes home early so we can talk about this before the pastor comes. . . . Maybe Michael will have some things to add to the list.”

We’ve just presented to you a “normal” family. With much of what has been said, many of us can identify. It’s a sad reality.

Workshop exercise. *[Divide the group into 4 different teams and give each group one of the following questions for discussion (10-15 minutes).*

1. *What is the main problem in the story?*
2. *What would you write on the list of things to talk to the pastor about?*
3. *What would you not tell the pastor and why?*
4. *If you were the pastor of this family, and you knew them well, what advice would you give them? How would you help them?*

Reconvene as a large group and have an open floor discussion with each group presenting their answers.]

Part 2

How It Is and How It Should Be

In our secular world, everyone considers himself important, free to choose and to plan as personal needs and interests dictate. Basic values of family and community are overturned in a search for personal accomplishment. We argue to defend the way it is, saying that the problems existing today are due to gaps between the generations, to the distance between us, to our schedules and many other factors, everything except seeing how we ourselves and our individualism are so much a part of the problem. We contend that each of us must be efficient, and of course it’s hard to be efficient when you depend on others. That is why we cannot allow ourselves to be tied down to our families, to friends, to church

Why is this so? Why so much estrangement? Who loses and who wins?

Once upon a time, according to a Native American legend, the colors of the world got into a quarrel. Each was eloquently presenting their importance above the others: blue was boasting about being in oceans and sky, green was covering valleys and mountains, yellow was bragging about fields of wheat and great deserts and daffodils, red was arguing it was the color of blood and blood is life. And so they kept on debating until a few drops of rain mixed them all up into a beautiful rainbow.

Satan has a great interest in getting us to quarrel. He wants families to be divided. He has created a vast arsenal of weapons with which to attack our homes. He even uses innocent things, good things to keep us occupied and away from our loved ones. Satan’s way, though, leads to isolation, distrust, pride and loss of intimacy with each other and with God (cf. 1 Peter 5: 8).

The Creator's plan however, is that the beauty, the strength of the family will be in its unity and intimacy. God will take us, with all our diverse colors, and bless us by the rain of His Spirit on us. Just as He met Adam and Eve morning and evening and blessed them, He longs to come and be in the midst of our families today.

We mothers and fathers and children are called to “submit ourselves to God” and to “resist the devil” (James 4:7). We are called to consolidate our families, to take action, to rebuild weak and lost relationships, and to fortify the stronghold of our homes through the strength of the Holy Spirit. Remember, even if, like the colors, we are all thinking of our own particular interests and prerogatives, it will only take a few drops of God's Holy Spirit to blend us together and so restore our families.

Ellen White talks about how the bond of the family is the tightest, yet the most delicate and sacred of all human ties. Families were meant to be a blessing for humanity (cf. *Ministry of Healing*, p. 356). In *The Adventist Home*, in a chapter about the atmosphere of the home, she says that God would like our families to serve as symbols of the celestial family. Parents and children together should daily aspire to achieve this, considering one another members of God's family. In such ways, their lives will reflect to the whole world what it means to love God and to obey His commandments. In such homes, Christ is glorified. Peace, long-suffering and love will be in that family (cf. *The Adventist Home*, p. 17).

Part 3 Strategies for Family Togetherness

As we were browsing the Internet to see what others understood about family togetherness, we found a website with questions and answers. One question asked about strategies for family togetherness: “I don't know about you guys, but it seems like families can get pretty scattered, even living under the same roof. In our house, everyone has their own TV and their own agenda and responsibilities. What do you do to keep the family together?” (<http://www.thriftyfun.com/>)

Workshop activity. [Ask the groups to discuss the question, “What do you do to keep the family together?” and find answers. Then, have the groups share their answers with everyone.]

On the website, there were only 11 answers to this question, although the question was posted in 2004!! Not many people considered this topic important. A summary of the answers posted there would be something like: “Eat together and have pleasant table conversation. Have only one TV so you can at least be all in the same room.” The answers focused primarily on the physical aspect of family togetherness. But is that what togetherness is all about? Since we were not satisfied with the answer, we kept searching.

On Wikipedia (the free Internet encyclopedia) we found this definition of togetherness:

Togetherness is the *feeling* of being *close to another person emotionally and physically*. It makes one *feel warm on the inside*, and creates an altogether *positive atmosphere* for the persons involved. It is well symbolized by the gesture of holding both hands up, slightly

cupped with palms facing each other, and moving them together to create a circle. The other symbol is also when two arms hold each other at the wrist.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togetherness>, emphasis supplied)

Here we have a new dimension presented—that of feeling. Togetherness is something one should feel, even if he is thousands of miles away from home.

If we take a boat as an example, what is it that makes the boat advance toward its destination? There are two main elements—the engine, which brings about movement, and the steering system, which gives direction. In our families, what gives us direction? What makes our family move toward the destination of togetherness? We think there are two main factors: *religion* and *time*.

Religion. “In the beginning God” On all levels, physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, religion has a powerful influence on family ties. We think practical religion is a walk with a personal God, a lifestyle. This should be taught in the family when the children are young. We should present religion as something practical, not abstract, and involve the children, according to their level of understanding, in the act of worship.

In our family, our children were raised in the city, but with no TV, computer, PlayStation video games, or any toys of a real sort. They found pleasure in doing surveys for the church in the park, in handing out invitations for evangelistic meetings, in inviting church members for lunch on Sabbath, in visiting nursing homes, and in participation in church programs and activities. When they were barely 12 years old, they asked to be baptized. It is amazing for us parents to see them today, nearly 30 years old, still filled with the same desire and enthusiasm for the church and for the people. On vacations when we are together, we still visit the sick, prepare church activities together, and invite church friends for Sabbath lunch. When we are apart, there is still a feeling of togetherness that stretches over the thousands of miles between us.

On the other hand, my family shares a different story. I (Ion) am the firstborn and my parents, especially my mother, loved me in a special way. We spent time together and had a strong bond. When I was 20, my parents left the faith and converted to Judaism. I remained in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our different beliefs now divided us. Even after many years, there is still coldness in our dealings with each other.

Religious faith—when shared by all the members of the family—gives us a direction because we all have one common goal, one common set of principles. The home is bound together by one faith and one Lord. Belief in God provides each of us with peace, love, long-suffering, assurance of forgiveness and salvation, wisdom, trust, self-sacrifice and many other elements needed to reach a heavenly atmosphere in the home and, as the Wikipedia definition says, a warm feeling.

When not all of your household shares the same belief, remember that the believer is a blessing to the non-believer and sanctifies them (cf. 1 Cor. 7:14). When one is in Christ, all power is at his disposition to make things work, because God desires, much more than we do, that our families be happy.

Faith is where it all begins for the home—faith in the heart of husband and wife, father and mother. God is the source of energy that keeps each of us going, and all of us going together.

Time. Once the boat starts on its way, what direction will it go? It must be steered if it is to reach its desired destination. In families, we think that the amount of time invested in relationships has a similar effect. Time will steer the relational “ship” of the family into one of many directions. Do you see? If you let go of the steering, the boat will be carried away by waves, even if the engine is working. But if you hold on to the steering wheel or tiller, if you plan your time and take charge of it, you will succeed in reaching your destination.

Joyce Coleman, director of Clinical Social Work at St. Louis Children Hospital, talks about how modern families are highly mobile. Children get involved in extracurricular activities, even at young ages. And because there’s limited time for families to come together, it’s important to establish a weekly or biweekly meeting with which nothing conflicts. It is our solemn duty, the duty of each family member, to *make* time for relationships in the family. Family time should be planned and scheduled so that nothing will conflict with this time. We should not cancel our family plans for other plans. Families *are* important.

- You can bring great joy to your kids when you come home in the evening and take them out into nature, have a pillow fight, help them with difficult homework, or take them on your lap for evening worship and bedtime stories.

- You can bring great joy to your wife when you go grocery shopping with her, or when you do domestic chores around the house together, or ask for her help on spiritual or business matters.

- You can bring great joy to your husband when you encourage him with your smiles and your love, spending time with him—even in his workshop!

- You can bring great joy to your parents when you help them with the household chores and with Sabbath preparations.

But all this takes and requires time. It is not time wasted; it’s time invested! Investing time in your family is a win-win business plan. There has to exist a common family agreement, a commitment of each member regarding family time. A time for you to be together physically, involved in the same activities and united in spirit. When you take charge of your time and not let it pass you by, then your home will be safely steered toward a most pleasant destination.

This, then, is the strategy we as a family found for family togetherness. This is a starting point. The rest is in the powerful hands of God. With His help, you can make your own strategy, a personalized plan according to the needs and desires of your family. But first you must have Him. Then make a serious commitment to invest in your family.

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