



The Family You Want



How to Build an Authentic, Loving Home



John A. Huffman, Jr.

CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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ISBN 1-85792-933-0



10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Published in 2001
Reprinted 2005
by
Christian Focus Publications Ltd.,
Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire,
IV20 1TW, Great Britain

www.christianfocus.com

Cover design by Alister MacInnes
Printed and bound by
CPD, Wales

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This book is dedicated to
my wife Anne,
my daughters Suzanne, Carla and Janet,
my parents Dorothy and John Huffman and
my in-laws Martha and Crawford Mortensen
and all who have provided my laboratory for
fleshing out this life experience.

And I express my appreciation to
Bill Lobdell, editor, church member and friend
who has given freely of his time and expertise
to make my writing more readable.





INTRODUCTION

Twenty-seven years ago I wrote a book titled *Becoming a Whole Family*. It represented the best that I had to say as a son, a husband, and a father writing in my early thirties during the early 1970s.

At that time, Anne and I lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We had two little daughters, five-year-old Suzanne and three-year-old Carla. Anne was a traditional housewife and mother. Richard Nixon was still in the White House.

I am now in my early sixties, writing at the beginning of the 21st Century. Anne and I are now empty-nesters. The youngest of our three daughters, Janet, who was not even born when I wrote the book, is a graduate of the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California, and now in her mid twenties is working back in Newport Beach. Carla, who is a graduate of Stanford University, has worked five years with a law firm in Palo Alto, California, has just completed her MBA in finance and marketing at MIT and is working in the high-tech computer industry with Microsoft in Seattle, Washington. Suzanne, who was our oldest, after graduating from Princeton University in 1990 while battling cancer for 19 months, has now, to our great grief, been dead for almost a decade.

Anne, no longer a traditional housewife and mother, is a highly respected professional who, fifteen years into marriage, entered Fuller Theological Seminary. Over a period of years, she earned two graduate degrees and now has her own psychoanalytic practice here in Newport Beach, California, and serves on the board of her graduate alma mater, Fuller Theological Seminary. As you can tell, there have been some changes in our family in nearly three decades.





Much is different in America, too. The rate of change has been exponential. Although every generation has confronted tragedy, it seems like ours has more than any other – or we see it more closely through the lens of television that now takes us instantly to the most remote places in the world.

CNN and other cable news services are right there on the spot with 24-hour coverage, whether it's a war, a revolution, an earthquake or a hurricane. ESPN brings the latest in sports. And there is even the 24-hour Golf Channel. I carry my cell phone everywhere I go. Faxes have sped up correspondence and, much to the surprise of my technologic-savvy children, I am sitting here at my computer typing e-mails to friends all over the world, even as I edit this book manuscript.

Back in 1973, the idea for that first book on the family emerged from a sermon series that I preached at the First Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh. At the time, I was quite troubled by something that happened. The messages were enthusiastically received by a substantial segment of the congregation. I noticed that the printed sermon ministry grew from about 300 subscribers to some 3,000 in a matter of those eight weeks. It was that series on the family that pretty well established my printed sermon ministry, which continues to this day. The sermons were replayed each Sunday evening over KDKA radio in Pittsburgh.

At the same time, I noticed a fascinating phenomenon. There were some persons who expressed a strong resistance to my family talk. They urged me to get on with preaching the Bible, to stop wasting time on family concerns. Our attendance dropped off slightly. Some very graciously, but firmly, mentioned that they were single, widowed, or divorced and that such a series was not too helpful to them.

I remember how puzzled I was by these two extreme reactions. Was it, in fact, inappropriate to take valuable Sunday morning time to deal in practical terms with the problems of husband-wife, parent-child relationships? Was it unfair to those who were not – at that point in their lives – married or





did not have children to take the time to speak to these unique circumstances? Or should we have reserved such conversation for covenant groups or adult education classes? On the other hand, how could we explain such a tremendous positive response? Some seemed to hunger for more of this biblical-relational preaching.

I discovered the hard way that any talk about family living has to recognize that there are two kinds of families. In those Pittsburgh days, I was aware of one kind of family – the nuclear family – made up of father and mother and whatever number of children they had. The nuclear family is important. We, in the church, need to talk a lot about healthy family relationships. And in fact, at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California – where I now pastor – the most requested sermon topics all have to do with family themes.

At the same time, we must never forget that there is a second kind of family. This is the extended family. When we talk about family only in nuclear terms of mother-father, parent-child, brother-sister, we have violated our responsibility to relate to every person who needs a family. The widowed, the divorced, the never married – instead of being pushed out of our inner circle of conversation – need to be included. No one is exempt from family concerns unless someone such as myself defines a family in such narrow terms as to intentionally exclude them.

Our society has to give much more attention to the extended family. We have discovered this at St. Andrew's. Some 13,000 persons have now gone through our Divorce Recovery Workshops. That's a staggering statistic. Although only a small percentage of these persons are members of the congregation, our church has reached out into a community that is devastated by divorce. It would be impossible for us today to find a family that has not been touched at least in some way by the horrendous pain of divorce.

Divorce isn't the only thing that creates the need for an extended family. The dynamics of modern life have made us a highly mobile society. Granted, there have been persons all





through history who have moved from place to place. Merchants, colonists and members of the military have had a high degree of mobility. However, the highest percentage of society had lived a fairly sedentary existence. But today is quite different from even the 1920s in the United States.

My mother's family, several generations ago, moved from Ontario to Northern Michigan. What little knowledge I have of their immigration was that it was a move involving the extended family. A large number of relatives moved together at one time. They set down their roots in that Northern Michigan farm community and lived there – brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins – in a place called home. Some would travel on business. Occasionally, one would move to another part of the country. But each knew where his and her roots were.

When my grandmother died back in the mid-1970s, we returned her remains to that community. Her friends and relatives were still there 27 years after she had left them. The uncles and aunts, cousins and their children embraced each other with that ongoing warmth of extended family relationships. When we returned for the memorial service, they greeted my mother, who had left in the mid-1930s, with a warmth and familiarity that astounded me. Now even that community has largely broken up as its young people have moved to other parts of the country.

Our modern life moves so fast! Some of us involved in corporate life go from one city to another every few years. Our children are raised without knowing their cousins. Occasionally they see their grandparents. We are being forced more and more into the nuclear family. Ties are being cut with the extended family.

Christmas of 1995 was the first time in 27 years that our Huffman family had been together for any part of a holiday season. The last time was in 1968 when our nuclear family included my father and mother, my sister and her husband, and Anne and me. Even then, the three component parts – my parents, my sister's family and my family – lived in three different parts of the country. It took the wedding of my nephew in Southern California to get us all together. This time, those six original





members of our nuclear family had more than tripled in number, with cousins who hadn't seen each other for years finally getting together. Children were reunited with their grandparents. We are being forced more and more into the nuclear family as geographical separation cuts our ties with the extended family. I hardly know the names and geographic locations of the children of my cousins.

Then add to that divorce with all of its implications, and we see the need for a broader understanding of family. The family is not just father-mother, brother-sister, parent-child. The family extends to all those who are part of a blood relationship. In addition, the extended family reaches out to include other relationships that we have in our communities.

The church is a family. It is the family of God. It is a community of individuals who cannot go it alone, who need each other. Therefore, when we talk about family, it is important to understand that church is just as much a family in its responsibilities to care for each other as are our own nuclear families.

So if you are single, widowed or divorced, I apologize for any truncated, individualistic understanding the church has shared about family living that does not show there's a place for you. There is a place for you in the people of God, the family of Jesus Christ. God did not create you to go it alone in this world. The Old Testament has a magnificent statement in Psalm 68:5-6a, which reads:

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families....

Never forget those verses. God is in the business of bringing together families, both nuclear and extended. He created a family where we have our blood relationships. He created the church to be a family of believers. God knows that we are social beings. God knows we cannot go it alone. So he created various kinds of families to help meet our basic social needs.





So, I've written this new book. It reaffirms much of what I wrote in the early 1970s when I was in my early 30s. But there is so much more to say. Life seems to have accelerated in its pace. It certainly is much more complex. Circumstances have changed. I've interacted with and counseled so many more people in the intervening years. And I have done so much more living myself.

Here is the best of my thinking, coming from a more seasoned veteran of family living. I hope you will find it helpful!

