

COVER STORY

Trapped by Relentless Hope

by Robert Whitcomb, PsyD

Jim came to my office seeking help for long-term depression. He was 52 years of age, married, and the father of three children. Initially Jim spoke like most other middle aged men. But over the next few weeks and months he periodically revealed another, younger sounding voice that reminded me of a young child pleading with his mother, or in Jim's case, his father to please "see me and pay attention to me."

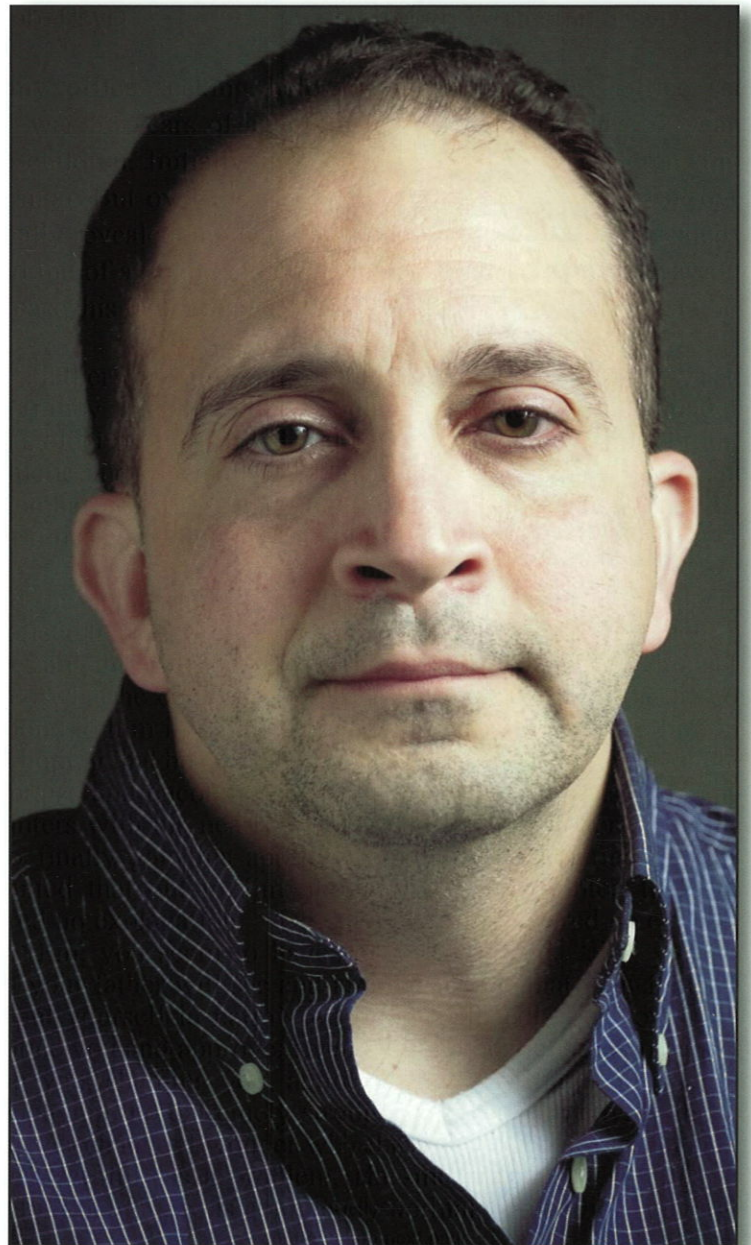
It turned out Jim's father was quite self centered and only valued his children if they made him look good and buoyed his narcissism. Jim's older brothers filled that need because they were quite athletic and especially good at sports. But Jim's dad seemed embarrassed by Jim's musical gifts. He both ignored and at times actively humiliated his unathletic son.

As Jim described the neglect and humiliation his father heaped on him, I noticed that he rarely appeared angry at his dad. Instead, expressing himself in a childlike voice, he repeatedly wondered what he could do to please his father and get him to respond to him in a kindly way. At 52 years of age Jim was still hoping that he could make his dad proud enough to notice, praise and encourage him. He described innumerable encounters with his nearly 75 year old father where he hoped to finally gain his approval only to fail again. When I pointed that out to Jim, he shrugged his shoulders and offered no explanation.

One day I said, "Jim, you seem to have some kind of relentless hope that your father will see and appreciate you so you repeatedly put yourself in harm's way hoping that *this* time he will notice you and approve. Even though your dad keeps belittling you, shaming you, and ignoring you, you seem to keep denying the extremely strong likelihood that your dad will never change. I wonder why that is?"

At first Jim didn't see this as a problem. He sincerely believed his compelling longing was completely normal.

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Who wouldn't want their dad to love them? But as we discussed situation after situation, we saw how his father either lacked the capacity or the willingness to respond as Jim so hoped he would.

Jim's relentless hope is actually quite common. *Many people seeking professional counseling are emotionally and relationally stuck because they keep hoping that a valued parent, spouse, or other important person in their life will finally love them the way they wish.* They believe their lives will be OK if only they can get the response they want. But that doesn't happen. Others continue disappointing them and failing to become the good loving objects they long for. So once again, they are left with another reminder of their overwhelming pain and sadness. Unless they overcome their relentless

search for approval they are doomed to repeat this cycle the rest of their lives!

Taking Responsibility

Jim's first step towards growing out of his self destructive pattern was to take responsibility for his refusal to stop pursuing his father. In one session I said, "Jim, although you have seen repeatedly that your father consistently fails you, it apparently hurts too much to sit with that pain so you keep thinking maybe *next* time it will be different." Jim insisted that his father *should* be kind and understanding and interested in his activities. But that wasn't the point. Jim's dad had a mind of his own and nobody could force him to be what Jim needed him to be. *If Jim was ever going to get better he would have to take responsibility for his reactions to his dad's hurtful style rather than continuing to fantasize that he should or could somehow get his dad to change.*

Gradually Jim began to see that

instead of helping him feel better about himself, his search was actually creating more pain and suffering. Then he realized he had a choice. He could decide to give up his unrelenting search for a healed relationship with his father or he could remain stuck in his vicious cycle. Eventually Jim concluded that facing the pain of his father's rejection and giving up his unrealistic hope might be better than continually being kicked in the face for trying to gain his dad's approval. *1 Corinthians 10:13* took on special significance to Jim during that time, "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the ways of escape also, that you may be able to endure it," (NASB). Jim realized he could live without his dad's affirmation and approval, even though he was often tempted to return to his false hope.

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Accepting Reality

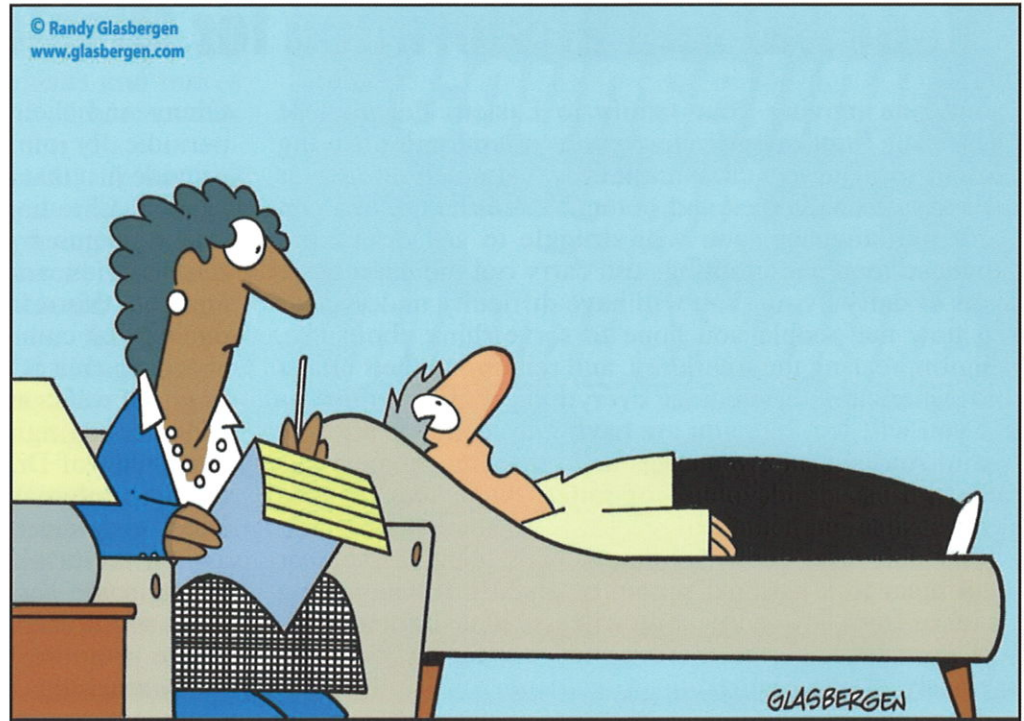
For a time, Jim's depression got worse as he began to allow himself to feel the overwhelming pain of admitting he would never earn his father's love and respect. There were times he couldn't even speak during our counseling sessions so I sat quietly and waited for him to reengage. Later he would explain that those times were necessary for him to try and contain his pain. But the nature of Jim's pain was also changing. Now, instead of concluding he was inadequate or incompetent or unlovable because he couldn't please his father, he realized his father simply wouldn't or couldn't love him. It was his father's problem, not Jim's.

Jim also realized that his relentless efforts to impress his father were actually an attempt to control his dad. He was trying to turn his father into what he needed him to be. But his father had other ideas – and having a non-athletic, sensitive, musical son wasn't part of his narcissistic image of himself. Jim realized that he needed to accept reality as it was and start moving on with his life. He would have to leave his father up to God.

Grieving

Probably the hardest part of Jim's growth was the process of grieving the fact that he would never have the caring father he had always craved. He went through several months of experiencing his disappointment and giving up his false hopes.

This included learning that his relentless hope was actually a fantasy that he created as a young boy in order to try to fill his longing to be loved. Much like some fatherless children develop a fantasy of a successful, loving father that will someday come for them, Jim dreamed his physically present father would someday emotionally return. But it was only a dream. During this time Solomon's comment that "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting..." (*Ecclesiastes 7:2a NASB*) also took on a new meaning. Jim began to experience the truth that facing reality was his best choice and that some good could come through grieving, no mat-



**"I'm hoping someone will steal my identity.
I'm tired of taking responsibility for my own life!"**

ter how temporarily painful it might be.

As Jim mourned his lack of a loving father he also realized he had developed some controlling ways with his own children to try to make sure he wouldn't lose them. Becoming less controlling enriched his relationship with his own son and daughter. Even Jim's relationship with his wife showed some new possibilities. He learned to pay attention to her needs and what was on her heart rather than focusing so much on how he was being mistreated by his dad.

Each of these steps had many successes and failures. But Jim persevered until he developed a new way of seeing himself, his father, and his loved ones. His self worth and sense of being loved were no longer dependent on his dad. He knew he was a person with his own gifts and that he was loved and valued by God, his wife, his children, and many others.

Learning to Forgive

Jim's final work involved forgiving his father. Although I had anticipated that this season of his therapy would be very difficult, I found that his earlier

work had laid a solid foundation. Sure Jim had some struggles with fearing that forgiving his father would mean minimizing the emotional damage he had inflicted or letting his father off the hook. And Jim realized that his unfor-giveness was a way of trying to belatedly punish his father. But in time he was able to let go of his dad emotionally and leave him to God. As Paul writes in Romans "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." (*Romans 12:19 NASB*).

As Jim gave up his relentless hope his depression lifted, his relationship with his wife and children continued to improve, and he gained a greater appreciation for the forgiveness that was his from God and his loved ones. By the end of his counseling Jim was seeing the many ways that God was providing for his needs. Although he had given up his childish longings, he had replaced them with new, healthy adult relationships. He was learning the truth of Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." *Psalm 23:1 (NASB)*. †

Renewal and Restoration for Missionaries in Eurasia

Imagine moving your family to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, or Africa to serve as missionaries. Living and ministering cross culturally, you will encounter all sorts of challenges and potential stressors. Until you learn the language, you will struggle to ask directions, purchase food and clothing, and carry out the most basic tasks of daily living. You will have difficulty understanding how the people you hope to serve think about life, religion, rearing their children, and relating to their elders and Americans! Sometimes everything will be so different you will feel like you are having to learn life all over again! And since your parents and other family members and friends are thousands of miles away, you may be very, very lonely.

You may also have to home school your children or send them to a national school or an MK school a long distance from your home. You will also have limited medical resources in case someone in your family becomes seriously ill or is injured in an accident.

Then imagine that your missionary organization has placed you on a team with several other people, some American, some European, and some from your new country. Your team members have very different perspectives on life and ideas on how your ministry should be run. One of the team members, an American, is difficult to get along with. He tries to control everything and is insensitive to others on your team. Unfortunately he is the team director! He often clashes with a European team member and you are caught in the middle. Another member of your team isn't adjusting well and has become seriously depressed. She spends hours sitting alone in her home. You try to encourage and help her but nothing seems to make a difference.

You and your spouse have a pretty normal marriage — some wonderful times but also some times of misunderstanding or conflict. But once you are on the mission field, your conflicts seem to increase. You both have difficult days and tough experiences that leave you exhausted and on edge. That magnifies the problems you brought with you to your ministry.

To top it all off, since your new "home" country is officially closed to the gospel of Christ and proselytizing is a crime, you are always walking on eggshells lest you get in trouble with the authorities. Since you are supposed to be a role model, you may not have a safe person in your life that you can go to in order to share your burdens. And since you are seeing little fruit from your demanding labors, you can easily become discouraged.

After 2 ½ years you are feeling incredibly stressed and nearing burnout. Sometimes you wonder if God really called you to this assignment. You need to get out of the country, have a change of environment, and find someone who can help you process your struggles so that you can be renewed.

NCF staff associate, Dr. Keith Edwards, and his wife

GINNY and their married daughter Rebecca Rodriguez, periodically join with the staff of Catalyst International to provide just that kind of help. Catalyst is dedicated to supporting Christian leaders in highly challenging global environments by providing 10-day renewal retreats for missionaries and their families just like you. Called Breathe, this retreat is held in Wilderswil, Switzerland in one of that county's most breathtaking regions. The surrounding area is quiet and restful. There are lovely places to go for walks and see sheep on the hills with the bells on their necks ringing melodiously as they graze. Under the leadership of Dr. Daniel and Lori Hahn, the Directors of Catalyst International, the Edwards help offer a comprehensive conference to meet the needs of missionaries who are on the brink of burnout, in need of encouragement, facing some personal or family problems, or just requiring a much needed change of pace for rest and renewal.

The program features a time of worship and teaching every morning, free counseling sessions in the afternoon, organized programs for children of all ages, and even a medical consultation with a Swiss physician and massage



Credo Hotel in Wilderswil, Switzerland, home to missionary renewal conference.



Sons and daughters of missionaries entertaining their parents during Breathe retreat.

therapy for all! Free times for rest, meditation, hiking and weekend excursions are also included. Ginny schedules all of the consultation and therapy appointments and makes sure that all conferees have access to the resources Breathe offers during the week.

Keith, a faculty member at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University, and Rebecca, who served as a missionary in Ecuador and is now completing a graduate degree in counseling, each provide four hours of counseling every afternoon. Each individual or couple is offered the opportunity to meet with a counselor for up to 8 appointments during the 10 days. Since Dr. Edwards' specialty is couples therapy, he usually meets with four couples. Rebecca sees children, teens and single or young married missionary couples.

During the most recent Breathe Conference, Dr. Edwards worked with a couple whose communication styles were making parenting their teenage son extremely difficult. When the son was asked to join his parents for two family sessions he reacted like most teenagers. He was leery of talking with a psychologist! But as Dr. Edwards helped the young man's parents listen to him and understand him better, he relaxed and opened up. The three of them began communicating and relating much better. At the end of the second day the teenager said, "That was so cool. I think I would like to become a psychologist some day." How great to help send this family back to their mission field with a better understanding of each other and less conflict in their family! And think about the severe problems that may have been avoided by helping this family learn to listen to each other's needs and concerns before things got out of hand.

Another guest at the Breathe Conference summarized his experience this way. "Breathe has been a lifesaver to me. It provided the right setting for me to decompress after a very stressful and difficult term on the field. I came feeling worn out and disillusioned. Now I have hope because God has begun the process of healing and restoring me."

Another wrote: "Thank you so much for this opportunity to retreat into the arms and love of God. I didn't quite know how dead and thirsty I was until I had the opportunity to come, drink and rest."

And a third shared, "I re-discovered DEEP REST of the soul, mind and body during these ten days at Breathe. Honestly, I cannot think of a more worthwhile investment focusing on overseas workers on the front lines of ministry. We needed this and YOU helped make it happen. Thank you!"

In just ten days most of the missionaries received a great deal of help. Weary bodies and souls were rested. Marriages were strengthened and restored. Spiritual and personal struggles were discussed. And family communication was improved. It was gratifying to hear testimonies at the end of the conference on how much the experience meant to the participants. And the Edwards and Hahns are grateful to NCF for enabling the Edwards to be part of the Breathe team for this life-changing conference. ✝

Continuing Education In

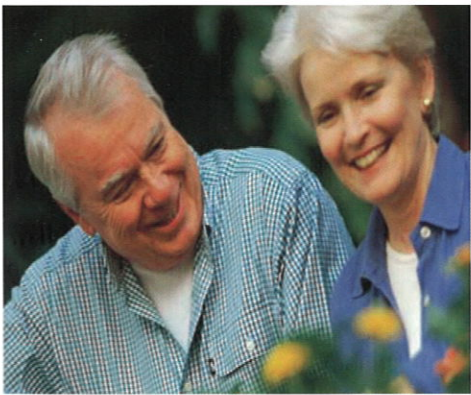
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2012 MK's Coming "Home" to America

Imagine a group of eighteen year-old young men and women who have grown up in 23 different countries leaving their families and coming to the United States to begin life as college students in a strange country. Although their parents are American, the United States is not their home because they are the sons and daughters of missionaries (MKs). They grew up in countries as different as Chile, China, El Salvador, Malaysia, Russia, and Uganda. And their time in the United States has been limited to once every three or four years when their parents were on home assignment.

These young men and women come to America with mixed emotions. Some are confident and ready for the challenge. Others are anxious about how

they will fit in. Most will be struggling to process their sadness at leaving family and friends and people they have grown to love. And some will have suffered through some incredibly painful and difficult traumas including civil wars, major accidents, being robbed, and even being victims of rape or other forms of abuse.

The Narramore Christian Foundation's annual MK re-entry program is designed to help these students process their many questions and concerns. Daily lectures and discussions and small group and individual counseling help these students open up their wounds and needs in a safe environment with caring people. Times of recreation, devotions and selected outings to a local church and to the beach provide a nice balance

to the heavy work of some of the sessions.

Research on the impact of this program shows that the students leave happier, less anxious, and more confident that they are ready to face the challenges of life in the United States. Please pray for these wonderful young men and women as they head off to schools across the United States to begin this next crucial phase of their lives. ✝



Dr. Narramore discussing the emotional life of Jesus.



Thirty-third annual MK reentry participants gather for group photo.

Realism and Idealism in Marriage



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by Dr. Jeannette Acree and
Dr. Bruce Narramore

Everyone comes into marriage with a conscious or unconscious image of an “ideal marriage”. In some ways, this is good. We all “fall in love” at least partly because we idealize our prospective mate and they idealize us. And we all like to be appreciated and thought of highly – even if it is a little exaggerated! But there is another, darker side of idealization in marriage.

Idealization can cause us to come into marriage with unrealistic and even damaging expectations of ourselves and our mates. Some of us, for example, enter marriage believing we will live in a state of continual bliss. Our spouse will make us happy and we will do the same for him or her. We will never have conflicts or misunderstandings. We will never lose our tempers or upset each other. And we may picture marriage as a kind of completely stress free, protective cocoon away from the harsh realities of life outside the home.

Fred, for example, explained to his counselor: “I thought that if I truly loved my wife, I would always feel impatient eagerness to get home to

her. When I didn’t, I began thinking there was something wrong with my love for her. I felt guilty for enjoying my work and hobbies because I thought I should always want to be with Kari. Now that I’ve lost the guilt over not feeling eager impatience, I find I have a restful or peaceful eagerness, if you know what I mean.”

Cindy feels guilty if she cannot please her husband 100% of the time. If she feels hurt or angry and lets him know, he becomes uncomfortable and complains of her “emotionalism”. Her ideal picture of her role is to completely accept her husband’s feelings and actions and never be upset with him, even though he says things that are painful for her to hear. For his part, Cindy’s husband thinks the ideal marriage should run like a well-oiled machine at all times. He hates conflict and even most differences of opinion. He backs up his idealized view by quoting the Scripture: “Live in harmony one with another.” (*Romans 12:16*) But he doesn’t seem aware of the Apostle Paul’s advice: “Be ye angry and sin not.” (*Ephesians 4:26 KJV*). His idealized view of marriage is a blissful harmony with everyone always in complete accord.

Cindy and her husband are like two people coming on the stage to play a specially-written part and the scripts don’t match. Either they are going to have to throw away the incongruous scripts and ad lib, making up the parts as they go along to fit both of their needs, or the play is going to be a disaster.

Another husband complains that his wife doesn’t understand him. But he shares very little about his thoughts and feelings. He basically expects her to know how he feels without verbal communication. He wants her to be like a perfect mother who reads her baby’s non-verbal cues and knows just how he feels. That way he can live safely in his own cocoon. But his wife is shut out and doesn’t have her needs for intimacy and communication met. This couple fortunately talked the problem through then set aside some regular time to work on communicating on a deeper level.

Good marriages will always have some differences of opinion, some misunderstandings and some disappointments. But mature couples learn to respect their partner’s differing perspectives, styles and needs and to work their conflicts out in non-destructive ways. They learn to tolerate their differences and even be enriched by them. And they learn to allow their spouse space to follow their own interests and use their individual gifts instead of having to do absolutely everything together.

It usually isn’t so difficult, once two people make up their minds they are going to succeed and put the marriage first under God in their hierarchy of values. Developing a realistic approach to the problems inherent in their two differing temperaments and personalities, and learning to accept and value their partner’s unique style can be the nurture which allows the flowers of deep love and happiness to bloom in what could otherwise seem to be an impenetrable rock of resistance because both partners are holding on to their idealistic view of how things should be. ☩



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RELATIONSHIPS

The Lost Art of Conversation

by Alexander Green

My daughter Hannah has reached the age, 13, where being popular at school is only slightly less important than breathing.

The problem is, like most of us at her age, she is more than a little shy, self-conscious and socially awkward. Despite being an A student, for instance, virtually everything she encounters is “cool” or “awesome” and little more. Her reluctance to express herself better makes it tough to reach out to new friends.

She will outgrow this, I know. But lately I’ve been trying to tell her something about the lost art of conversation.

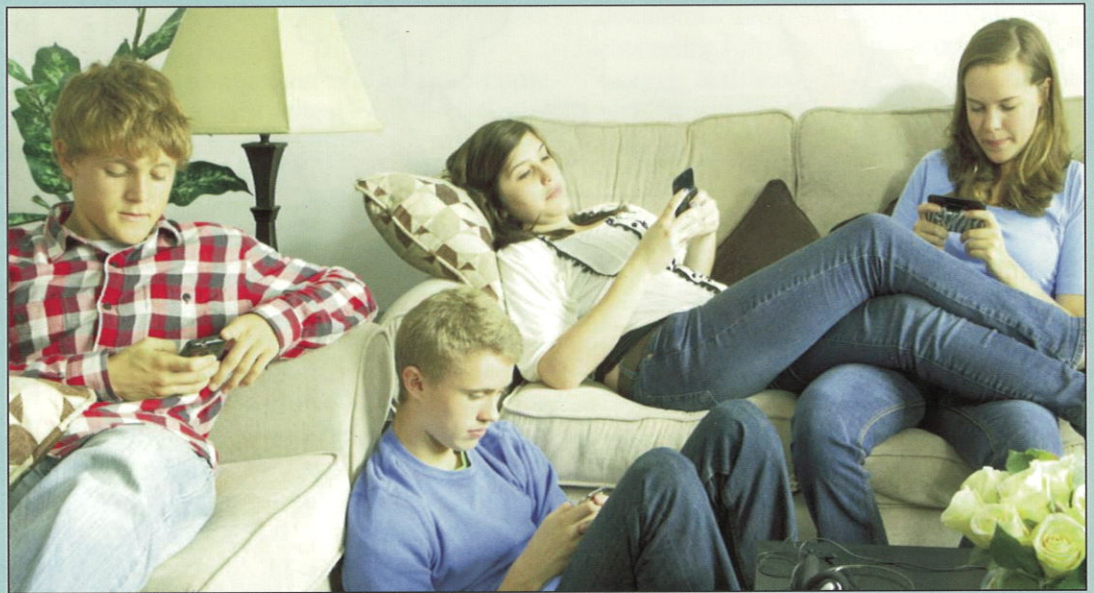
For most of human history, face-to-face communication was the core of our interaction. But not today. We text, we email, we blog, we friend each other on social networks. In the new age of electronic media, family and friends converse less than ever. As a result, we miss out on one of life’s singular pleasures: a relaxed, civilized exchange of views.

Conversation offers infinite possibilities. It is great for polishing thoughts and generating new ones. It is unbeatable for beating the blues or forging friendships. The ultimate bond of all personal relationships - whether in business, friendship or marriage is conversation.

Yet two opposing attitudes pull us away from it. The first is the mistaken belief that it is unnecessary. Why bother making the call or the visit when you can fire off an email? Unfortunately, text has difficulty conveying tone - the most important aspect of any communication. As well, think how much is conveyed with a smile, a glance, a wink, an eye roll or an arched eyebrow.

You really can’t compare it with :) can you?

The opposite attitude is that conversation is too much work. So we don’t really try. Look around the typical home today and you see not faces but the backs of heads.



As we stare blankly into our electronic screens, the art of personal interaction is dying.

Yet, as I told Hannah, there are good reasons to exercise our conversational skills.

Society provides lavish rewards to those who express themselves well. (Studies show that no single factor better predicts your future income than the size of your vocabulary.) Good talkers routinely ace the interview, get the contract, close the deal, win the girl. Get on with others and you will get on in life - and enjoy it more.

There is a widespread misconception that the best conversationalists are the smoothest talkers. Not so. (Indeed, glib talk generally comes off as phony or insincere.) And few of us will ever display the conversational genius of, say, Oscar Wilde, whose legendary wit enthralled his contemporaries in the salons of London.

Conversation is not meant to be a performance art or a competition, but an opportunity for mutual appreciation. And the best conversationalists are not the best talkers. They are the best listeners. (Used by permission of the author.) †

Alexander Green is the Investment Director of The Oxford Club and author of *Beyond Wealth: The Road Map to a Rich Life.*