

LOOK WHAT'S INSIDE:

MISGUIDED MOTIVATION

LONELINESS

COMMUNICATION

NCF IN ACTION

Religious or Practical?

By Bruce Narramore

Some years ago when I was on a speaking trip to Australia I was interviewed on a local radio station. Early in the program, my non-Christian host asked, "Dr. Narramore, are your meetings going to be religious or practical?"

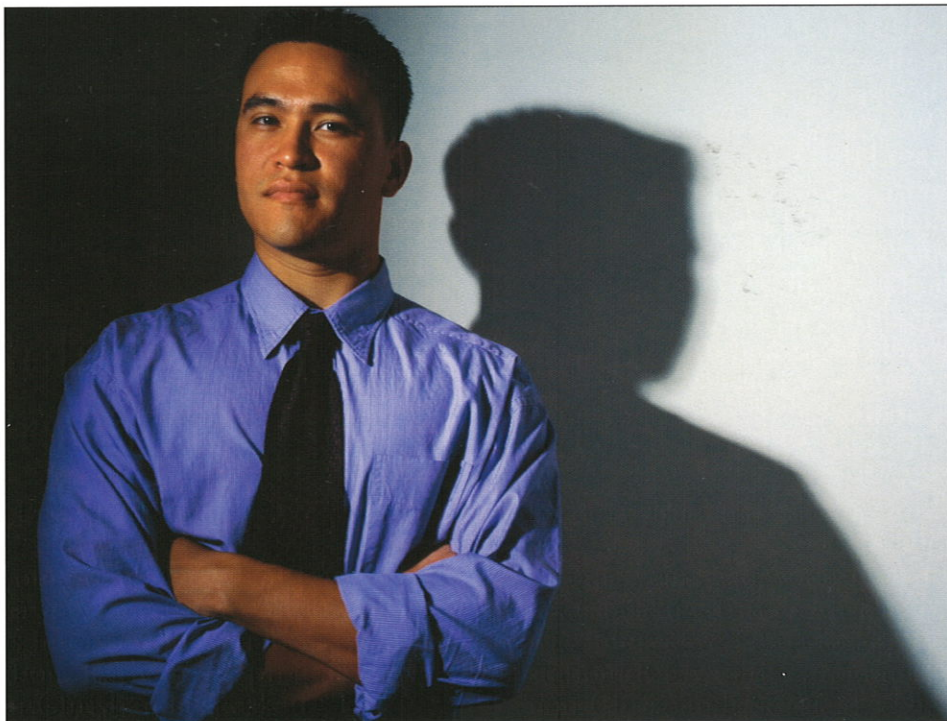
What a great misunderstanding of Christianity! But what an opportunity for me to debunk the common myth that somehow Christianity isn't practical!

The fact is that although Christianity is much maligned in our secular media there is an abundance of research evidence that demonstrates that *Christian commitment is positively correlated with everything from physical health and longevity of life to marital happiness and social and emotional adjustment.*

Recently a number of researchers have demonstrated that religiosity helps prevent

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Understanding Narcissism



By Paul M. Floyd, M. Div, J.D.

Jim is a 43-year-old regional sales manager. When people first meet him, they find him charming, pleasant, and endearing. But as they get to know Jim better, they see another side.

During planning meetings at church and work, Jim often dominates the conversation. He tells everyone his opinion and he doesn't like being challenged or out voted. Jim is hypersensitive to criticism and acts like he is someone special whom others should admire and defer to. He is proud, focuses excessively on himself and has a sense of entitlement. At restaurants, for example, he always expects to get the table he wants

when he wants it. If he has to wait, he becomes curt and angry.

At home, Jim's wife and children find him difficult. He always expects them to see things his way, cater to him, and appreciate everything he does. He doesn't have a lot of empathy and respect for his wife but expects her to admire him. Jim is a narcissistic personality.

Some very successful leaders, businessmen and women, and politicians are rather narcissistic. They have great vision and drive, but they like things their way, eat up the admiration of their followers, exploit others to fulfill their understanding of God's will or the needs of their business or society, but lack deep caring for others and true humility. They may be admired from a distance and "suc-

smoking, drinking alcohol and using marijuana among teenagers. When one researcher asked a group of adolescents if there were any questions she was leaving out of her research, they kept telling her, "You're missing God". "That scared us," she said, but she went on to design a questionnaire that included a number of items about belief in God.

To her surprise, she found that the more adolescents believe that God plays a role in their lives, the less likely they are to drink alcohol. Other researchers have found that parents who are more involved in church are more likely to have harmonious marital relationships and parenting skills, which, of course, promote better psychological adjustment and greater success in school.

These findings are no surprise to Christians, but isn't it interesting that even non-Christian researchers are finally recognizing the positive impact of faith on daily living? As the scripture told us centuries ago,

"Keep my commandments and live" (Proverbs 7:2).

"The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn that shines brighter and brighter until the full day. The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not know over what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:18-19).

Not only is Christianity practical, it is the most practical, healing, life-giving experience that any person can have in this lifetime, not to mention the life to come. If Christians around the world were asked in what ways knowing Christ has impacted their lives, a thousand volumes couldn't contain their many answers. Praise God from whom ALL blessings flow! †

cessful" in terms of growth, numbers, outreach, and influence, but not in terms of their close interpersonal relationships. And when it comes time to give up the leadership reins, they have a hard time letting go because they like control.

The Dynamics of Narcissism

The underlying skeleton that holds the narcissist's personality together is a fragile self-esteem that fears abandonment. The narcissist tries to ward off painful fears of abandonment or shame by developing a false, idealized view of himself that he thinks everyone should admire. When others fail to share his unrealistic view of himself, he may turn on them in rage and devalue them and their opinions in order to protect his idealized view of himself.

We are all born with a wonderful God-given potential to become unique individuals who can love and be loved and make our own contribution to the world. But to grow into this kind of person we need certain experiences as young children. A child's awareness of his own unique abilities and needs, for example, develops gradually as his parents are sensitive to his needs and recognize his God-given gifts.

Good parents recognize their children's unique ways of being and value those distinctives. They also allow their children to grow up and develop their own individual identities as separate people rather than trying to force them into a mold or make them meet the parents' needs.

How well we develop our own God-given identities determines to a large degree whether we will become emotionally healthy individuals or suffer from narcissistic or other adjustment disorders. For some reason, the potentially narcissistic person fails to develop his God-given self and shifts his energies into becoming the kind of perfect person he thinks he must be in order to feel good about himself. He tries to develop an idealized self that he thinks everyone will admire and love. But since that false self isn't the spontaneous, natural person that God created him to be he can only feel



good about himself when this false self is constantly admired or affirmed. Consequently the narcissist learns to look to everyone else to prop up his unrealistic self.

In the process he obliterates the boundaries between himself and others. He expects others to live for him and to support his unrealistic self rather than to be the distinct people God called them to be. He uses others rather than loving them.

Understanding this dynamic of narcissism helps answer two questions many people have about narcissistic individuals. "Aren't they just proud or selfish?" and "Aren't they just being sinful?" The answer to both questions is "yes" and "no." Narcissists are proud and they are sinful – as we all are. But they aren't just proud and just sinful.

Simple pride and selfishness is something most of us struggle with. We can all seek our own advantage or wellbeing without regard for others.

But while this isn't emotionally or spiritually healthy, if we face ourselves realistically and seek forgiveness and grow through our relationships with Christ, we can move beyond our pride and selfishness.

Narcissism is different. It is a personality style that is deeply rooted in the structure of the entire personality. It cannot be overcome by simply confessing one's sins and committing to change. Growing out of narcissism is a long, slow, difficult process that typically takes years.

Living or Working With a Narcissist

Those who live or work with a narcissist, can become incredibly frustrated or discouraged with the narcissist's extreme self-focus, overblown sense of entitlement, violation of others' boundaries, and controlling style.

Some decide the best way to deal with the problem is to sacrifice a part of their "self" so that the narcissist can live out his or her fantasy life of superiority without conflicts. Unfortunately, spouses who try to make peace this way have to leave large parts of themselves behind. They can't be honest about their own thoughts, feelings, and desires because that would upset their mate. In time they become depressed

or resentful.

There Are Better Ways of Coping

- Remember that it is inevitable that you will periodically trigger the narcissist's feelings of shame, inadequacy, and anger. Realize that it usually is less about you and more about the narcissist. Even though narcissists like to be above their failures, they are sinful and imperfect like the rest of us (Romans 3:23, Jeremiah 17:9).

- Try not to assimilate the guilt or blame that the narcissist attempts to place on you. The narcissist's need to blame you comes from his own deep feelings of inadequacy. You simply get caught in the crossfire.

- Put some emotional distance between yourself and the narcissist while you sort all this out. It doesn't help to either fight back or accept blame that isn't yours.

Attacking just triggers the narcissist's anger. Accepting their accusations reinforces their unhealthy style and leaves you feeling depressed, angry, or "crazy."

- Remember that in many ways, the narcissist is acting and feeling like a two- or three-year-old. But don't tell him that! Use your understanding to be patient and sensitive while still keeping yourself centered. Don't use it as a weapon to fight back.

- Maintain good personal boundaries between you and the unhealthy behavior of the narcissist.

- Develop other friendships. Since narcissists can trigger all sorts of frustrated feelings, don't expect to have all of your needs met in a relationship with a narcissist. Get involved in your church or a good social or recreational group, or find other ways of developing a few good friends (I Thessalonians 5:11).

- Consider getting a job if you don't already have one. You need a place and some space to have a life beyond the shadow of the narcissist.

- Develop a deep and meaningful relationship with the Lord. We all need great human friends, but centering your life on God and studying scripture (especially about your uniqueness and identity in Christ) can provide you a wonderful resource and give you meaningful outlets to use your gifts in helping others. (Ephesians 1:3-10)

Finally, remember that living with a narcissist is never easy. If you have trouble with any of these guidelines, you may need more personalized assistance from a competent counselor or therapist. †

Paul M. Floyd is an attorney in private practice with a specialty in consulting with mental health practitioners.

LAST LAUGH

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"I do so share my deepest emotions with you!
Hungry and tired are my deepest emotions."

PSYCHOLOGY FOR LIVING

Published quarterly by the Narramore Christian Foundation, 250 W. Colorado Blvd., Suite 200, Arcadia, California 91007.

President: Dr. Bruce Narramore

Founder: Dr. Clyde M. Narramore

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Art Director: Richard W. McDill

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All She Ever Does is Yell!



By Bruce Narramore

One day when our daughter Debbie was twelve years old I was watching her play a Saturday morning soccer game. Standing near the goal, I overheard two girls on the other team discussing their coach. “I think I’ll quit!” the first girl said. “All she ever does is yell!” “Me too,” the other girl chimed in. “She never tells us when we do anything right!”

Listening to their coach I quickly understood what the girls meant. She was throwing out a constant round of commands and condemnations. “What’s the matter, Sheri?” she would yell. “Wake up and get in the game!” “That’s your fault, Karen you should have been in position,” or “I don’t believe it, Jill. Can’t you do anything right?” Not surprising, the morale of that entire team was low.

Then I started paying attention to our daughter’s coach. He, too, was yelling constantly. “Nice pass, Debbie,” he yelled at our daughter. “Good team-

work, Kim.” “Way to hustle, Rachael.” “Keep at it, Carol. You’ll get it next time.” And when our girls came off the field at half time, our coach had an encouraging word for every child!

What a difference! One team enjoyed themselves and knew their coach was for them, win or lose. The other was discouraged and defeated because their coach didn’t know how to motivate them positively. All she did was criticize.

That coach had a terrible misunderstanding of the needs of children and how to motivate people to higher levels of accomplishment. She thought that if she made them feel badly enough, they would change. But the girls’ comments reveal the real result of negativity. They wanted to quit! And even if her criticism temporarily pressured some of the girls to try harder, it took the pleasure out of the sport and undercut their feelings about themselves.

We all grow best with encouragement and support. The apostle Paul understood this well. He tells us to “encourage one another, and build up one

another” (I Thessalonians 5:11). And the author of Hebrews writes, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together ... but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:24, 25). What a contrast!

The kind of pressuring criticism used by the soccer coach reveals three aspects of destructive attempts to motivate others. First, by constantly criticizing and telling her girls what to do *she was holding out unrealistic expectations*. Twelve-year-old girls cannot be expected to always stay in position or to never miss a kick. None of us is perfect and while we shouldn’t use that as an excuse for sloppy work, unrealistic expectations program our self and others for failure and discouragement. In fact, many children whose parents, teachers or leaders hold out demanding standards eventually give up or rebel. Others cause their children to grow up to be perfectionists.

The coach’s anger is another aspect of hurtful motivation. The Bible encourages us to “provoke not our children to

Christian Psychologists and Missionaries Meet

wrath lest they become discouraged." Anger discourages and depresses children. Loving correction and encouragement lift them up and give them hope. Children who live with angry motivation either incorporate these hostile attitudes into their own self-esteem and end up hating themselves or they become angry and rebellious toward others.

Finally, this coach was shaming and condemning her players. She was in effect telling them, "You are inadequate!" "You are no good." "You don't deserve to be respected." These accusations tear away at a child's good feelings about himself. If done by parents and other significant adults, they can create serious feelings of guilt and worthlessness. Contrast this attitude with the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians at Corinth. Although they were involved in serious immoral behavior that he clearly addressed, Paul did it in a loving way. He began his letter with, "I thank my God always concerning you" (I Corinthians 1:4), and he ended it with "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (I Corinthians 16:24).

Anytime you want to motivate someone successfully, attempt to react precisely opposite to this coach. Hold out realistic expectations that are consistent with their God-given talents and developmental levels. Speak encouraging words and correct them lovingly rather than in anger.

In essence, effective parents and other good motivators respond to people in grace instead of law. Under law, acceptance is conditioned on our behavior. Blessings or rewards must be earned and punishment comes with failure. Under grace, acceptance is unconditional, blessings are freely bestowed, and there is loving discipline instead of punishment.

Since many of us tend to become angry, or resort to guilt motivation when our children disobey or fail to carry out their responsibilities, one of the best ways to avoid negative motivation is to learn to discipline lovingly and consistently. Effective parents,

YELL, continued on page 8 ►



Dr. Dave Wickstrom, NCF Staff Associate, shares with Mental Health and Missions conferees.

A group of 150 Christian psychologists and counselors and missionary leaders met recently to discuss ways in which Christian counselors can best assist missionaries serving in countries around the world. The conference, known as the Mental Health and Missions Conference, meets annually in Angola, Indiana.

Dr. Bruce Narramore was invited to deliver the opening address. His topic was "Rethinking the Doctrine of Sanctification for Member Care and Counseling." In his talk, he discussed the fact that many Christians, including missionaries, become disillusioned with the Christian life when they are unable to gain immediate relief from serious emotional problems and stresses by means of their usual spiritual disciplines of prayer, confession, and Bible study.

The message presented a broader scriptural and psychological understanding of how Christians grow and change, emphasizing that the work of the Holy Spirit often occurs gradually, over a period of time, in the context of caring relationships with others. Missionaries, just like other Christians who are carrying a lot of emotional baggage or in danger of crumbling under prolonged stress often need a period of time with a trained counselor to work through

their emotional and spiritual vulnerabilities and be restored to dynamic health and wellbeing. This process of counseling will often require an understanding of the root causes of the problems, insight into maladaptive ways of dealing with painful experiences and emotions, and sufficient time for the missionary to feel safe enough to explore or share these deeper struggles.

To work effectively with missionaries, Christian counselors need to understand the desire of many Christians to have an immediate "fix" for their problems rather than take the time to work through the source of their pain. The effective Christian counselor will be able to help his/her missionary client see God working through these ongoing counseling processes so that they do not become discouraged when their problems don't immediately vanish.

Other speakers, including NCF Associate Staff member, Dr. Karen Carr, who serves in West Africa, led discussions on topics like Post Trauma Debriefings on the Mission Field, Child Abuse, Pre-Field Training, Internet Pornography, and Systemic Problems in Missionary Organizations. The annual conference is the major meeting of psychologists and others serving the mental health needs of missionaries around the world. †

Overcoming Loneliness

By Dick Innes

“I’m all alone in the universe and no one really knows me or cares. If there is a God, He is far away. He got tired of the world and moved on. I looked in the mirror today and saw the real me—one hideous scar, an open sore. I’m going to sleep.”

These were the words of a brilliant student at a well-known university. He was one of the most promising students there.

In spite of his many gifts and outward popularity, internally he was a very lonely young man. After writing the above note, he injected poison into his veins and went to sleep—forever. He committed suicide.

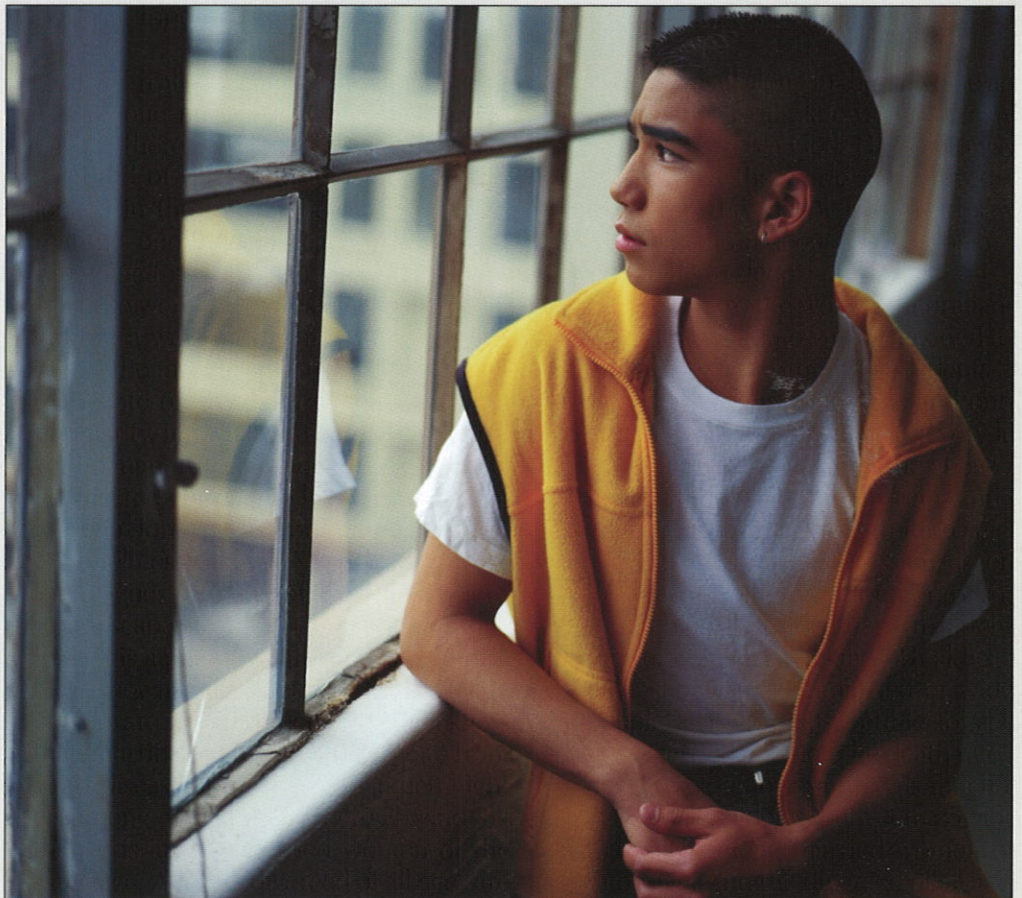
Loneliness, like depression, is one of the plagues of our contemporary society. Few escape it altogether. In its chronic form it is a potential killer. Health studies have shown that unmarried or widowed people are more susceptible to sickness than married people. The death rate from heart disease, for example, is much higher among widows between 25 and 34 than it is among married women of the same age. And the divorced of all ages are more susceptible to strokes than those who are married.

Loneliness is a feeling of not being able to reach another person and his not being able to reach you. It is a feeling of being isolated even though you may be surrounded by people. Henri Nouwen expressed it this way: The lonely person “cannot make contact; his hand closes on empty air.”

Marriage counselor H. Norman Wright in *An Answer to Loneliness* quotes a lonely woman who said, “I hurt deep down in the pit of my stomach. My arms and my shoulders ache to be held tight ... to be told that I am really loved for who I am.”

“Deep within each of us is the hunger for contact, acceptance, belonging, intimate exchange, responsiveness, support, love, and the touch of tenderness,” says Wright. “We experience loneliness because these hungers are not always fed.”

Marriage problems, divorce, the breakup of a relationship, or the death of



a beloved spouse can all trigger struggles with loneliness. Children feel lonely when their parents are too busy for them and they have no one to whom they can turn. Adolescents feel lonely when they feel misunderstood by their parents or unaccepted by their peers. And mothers of small children can feel lonely when they are too busy caring for their little ones to have their own needs for adult companionship met.

Long-standing emotional problems or conflicts can also make us lonely. People who feel inadequate or fearful, for example, are often lonely. Because they don’t like themselves, they think others don’t like them either. Then they keep their distance from people to avoid their fear of rejection. But this “solution” only worsens the problem.

Sometimes hidden anger or deep emotional scars are at the root of loneliness. People who harbor resentment toward others because they were wounded earli-

er in life may not let others get close enough to love them.

Sharon, for instance, was five when her father left home. Naturally, she felt rejected and abandoned. Ever since, Sharon has had an unconscious fear that if she ever fully loved a man, he would leave her too. She was even afraid to let in her husband’s love until she realized she was holding back from him because of her past trauma, not her husband’s lack of commitment and trustworthiness.

On the other hand, John came from a happy home but his parents moved every year for business reasons. Every time John made close friends, the family moved and he would lose his friends. As he grew older, he no longer wanted to make close friends because it was too painful to lose them. This left him lonely. He learned to make many superficial acquaintances, but no close friends.

Through professional counseling, both Sharon and John were able to overcome

their loneliness once they realized and worked through and resolved its causes. Little by little they regained the courage to reach out to others and, in time, they overcame their loneliness. Understanding the causes of their loneliness was the first step to overcoming it. Then they took the next step of learning to reach out to others.

If I'm having trouble with loneliness, I, too, need to ask myself what the real cause is or might be. Is it due to life circumstances such as the death of a loved one, divorce or children leaving home? Is it a communication problem? Or does my loneliness have deeper roots, as in feelings of inadequacy or the fear of being hurt? Is it due at least in part to difficulties associated with health problems?

If your loneliness is primarily due to life circumstances, you can probably change your circumstances enough to make a difference. We can always make new friends and acquaintances, for example. We can reach out to our family or set up regular times to phone, write, or see them. And we can get involved in our church or other group.

There is usually no better place to find meaningful relationships than in a church fellowship where there is a common love for the Lord and concern for others. Involvement in church can help develop friendships at the same time it heightens our awareness of our relationship with God who has promised to "never leave us or forsake us" (Hebrews 13:5). Even when earthly friends depart, Christ is always with us.

Service to others is another way to overcome loneliness. I think of my grandmother who lived to 90. She had been a widow for many years but didn't suffer from loneliness.

She reached out to help others by regularly visiting the sick and the elderly. In helping to meet their needs she met many of her own.

In summary, loneliness is a serious problem that affects many people. But we need not let it dominate us. Through understanding, service to others, involvement in group activities, professional counseling, or improved health and spiritual growth we can live a dynamic, productive life. †

Do Unto Others

By Gloria H. Dvorak

Have you noticed that when we are sensitive to and civil with others, even strangers, that they often take notice and respond in kind? Here are just a few simple ways we can treat others in the way we like to be treated:

- Listening instead of interrupting conversation
- Accepting a newcomer into a conversation
- Keeping our voice down whenever it may interfere with others' speaking
- Respecting other's opinion, even if we differ with it
- Responding graciously to a challenge
- Acknowledging our mistakes
- Staying away from malicious gossip
- Being kind to someone asking for directions
- Being graceful when losing an argument
- Saying please, thank you, and I'm sorry when necessary.



These simple courtesies are often taken for granted, but they can make a big difference. It takes so little effort to respect others' time, space and feelings. Paying attention to their needs and acting fairly on them ultimately makes life easier for all of us.

Matthew 22:39 says, "You shall love you neighbor as yourself." There is no better way to show this love than to be sensitive and courteous to one another. The more we do, the happier we will be. †

Gloria Dvorak has been a religious freelance writer for 15 years and is a mother of three grown children and a grandmother of ten grandchildren. She lives in Winnetka, Illinois.

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teachers, supervisors, coaches and others in leadership roles should come up with alternatives to repeatedly nagging.

Instead of a string of "reminders" such as the following: "Feed the dog," "Brush your teeth," or "Make your bed," followed by increasing frustration when our children don't respond, we need to help our children develop a regular schedule of responsibilities with clear consequences for failure to carry them out. As parents, when we carry through on these consequences, we keep our interactions from deteriorating into nagging, anger or frustration. For example, if you set and implement a rule that children do not eat breakfast until their morning chores are completed, most children will quickly learn to carry out their responsibilities without nagging pressures or condemnations. And since you have already established the consequences, you can naturally carry them out instead of resorting to threats or anger.

Here are some other guidelines that can help you motivate your children and others in a positive way:

- Set realistic standards appropriate for your child's developmental level, unique gifts, and personality
- Communicate respectfully
- Be encouraging and supportive
- Discipline consistently
- Correct in love instead of anger
- Accept responsibility for your part in conflicts instead of blaming your children for everything that goes wrong
- Avoid shaming or condemning, which usually only occurs when we are angry.
- Model openness, honesty, and godly sorrow.

If we do this, we will be following the example of the apostle Paul who ended every one of his letters to the First-Century churches with a slightly different version of "May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you." What a wonderful, encouraging, hopeful message! †



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