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## ABSTRACT

### A Storytelling-Based Curriculum for Use in Providing Small Group Support to Hurting Parents

by

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In every community, in every social and economic class, in every type of family, there are parents who are hurting because of the unacceptable behavior of their children. The behaviors vary from normal rebellion to acts of violence, but the result is often the same: the parents feel guilt and pain because of the actions, beliefs, or attitudes of their children. Our churches and communities provide little support and make available few resources that specifically address the needs and concerns of the hurting parent.

The purpose of this study is to employ the discipline of storytelling in the development and testing of a support group curriculum for hurting parents, with the goal of effecting a positive change in their feelings, attitudes, and reactions.

Using information gathered from a review of the literature, the H.O.P.E. (Healing Our Parenting Experiences) Support Group Curriculum was developed by the researcher. This six-unit resource utilizes storytelling techniques, such as collages, drawings, reflection questions, and fairytales, to facilitate the sharing and examination of biblical stories, contemporary stories, and the personal stories of the participants. The action component

encourages the participants to apply the newly-gained knowledge and insights in the development of strategies for change.

Using a researcher-designed questionnaire, the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the subjects were measured prior to participation in the group. The subjects were exposed to the curriculum in a series of fifteen sessions, then re-tested using the same questionnaire. A comparison of the pretest and posttest data was made in an effort to identify and document changes that occurred in the parents during their experience in the support group setting.

The findings, which are reported in tabular appendices and in descriptive form, indicate that important changes did occur, and that the support group did, in fact, become a lifeline for the participants. Based on this initial case study, it appears that the directed sharing of story in a support group setting can facilitate the examination of, and effect a positive change in, the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the hurting parent.



DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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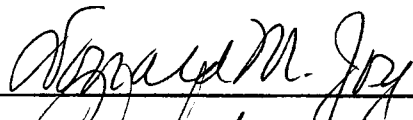
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A STORYTELLING-BASED CURRICULUM FOR USE IN PROVIDING  
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Doctor of Ministry

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## CHAPTER 1

## An Overview of the Study

The Problem

The problem addressed in this dissertation/project is that hurting parents tend to find little support, and few resources that promote healing, in their communities and churches. Margie Lewis, in her book The Hurting Parent, describes hurting parents as "those who feel they have failed at their divinely appointed task of Christian parenthood" (24). Following are two classic examples.

A frantic mother, tears streaming down her face, sits in the pastor's office, having just learned that her twenty-five year old son has been sexually active with a woman who has tested positive for the HIV virus. "Maybe if I had been a better mother and provided a better Christian witness this would not have happened," she cries. Her immediate reaction is to blame herself for the son's crisis. No amount of reasoning is able to convince her that the son must take responsibility for, and suffer the consequences of, his own actions.

The mother of a seventeen year old boy watches in horror as the doors of the county prison close between them. The son has been convicted of car theft, possession of illegal drugs, and making terroristic threats. "Where did I go wrong?" she exclaims. Self-blame takes over, convincing her that her "bad" child is the result of "bad" parenting.



In both cases, the shame associated with the child's crisis caused the mothers to withdraw from the church and from other social functions, opting instead to hide behind walls of shame and self-doubt. Friends and family either stayed away or carefully avoided the subject of the family crisis, not knowing what to say or what to do. In the face of crisis, even the church seemed ill-prepared to minister to these mothers. The result was that these hurting parents were left alone to deal with the feelings of fear, guilt, shame, rejection, despair, and loneliness that often accompany family crisis.

These are not isolated cases or unusual responses to a child's crisis. A demographic analysis done for the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church by Church Information and Development Services, of Costa Mesa, California, reveals that nearly 27% of 1411 households within a five-mile radius of the church consider dealing with teen/child problems to be a primary concern (Ethos 5). The same study indicates that the national average is 21.3% (Ethos 5). According to Buddy Scott, author of Relief for Hurting Parents, "Abused parents (those who experience emotional pain as the result of the values and behaviors of their children) hurting in secret, are sprinkled all over America" (13). Every day, in all types of families, in all types of communities, in all types of churches, parents are enduring emotional, spiritual, and/or physical pain as the result of the actions

of children who reject the teachings and values of the parent. The behaviors of the children range from skipping school to dealing in illegal drugs, from the sassing of parents to commission of violent crimes. The emotions experienced by hurting parents vary from situation to situation. Those emotions include anger, disgust, shame, guilt, self-pity, grief, and fear (Greenfield 47). Hurting parents react to their children and to the crises in a number of ways, including denial, rejection of the child, violence, and withdrawal from society. But amidst the diversity, there are at least two common denominators--a feeling of pain and a feeling of failure. According to Lewis, "The crisis point varies from family to family, but the results are always the same--parents hurt with the frustration of what they see as their own failure" (25). The pain of seeing a child in crisis is compounded by the anguish of feeling responsible for the crisis. Even the Bible seems to reinforce this message. Proverbs 22:6 instructs parents to "train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." So what happens when a Christian child departs from the teachings and values of the parent? The hurting parent's conclusion might easily be that the child was never properly trained in the first place. Hence, the parent is to blame, and the cycle of pain continues.

What can be done to break the cycle of pain experienced

by hurting parents? Margie Lewis considers the primary need of the hurting parent to be a meaningful, supportive fellowship (44). Lewis gives example after example of parents whose healing came only after they were able to confess and discuss their problems within a caring, Christian community. Guy Greenfield, author of The Wounded Parent, suggests that the most supportive fellowship will be found with other hurting parents. "There is healing for both yourself (the hurting parent) and others when you choose to weep with those who weep," according to Greenfield (64). Within the confines of a caring support group, hurting parents need to hear that "good parents, successful parents, can have trouble with their children" (Scott 12). Rather than a voice of condemnation, hurting parents need to hear a voice of encouragement, assuring them they are not alone in their suffering, they are not fully to blame for their child's crisis, and there is hope and healing through faith and fellowship.

The problem is, help and support for hurting parents seems to be lacking. Resources that specifically address the concerns and needs of parents with children in crisis are in short supply. In the Preface to, The Hurting Parent, Lewis describes the problem. "I could walk into any Christian bookstore and buy half a truckload of books on the Christian family. But for whatever reason, I have never found a book that captured the emotions and pain hurting

parents feel" (9). Much of the existing literature, which is built around the solving of problems, caters to a society looking for answers and quick fixes. There seems to be an abundant supply of how-to and self-help books on the subject of parenting. Books such as James Dobson's Parenting Isn't for Cowards, and Charles Swindol's Growing Wise in Family Life, offer valuable information to parents who hope to avoid or correct family crises by improving their parenting skills or by working to change the child. But little has been written to help parents survive those crises that defy quick and easy resolution. What happens when the family is already experiencing a full-blown crisis? It is too late to learn how to be a better parent. What help is available to effective parents who find themselves dealing with prodigal sons and daughters? How is a parent to survive the crisis of a child? To whom can the hurting parent turn for healing and understanding? What happens when the parents have done their best to train their children in the way they should go, and the children still depart from those teachings and expectations? How can parents move from asking "What did I do wrong?" and "Why is this happening to me?" to "Where do I go from here?"

The implied message society and the church are sending to hurting parents is, "We're sorry, but we just can't help you." It is time to change the message. What is needed is a "survival guide" for the hurting parent.

### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this dissertation/project is to employ the discipline of storytelling in the development and testing of a support group curriculum for hurting parents with children in crisis, with the goal of facilitating the examination of, and effecting a positive change in, the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the parents. This project was informed by, but does not directly apply, the discipline of family-systems theory.

The curriculum, and the case study as a whole, were designed to encourage and enable hurting parents to:

1. find 'caring, non-judgmental support;
2. better understand some of the dynamics of parent/child relationships;
3. name their true feelings and attitudes, without judging those feelings and attitudes to be appropriate or inappropriate;
4. find worth and meaning as a person, apart from being the "perfect" parent of a "perfect" child;
5. develop both short-term and long-term strategies for reacting to, and dealing with, the child in crisis;
6. receive support from other members of the group as those strategies are implemented;
7. better understand the theological concepts involved in their relationships, with emphasis on grace, repentance, unconditional love, forgiveness, and reconciliation;

8. develop an appreciation for the power of intercessory prayers, private devotions, and communal worship; and

9. take the lead in establishing an on-going, lay led program of support in their own church or community.

#### Research Questions

The following questions guided this project:

1. What is the definition of a hurting parent, and what are some of the root causes of the hurt?

2. Do the various crises have any common characteristics?

3. What are the common feelings, attitudes, and reactions of hurting parents?

4. What are the common needs of hurting parents?

5. What major theological issues affect the life of, and ministry to, hurting parents?

6. What role can small group support play in providing ministry to hurting parents?

7. What is the difference between "letting go" and "giving up?"

8. Can storytelling be used as an effective pastoral care tool in a support group ministry to hurting parents?

9. Can the support group assist hurting parents in the identification and implementation of needed changes in beliefs, attitudes, actions, and reactions?

10. Can there be healing for the parent without the

active participation of the child?

11. Is it possible for hurting parents to find healing, even if the prodigals never return?

12. Is it possible to separate the effects of the curriculum from the effects of the group interaction?

### Definition of Terms

In order for to reader to fully comprehend the impact of this project, it is important for the writer and the reader to have the same understanding of some basis terms.

Hurting Parent--Guy Greenfield describes the hurting parent as one "who realizes that his or her son or daughter has rejected the family's religious and moral values and has adopted a radically different lifestyle (or pattern of behavior). The words hurt, angry, frustrated, confused, rejected, offended, embarrassed, used, abused, disappointed, unappreciated, and resentful describe how parents may feel when their children go astray morally and spiritually" (9). The hurting parent, then, is one who finds the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs of his or her child to be unacceptable and to be the source of emotional, spiritual, and/or physical pain.

Family-Systems Theory--John Bradshaw says that, "The family-systems model shows how each person in a family plays a part in the whole system" (The Family 27). Persons do not exist in isolation, but in relationship. In order to understand a crisis in one member of the family, the entire

family should be examined. Because of the interactions and the interdependencies of the family members, a positive or negative change in one part of the system will, by necessity, cause a change in the other parts of the system, and in the system as a whole. Thus, the entire family system can be impacted by dealing with only the parent.

Storytelling--This term is used broadly to include the use of personal histories, personal experiences, fairytales, drawings, collages, short stories, and Scriptural stories. In the support group curriculum, storytelling is used to promote an understanding of each persons own story, with emphasis on the present crisis and the feelings and reactions that the crisis invokes.

Guilt versus Shame--Feelings of guilt arise when persons believe they have done something wrong. Feelings of shame result when persons believe there is something wrong with them. John Bradshaw distinguishes between shame and guilt in this way: "Guilt says I have made a mistake; shame says I am a mistake. Guilt says what I did was not good; shame say I am no good" (The Family 2).

Child in Crisis--This phrase refers to any child of any age who is involved in behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs that are deemed unacceptable by the parent and that are causing emotional or physical unrest in the parent and/or in the family system. The crisis may be as minor as a child doing poorly in school, or as major as a child being in



prison for murder. This project and curriculum make no judgment on the child other than to identify that child as the cause for the parent coming to the support group for healing. The emphasis is placed upon the parent's reaction to the child in crisis, and not on the child or the crisis.

### Methodology

This dissertation/project combines the case study method of research (Leedy 90) with the pre-experimental methodology known as the "one group pretest/posttest design" (Leedy 220). A preliminary part of the project involved the development of a support group curriculum entitled H.O.P.E., which stands for "Healing Our Parenting Experiences." This is a six-unit program which includes units on (1) understanding the crisis and naming the pain, (2) identifying the feelings and attitudes associated with family crisis, (3) unconditional love and forgiveness, (4) the importance of prayer, (5) the importance of letting go of child and releasing them into the hands of God, and (6) developing a strategy for change. Each unit includes opening devotions, the sharing of a biblical story and a contemporary human example, the discovery of personal stories through the use of reflection questions and storytelling techniques, an action component, a time of closing worship, and a time of informal sharing and refreshment. On the average, the completion of each unit required two meeting periods, or approximately four hours.

Using this curriculum as the variable, the "one-group pretest/posttest design" was employed (Leedy 222). The subjects were evaluated, then exposed to the curriculum in a series of fifteen support group meetings, then re-evaluated to determine what identifiable changes were brought about by the intervention.

### The Subjects of the Study

The population for this project is limited to those hurting parents who volunteered to participate in the program. The support group was made available to single parents, one parent from a two-parent family, and/or both parents from a two-parent family. There was no criterion or assumption concerning church membership or participation. The subjects were drawn from within a five-mile radius of the community of Laceyville. Laceyville is a small, rural community, located in the north-west corner of Wyoming County in northeastern Pennsylvania. According to data from Church Information and Development Services, there are 601 families with children eighteen years of age or younger in the study area (Census 5). The subjects were identified in three ways. First, a personal invitation was issued to those parents known to be in crisis situations. Second, the pastors of neighboring churches (there are thirteen churches involved in a cooperative-parish ministry) were asked for referrals. Third, a general invitation was offered in the newsletter of the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church and

in the local weekly newspaper. In the end, five hurting parents volunteered for the project. Detailed descriptions of the subjects and their crises are included in Chapter 4 (see page 99).

#### Independent and Dependent Variables

According to Paul Leedy, independent variables are those variables which the researcher can manipulate or change at will, and which are presumed to cause or effect the outcome of the study (219). The independent variables in this project include

1. the content of the curriculum and the design of the pretest and posttest questionnaire,
2. the amount of time spent on each session and on each item within the session,
3. the level of sharing within the group, and
4. the presentation and processing of key ideas and information.

Dependent variables are those variables which occur as the result of the independent variables, and over which the researcher has no control. The dependent variables in this project include

1. the parent's feelings about the child and about the crisis,
2. the parent's reactions to the child and to the crisis,
3. the participant's sense of worth, both as a parent

and as a person,

4. the degree to which the parent derives pleasure and meaning from the child,

5. the parent's attitudes regarding the importance of a support system,

6. the role of worship and prayer in the life of the parent and in the survival of family crisis.

In addition to these independent and dependent variables, there are a number of extraneous variables which impacted the results of this project. These include

1. the ability of each person to perform the tasks spelled out in the curriculum, such as writing a short story or drawing a simple picture;

2. the willingness of each person to share their feelings and to discuss their child's behavior in a group setting;

3. the confidentiality of the information shared, and the effect of "leaks" on the sharing process;

4. the degree of honesty with which persons answer the questions on the pre- and posttest questionnaire;

5. the individual interpretations of the stories presented;

6. the interaction of participants outside of the support group setting;

7. the continued interaction between the parents and their children--what parents do with the information gained

in the support group;

8. the positive or negative effects of the relationship between the group facilitator and the group participants;

9. the age and sex of the parent and the child in crisis;

10. the relationship of the parent and the child, for example, is the child a blood child, a step-child, or an adopted child;

11. the type and severity of the crisis; and

12. the family history.

#### Instrumentation

The primary instrument used for information gathering was the researcher-designed "Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire." This instrument was designed to document the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of hurting parents, both before the support group sessions began and again following completion of the sixth unit. A comparison of the pretest and posttest results was then made to determine what changes resulted from the intervention and whether the goals of the project were met. The questionnaire utilizes the sliding scale inventory (Leedy 149). The questionnaire was completed by each parent following an informal interview in which the facilitator sought to gain background information on the family and on the crisis, and to explain the questionnaire in some detail.

### Delimitations of the Study

This project was designed to improve the coping skills of the hurting parent. It was not designed to improve parenting skills. Participation in the support group should be viewed as an exercise in survival rather than as an exercise in problem solving. Parents participating in this project did not find solutions to their child's crisis. In each case, the crisis continues. Parents did, however, discover new ways of reacting to and coping with the crises.

The purpose was to bring to the hurting parent new insights and a deeper self-awareness through group process. It was not intended to be a teaching seminar.

This project was intended to facilitate sharing and support within the confines of a caring group of hurting parents, and was not intended to be a substitute for, or to be confused with, professional counseling or therapy.

The results of the pretest and posttest, and the conclusions based on those results, are based solely on the test group of five hurting parents and are not intended to be applied to all hurting parents.

Using the established curriculum and pretest and posttest questionnaire, this project can be duplicated in other settings where hurting parents can be brought together. Specific results may vary from person to person and from group to group, but it is believed that a number of constant truths and patterns have emerged.

A Glimpse at What Lies Ahead

Chapter Two presents an examination of the available literature concerning healthy and unhealthy family systems, the specific needs and concerns of hurting parents, the role of group support, the use of storytelling as pastoral care, the theological issues of importance to hurting parents, and other related topics.

Chapter Three provides the details of the study's design, including an in-depth explanation of the support group curriculum and the pretest/posttest questionnaire.

In Chapter Four, the results of the project are reported, with emphasis on the measurable changes in the attitudes, feelings, and reactions of the hurting parents.

The final chapter contains a summary of the dissertation/project and the conclusions reached as a result of the project.

## CHAPTER 2

## Precedents in the Literature

What Is the Definition of a Hurting Parent?

The term "hurting parent" will be better understood when the family life of the hurting parent is compared and contrasted with that of the healthy and the unhealthy family.

The Healthy or Functional Family

It is not uncommon for persons to refer to themselves or to others as the "perfect" family. While the existence of a truly perfect family is doubtful, it is possible to identify certain common traits of a healthy, successful family. In their book entitled Secrets of Strong Families, Nick Stennett and John DeFrain report the results of a survey of over 3000 families. From the information gathered Stinnett and DeFrain were able to identify six common traits, or "secrets" of healthy families (14). These traits are:

1. Commitment--family members value the unity of the family and are actively concerned for the welfare and happiness of other family members.
2. Appreciation--family members let each other know their presence and contributions are valuable and necessary. The result is a greater sense of self-esteem for each member and for the family as a whole.
3. Communication--family members spend time in



conversation on a variety of subjects, from the trivial to the profound. The effective sharing of ideas and feelings promotes mental health, reduces frustration, and increases the family's problem solving skills. Communication includes listening as well as talking.

4. Time--strong families spend time together, with concern for both the quantity and the quality of that time. Spending time together reduces isolation and loneliness, increases each person's sense of identity, and nurtures relationships within the family.

5. Spiritual wellness--family members share a sense of a greater good or power in their lives, and in that belief find strength and purpose. Family members are able to see beyond themselves and beyond the family to understand themselves as a part of something larger. Family members are united by common themes of love, hope, a reverence for life, and a sense of the sacred.

6. Coping ability--members of strong families are able to endure stress and crisis, and to use such experiences as opportunities for growth. They are able to see the positive elements of each situation. Members of strong families are not afraid to seek outside help when necessary. Strong families are adaptable and flexible.

Given this list, one might conclude that the family system is more important than the individual members. This is not the case. In addition to promoting the welfare and

growth of the family system as a whole, the role of the family also includes promoting the welfare and growth of each individual member. Perhaps Michael Nichols says it best when he suggests that "we (family members) are inescapably bound together, at the same time we are ultimately free--free to get what we want and need out of family life (61). John Bradshaw, in his book Bradshaw on the Family, offers a list of rules for functional families (54-55). While Bradshaw's list echoes much of what Stinnett and DeFrain discovered in their research, his inclusion of Virginia Satir's five freedoms specifically addresses the importance of individuality within the family unit (49). Each person in a functional family system enjoys:

1. the freedom to see and hear what is here and now rather than what was, will be, or should be;
2. the freedom to think what one thinks rather than what one should think;
3. the freedom to feel what one feels rather than what one should feel;
4. the freedom to want and to choose what one wants rather than what one ought to want; and
5. the freedom to imagine one's own self-actualization rather than playing a rigid role or always trying to play it safe.

The goal of family life, as impacted by these five freedoms, is full self-acceptance and expression. Persons

in the family must see themselves as an "I" in the mist of "we." If personal and corporate growth is to occur, family members must be able to differentiate between their own personal goals and values and the goals and values of the family system. Edwin H. Friedman says, "The less well-differentiated a family relationship system, the more probability exists that stress in any family member can produce dysfunction in any other family member" (135). He goes on to say, "To the extent that family members pursue a style of life aimed primarily at togetherness and interdependency, they set a course that actually risks the survival of their loved ones" (136).

The healthy family, then, is one which has struck an effective balance between individual and group needs and responsibilities. The parents must be willing to accept their role as leaders, while at the same time creating a system that recognizes the importance and uniqueness of each member and encourages the open sharing of ideas and feelings. If the boundaries between the parents and the children become too rigid, disengagement results and relationships within the family become distant and strained. If the boundaries are too weak, enmeshment results, and family members become too involved with and dependent upon each other. A more detailed discussion of enmeshment and disengagement follows in the next section of this chapter.

### The Unhealthy or Dysfunctional Family

Experience will show that not all parents and children live in healthy families. Often there is an absence of, or a breakdown in, one or more of the criteria for a healthy family. John Bradshaw suggests several sign of dysfunction (Bradshaw on the Family 80-85). These signs include excessive control, perfectionism, blaming, denial of the five freedoms, secrecy and denial, lack of communication, unreliability, lack of clear boundaries, role confusion, and enmeshed or disengaged relationships. The book Secrets of Your Family Tree gives three rules by which dysfunctional families live: (1) don't talk, (2) don't trust, and (3) don't feel (Carder et al. 71). "Need" and "dependence" are the operative words in the unhealthy family.

For the parents of unhealthy families, the sense of need and dependence gets played out in a number of ways. Often parents will project their own unmet needs and/or conflicts onto their child, thus seeking to vicariously have their own needs met or conflicts solved through the child. As a result, the life of the parent becomes enmeshed with the life of the child. For example, if the parent's need for love is not being met by a spouse, the parent may turn to the child for the love that is craved. Or, if a parent has an unmet dream to be a football star, that parent may pressure a child into fulfilling the dream. In effect, the children are seen as extensions of the parent rather than

being seen as individuals with their own needs and desires. The self-worth of the parent is dependent upon the child. If the child is successful and doing well, the parent participates in the glory. If the child is not successful, or deviates from the parent's plan, the parent participates in the pain.

In some dysfunctional families, parents go to the opposite extreme. In these instances, the parents have all their needs met outside of the family system, resulting in their become disengaged, or distanced, from the family. Because relationships within the family are unsatisfying and unnecessary, they are ignored or taken for granted. The result is that the family becomes little more than a collection of individuals sharing the same living space. Neither the enmeshed parent nor the disengaged parent is able to offer the necessary support and guidance to the other members of the family system.

### The Hurting Parent

A hurting family is a family in pain. The pain may be physical, emotional, or spiritual. The pain may be caused by a loss of life, the loss of a job, tragedy, or a number of other stressors. The source of the pain may be found in the life of the parent or in the life of the child. The pain may be experienced one or more members of the family. But, in the words of 1 Corinthians 12:26, "If one member suffers, all suffer together." This dissertation/project,

however, is specifically concerned with parents who are in pain because of the beliefs, behaviors, actions, and/or reactions of one or more child.

Hurting parents, then, are those who feel embarrassed, confused, intimidated, insecure, rejected, isolated, and/or shamed when their children begin to show signs of rebellion against the established norms of the family system. Hurting parents, according to Margie Lewis, "are those who feel they have failed at their divinely appointed task of Christian parenthood" (24). The cause of the pain will vary from family to family, but the result is always the same--parents hurt with frustration over what they perceive as their own failure.

It is important to note that, in many cases, hurting parents parent healthy families. Even children from healthy families make wrong choices or have beliefs that bring pain to the parent. Buddy Scott, author of Relief for Hurting Parents, agrees that "good parents, successful parents, can have trouble with their children" (12). The wrong crowd, the wrong music, the wrong movies can lure "good" kids away from their "good" parents. In many instances, however, the pain experienced by the parents and other family members causes a temporary shift in character of the family. There is a breakdown of those characteristics that once defined the family as healthy, and an awakening of characteristics that now define the family as unhealthy, or dysfunctional.

The more intense the pain, and the longer the crisis continues, the more this shift is likely to occur. Pastoral care to the hurting parent, then, includes the strengthening and rebuilding of those traits that originally brought health to the family structure.

It is also important to note that parents of unhealthy families do not necessarily hurt. Often they have developed such an elaborate coping mechanism that they can effectively deny or avoid the issues that cause pain in other families.

And so, hurting parents may be found in families that are healthy or unhealthy, rich or poor, white or minority, large or small. No parent is exempt from the stressors that result in pain.

What Are the Most Common Feelings, Attitudes  
and Reactions of Hurting Parents?

In an effort to protect themselves against additional hurt, parents in pain often develop a fortress mentality, walling off themselves from their own feelings, from other people, and from important sources of healing. It is only when hurting parents make themselves vulnerable, and open themselves to scrutiny and self-reflection, that the walls can crumble and the healing process can begin. Pastoral care to hurting parents, then, must include the identification and exploration of their conscious and unconscious feelings, attitudes, and reactions.

In The Hurting Parent, Margie Lewis identifies and

discusses the following common feelings experienced by parents in pain: embarrassment (30-39), anger (77-87), guilt (103-11), and hopelessness (125-35).

### Embarrassment

One of the first feelings to surface when there is trouble in a family is embarrassment or shame. Many hurting parents are overly concerned about what others will think of them and their family. Hurting parents feel that they are going to be cast in a negative light because of the actions of their children. Lacking the ability to find a sense of self-worth apart from the approval of other persons, some hurting parents become dependent on being liked and being approved of. Because of the feelings of shame, and the fear of rejection and ridicule, hurting parents often withdraw from their normal circles of friends and support. An unhealthy desire to hide the reality of what is happening in their family causes both the parents and the child to refrain from seeking the outside help they so desperately need. Since many persons are not effective in hiding their true emotions, the child often senses the parent's embarrassment and becomes even more alienated from the parents. In effect, feelings of shame and embarrassment tend to prolong and to escalate the existing crisis. The keys to healing for the hurting parent include finding value in themselves as less than perfect parents, finding unconditional acceptance from God, and learning to trust



humanity. Some people will criticize and judge. But many others will be supportive and understanding. Many other parents will have already walked down the road now being travelled by the hurting parent, and will stand ready to reach out with love and compassion. Pastoral care to hurting parents must provide them with opportunities to admit their embarrassment, to confront it for what it is, and to learn to deal with the emotion in a helpful, healing way.

### Anger

Another common response of hurting parents is anger. Anger, according to psychologists, is the instinctive human response to fear, pain, or frustration (Lewis 79). The anger may be directed at the self, the child, a spouse, the child's peer group, law enforcement officials, other parents, innocent bystanders, or even at God. One problem with anger is that it is often misdirected. For example, a parent may exhibit anger toward a spouse or other relative rather than toward the child with whom the parent is actually angry. In order to avoid unnecessary damage to important relationships, it is extremely important for hurting parents to accurately identify the source and the target of their anger.

Hurting parents must be aware of the possibility that they are using their anger as a weapon against the child. According to Guy Greenfield, the subconscious reasoning

behind anger is this:

First, I want something; second, you won't let me have it or you prevent my having it; third, that frustrates me; fourth, people who frustrate me are bad; fifth, bad people should be punished; sixth, I will punish you with my anger. (49)

It is important for parents to understand that, while the anger may be justified, they have other tools, such as love, understanding, and compassion, that can be utilized when responding to a child's misbehavior.

Pastoral care to hurting parents should include an honest examination of their anger. Hurting parents may be encouraged in that examination by the fact that even Jesus appeared to display anger toward the actions of the money changers when he cleansed the temple, as recorded in Matthew 21:12-13. So anger is not an ungodly emotion. But anger can be acted out in inappropriate ways, including open hostility, physical or verbal violence, resentment, and bitterness. Using Jesus' display of anger as a model, hurting parents can learn to direct their anger at the behaviors of the child or of other involved persons, and not at the persons. In addition, hurting parents can use their anger as the motivation to take corrective action. Healing begins when hurting parents are able to confess and confront their anger. If denied and left to fester, anger will manifest itself in unexpected and unhealthy ways.

### Guilt

An attorney's advertisement on a local television

station invites accident victims to "make the guilty party pay." When a child is in crisis, hurting parents often react by trying to find someone or something to blame. All too often, hurting parents target themselves as the guilty party. "It is all my fault" becomes their battle cry. Feelings of guilt arise out of the false perception that the parent is responsible for everything the child does. Being blessed by God with a free will, children make choices. Sometimes, regardless of the quality of their parenting, they make wrong choices. Even the best parents cannot, and should not be expected to, control every action of their children.

Hurting parents must be able to distinguish between false guilt and real guilt. What has been talked about up to this point is false guilt--guilt that arises out of a false perception of responsibility and control. False guilt means taking more blame than is reasonable or placing blame where it does not belong. A sign of false guilt is the absence of an apparent cause. The parent might think, "I know I must be guilty, but I cannot pin down what I did wrong." Pastoral care to hurting parents must include efforts to expose false guilt and to empower persons to let go of it.

Real guilt is different. Sometimes parents are at least partly to blame for the crisis of their child. For example, if a parent furnishes alcohol for their teenager,

and that teenager is killed in a car accident because of impaired driving ability, the parent does have some real guilt. Hurting parents should be encouraged to confess and to repent of real guilt. Legal or social penalties might have to be paid. Like other emotions, guilt that is allowed to fester will consume the thoughts of the hurting parent and will block any attempts at healing.

### Hopelessness

Parents with children in crisis often experience a sense of despair. This feeling is characterized by a sense of helplessness, inadequacy, and a loss of expectation and hope. Feelings of hopelessness may be aggravated by physical and emotional distance or barriers, by the gravity of the crisis, by the length of the crisis, and by the sense of finality that surrounds the crisis. Disappointment with the child, with self, or with God may contribute to this emotion. There is an overwhelming sense that life is never going to improve and that life is not worth living under present conditions. For example, a father in a nearby community, having witnessed the death of his ten year old son in a farm accident, took a 30-06 rifle into the woods and threatened to kill himself. That is ultimate despair!

The cure for despair is hope. Hurting parent who are experiencing a sense of hopelessness need to hear success stories. The Apostle Paul is a good example of a person who had every reason to despair, having faced shipwreck,

stoning, and imprisonment. Still, in the midst of it all, Paul found joy and promise in the presence of his God. With his faith in God and the support of family and friends, the father of that ten year old boy has survived the crisis, and has found meaning in a life without his beloved son. Not every hurting parent will have the faith of Paul, or that father, but through prayer and meditation on the scriptures, they can be helped to find hope in the assurance of God's presence in the midst of their suffering. The power of God to bless and to change even the most hopeless situation cannot be underestimated. Perhaps the best advice for the hurting parent who is plagued by feelings of hopelessness is to let go of the crisis, and allow God to be Lord.

William and Candace Backus, authors of What Did I Do Wrong? What Can I Do Now?, echo much of what Margie Lewis has written concerning the feelings experienced by hurting parent, but add fear (25-32), and remorse (47-62) to the list.

### Fear

Realism and honesty are important keys in the survival of family crisis. But often a parent's reaction to crisis is based on fear and wrong belief. Hurting parents often are consumed with beliefs about what should happen rather than facing the reality of what is happening. When the "should's" don't materialize, the parents become afraid. For example, if the belief held is that "good" parents

should always be able to protect their children from harm and danger, and the child is injured when wandering out of the backyard and into the street, the resulting fears might be, "I am a bad parent," or "I have failed my child."

There are a host of fears and "what if's" that plague the hurting parent. Often the fears are directed at what might happen rather than what really is happening. What's going to happen to my child? What's going to happen to my family? What's going to happen to me? What will other people think or say? Can I endure the pain? What if things never improve? What if I lose my faith? The questions go on and on.

While many of their fears are groundless, the hurting parent does have good reason to fear. Their child has already proven that he or she does not make good choices. Some fear about the consequences of such choices is normal. The mother of a young man who is heavily into the abuse of alcohol and drugs fears that her son will not survive long enough to come to Christ and to come to healing. Her fear is well founded. Some fear is healthy. Fear can keep people from taking unreasonable risks. A father who fears financial ruin may be more careful when investing the family's funds. But problems arise when fear is used as a tool of manipulation by the child or the parent, or when fear is allowed to control, paralyze, or divide persons and families. The parent must choose whether to be controlled

by the fear, or to control the fear. An effective pastoral care plan for hurting parents will allow them time to identify and examine their fears and will encourage parents to deal with reality that living in a world of "should's" and "could have been's".

### Remorse

Remorse is a sadness at chances missed, a longing for what used to be, or a yearning for what could be. Feelings of remorse are evidenced by such statements as, "I wish I had it to do over again." Remorse can be helpful. For example, remorse over missed opportunities to spend quality time with a child can motivate the parent to take steps to avoid making the same mistake with another child. Too often, remorse becomes controlling. Deep feelings of remorse may cause the hurting parent to avoid the reality of the present crisis by living in the past or the future, or may cause the hurting parent to blow the present crisis out of proportion. The pastoral care giver should be intentional about providing hurting parents with opportunities to examine feelings of remorse, with the goal of distinguishing between remorse that is well-founded, and remorse that borders on self-pity or wishful thinking.

### Other Emotions.

Other writers on the subject of hurting parents suggest additional emotions experienced by those parents. For example, John White lists the emotions of shock, mistrust,

rage, weariness, despair, panic, and disappointment (65). Many of these emotions are related to, or are by-products of, the emotions already discussed in detail. Hurting parents should avoid judging themselves based on the presence or absence of certain feelings. Not every hurting parent experiences the same emotions with the same intensity. Each person has to get in touch with his or her own feelings, and come to an understanding of how those feelings are affecting the lives of the individual, the child, and other persons. The feelings themselves are neither good or bad, right or wrong. The hurting parent alone can decide when a certain feeling getting out of control or is becoming hurtful. Only the hurting parent can decide when a change is necessary.

#### What Are the Needs of the Hurting Parent?

In his book Growing Wise in Family Life, Charles Swindol lists four needs that must be met if parents are to successfully endure painful situations (247):

1. the need to be realistic,
2. the need for a friend,
3. the need for a Savior who is reliable, and
4. the need for a faith that nothing can shake.

The need to be realistic, will be dealt with in detail in this section. The need for a friend will be dealt with in the section addressing the role of group support. The need for a reliable Savior and the need for an unshakable



faith will be dealt with in the section concerning the role of faith and prayer.

The Need to Be Realistic About  
the Cause of the Present Crisis

"How did we get in this mess?" This is a common question asked by hurting parents. Too often, the conclusion reached by the hurting parent is that they are to blame for the crisis. Perhaps a better question is, "Why do children turn out the way that they do?" The hurting parent needs to know that there are a number of factors that affect a person's growth process. These factors include the immediate family environment, the family history, genetics, cultural influences (school, television, movies, books, magazines, music), peer group influences, and the individual's own free-will. To isolate parenting as the sole contributor to a child's crisis-causing behavior, while ignoring all other factors, would be folly. And yet, this is exactly what a number of hurting parents do!

Buddy Scott offers some helpful hints on using the process of elimination in discovering the cause of a child's problems (30-31). First, the parent should consider whether mental illness is the cause of the problem. A family doctor or mental health professional could be consulted if, indeed, mental illness, such as depression or anxiety, is suspected. If it is concluded that a mental illness is at least partly to blame, it is the parents responsibility to obtain or, in

the case of an older child, to encourage professional treatment.

The second possibility to consider is whether the child's patterns of behavior could be the result of a physical problem. The family doctor will be of assistance in following up on this possibility. If a physical problem is the cause of the child's wrong behavior, the parent is responsible for seeking or recommending appropriate medical treatment. The age of the child will determine whether or not the child can be treated against his or her will.

The third possible cause of a child's misbehavior is problems within the family. Is the child being raised in a "war zone" and rebelling as a means of survival? Is the child being ignored and rebelling as a means of gaining attention? Is the child reaping the harvest of seeds planted in previous generations? For example, is there a pattern of physical abuse, alcohol abuse, or sexual deviancy that is reappearing in the present generation? Is there unwarranted interference in the child's life from other family members. If the family system, past and/or present, is identified as the primary cause of the child's problem, efforts should be made to correct the system, or, in more extreme cases, to remove the child from the system. Even in such extreme cases, however, parents cannot dwell on past mistakes but must repent of the past and strive to be a more effective in the future. While the general rule is that

healthy families tend to produce healthy children, and unhealthy families are more likely to produce troubled children, this correlation is not iron-clad (White 27). "Bad" children can be the product of a healthy family system, and "good" children can be the product of an unhealthy family system. Remember, there are other factors at work.

If the first three causes can be ruled out, the remaining conclusion is that the child does wrong because he or she chooses to do wrong. The child's wrong behavior is not the result of a mental illness, not the result of a physical problem, and not the result of poor parenting or an unhealthy family life. The child, not the parent, is responsible for the crisis.

#### The Need to Be Realistic About the Child's

##### Motivation and Responsibility

Many hurting parents have unrealistic beliefs and expectations regarding their children. Jay Kesler, author of Too Big to Spank, reminds parents that:

To be young is to be different. To be young is to be in rebellion. To be young is to question and test. It doesn't mean that they are hostile. It doesn't mean that they are going to leave the time-tested things permanently. It just means that they are trying to find their own set of values in the midst of those of their parents.  
(89)

Parents often have the mistaken impression that their child is the only child who is misbehaving, and that every other child is a model of perfection. Hurting parents need

to know that a certain amount of testing and rebellion is normal and healthy if the child is to grow into an independent person. A child may be skipping school, drinking alcohol, challenging the authority of a parent, or breaking the law. In the mind of the parent, such behavior may be interpreted as ingratitude, as a personal attack on the parent, or as an attempt to humiliate the family. In fact, children act out for a number of reasons, some of which have little or nothing to do with the parent. For example, the child may be searching for acceptance outside of the family: sometimes as a means of finding acceptance that is not available within the family structure, and sometimes as the result of the maturing process and the accompanying need for a wider circle of friends. Or, the child may be enticed by the excitement or pleasure found in activities deemed unacceptable by the parent. Still another possibility is that the child simply possesses a keen sense of curiosity and is out to explore the unknown and the forbidden. The hurting parent will be helped by an honest appraisal of the child's motivation and of the true source or cause of the crisis.

While even a child's normal, healthy rebellion may cause the parent pain, the degree of concern and the necessity of intervention will depend on a number of criteria, such as the age and maturity level of the child; the type and severity of the behavior; the frequency and

intensity of the behaviors or attitudes; and the possibility of short-term and long-term harm to the child, the parent, the family, and/or other persons. Parents must learn to walk the fine line between protecting the child from all harm, and allowing the child to accept age-appropriate responsibility for decision making. William and Candace Backus offer a "golden rule" for parenting: "Let every child do what he can for himself" (121). The difficult task for parents, including the hurting parent, is to know the capabilities and the limitations of each child, and to parent that child accordingly.

#### The Need to Be Realistic About the

#### Role and Responsibility of the Parent

Just as many hurting parents have unrealistic expectations concerning their children, many place unrealistic expectations and demands upon themselves as well. First, the hurting parent may wish to be the "perfect" parents of "perfect" children. The research presented in the previous sections has established the fact that the idea of a "perfect" child is a myth. Similarly, the "perfect" parent does not exist. John White, author of Parents in Pain, offers some advice for the perfectionist parent (185-88). He suggests that parents must learn to be content with the gifts for parenting that God has given them. This means:

1. Parents should concentrate on their assets rather

that on their liabilities.

2. Parents should take their liabilities to God, offering no apology for their shortcomings, but seeking forgiveness when and if those shortcomings result in sin or crisis.

3. Parents should never pretend to their children, that they are better than they really are. Children should understand that their parents are fellow strugglers in life, enjoying both victories and defeats.

4. Parents should not brood over failures. Parents should recognize and confess their faults and failures, and any resulting damage to their children, but then leave it at that and allow the redemptive power of Christ to work in their own lives and in the lives of their children.

The bottom line is, nobody is perfect.

Second, many hurting parents feel the need, or the expectation, to be in control at all times. Often this need for control leads to an unreasonable sense of responsibility for their child's behavior. Doctors Jordan and Margaret Paul, authors of If You Really Loved Me, offer this caution to hurting parents: "You can only be responsible for what you do, not for how others feel and behave in reaction to what you do. Your happiness or unhappiness results from your freely chosen action and reaction, and the same is true for others" (160). Nearly all hurting parents blame themselves for the crises of their

children. While the hurting parent may share some of the blame for creating the environment out of which a crisis is born, the parent does not have sole responsibility for the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and/or reactions of the child. If a child chooses to rebel, to drink alcohol, to take harmful drugs, or to run away, it is the child's choice and the child must take responsibility for, and accept the consequences of, that choice.

Third, many hurting parents have an overwhelming desire to save their child from making mistakes and from experiencing the painful consequences of those mistakes. The parent is responsible for loving the child, in spite of the crisis. The parent is responsible for helping the child confront the pain, work through it, and learn from it. But, the parent's responsibility does not include rescuing the child from every painful situation. Parents should know that "children can handle any pain, no matter how intense, when they have a loving parent to hold and comfort them" (Drs. Jordan and Margaret Paul 300). To remove the pain is to deny the child a chance to grow and to find grace and deliverance in their parent, and in God. The parent is called to be an effective role model for the child. But when the child freely chooses to ignore or reject that model, the child alone is responsible for the consequences. In the words of John White:

You cannot ever control another human being, even if that human being is your own child. You do not

have a right to. You may discipline and teach; you may train; you may point the right course; you may shape the behavior patterns; you may plead. But you cannot and may not ever control. God has placed your child's ultimate destiny within your child's own hand. (58)

What Role Can Group Support Play in the  
Life of the Hurting Parent?

The concept of small group ministry enjoys a strong biblical foundation. The concept of groups is evident in the Old Testament record of the people of Israel. The very structure of Israel's society, from the single family unit, to the household, to the clan, to the tribe, to the nation, is a testimony to the importance of groups. "Every Jew could (and many still can) rehearse his or her identity based on nation, tribe, family, household, and father. These identity groupings were important political, social, and spiritual designations" (McBride 15). A sense of identity and a sense of community resulted as people learned to share and to care in small groups.

The New Testament pictures Jesus Christ as the greatest small group leader in history. Jesus began his public ministry by gathering together a small group of followers, the disciples. Jesus used the small group concept to teach and to model what it means to be in ministry and service to God. Jesus placed relationships above organization. Being with the people was more important than preaching to the people. Throughout his ministry, Jesus met with small groups of people in their homes and on the streets. His



ministry to these small groups was one of caring, healing, listening, forgiving, encouraging, teaching, and preaching. When Jesus' earthly ministry was drawing to a close, he trained and empowered a small group of people, again his disciples, to carry on in his absence.

Small group ministry was an important element in the early church as well. The small group setting seemed to lend itself to the intimate sharing of a gospel of love. Home churches, such as those which met in the homes of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:3-5), soon became the norm as Christians began to unite in their faith. The Apostle Paul often referred to the church as "the household of God," a term that rings of intimacy and caring. As the persecution of the church increased, the significance of small group meetings took on even more importance. In the midst of crisis, the early Christians had the assurance that where two or three were gathered in Jesus name, he was there with them (Matthew 18:20).

Thus, it is clear that small group ministry is not a passing fad, or a recent invention of the twentieth century church. From the beginning of time, people have lived, and ministered to each other, in small groups. The effectiveness of this style of ministry has been proven time and again. The church appears to have a biblical mandate to reclaim the small group ministry.

Human beings need a number of reciprocal, liberating

relationships. It is not surprising, therefore, that the second need of hurting parents mentioned by Charles Swindol was the need for a friend (247). The story of the early New Testament church, as told in Acts 2, further reminds us of humanity's need for communion, shared meals, and worship. This need for the love and support of other persons is especially strong in the hurting parent. Unfortunately, it is a need that is often not met.

Donald M. Joy, in his book Bonding: Relationships in the Image of God, helps persons to define and evaluate their support system by asking the question, "Who is holding your trampoline" (3-4)? He asks the person to imagine a hand-held trampoline with five to eight people holding each of the four sides. One side is supported by family, such as parents, children, and spouse. The second side is held by other relatives, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and cousins. The third side is born by associates from work, church, clubs, and recreation. The fourth side is held by the friends who are currently active in the person's life experience.

Hurting parents often find that one or more sides of their trampoline is lacking, or missing, the support needed if they are to growthfully endure times of crisis. Often it is the fourth side, the side held by close friends, that most needs to be bolstered. The ministry of a pastor, the care of a church family, the fellowship of a church school

class or bible study group, the guidance of a professional counselor, the love of family members, and the compassion of work associates are all represent valuable and available means of support for the hurting parent. But none of these can substitute for real friends. One of the most positive steps that can be taken by hurting parents is the finding and assembling of a few close friends in whom they can trust and confide.

When those friends happen to be fellow hurting parents, the person is presented with a unique opportunity for healing. There is healing and strength in the sharing of wisdom, skills, insights, and common concerns. When hurting parents relate to each other in a support group as fellow Christians, there is additional healing and strength to be found as persons pray for one another, lovingly correct one another, and encourage one another in matters of life and faith.

Buddy Scott writes, "I asked several abused parents what had helped them more than anything else. Each person listed the support group. It was unanimous" (193). Scott goes on to say that he believes that God mostly helps people through other people. "When we are going through our roughest times, God helps us by putting the right people near our pathway . . . " (Scott 194).

According to Guy Greenfield, "Wounded parents . . . find considerable strength, wisdom, and encouragement by

sharing their journey in a fellowship of struggle. They have a lot to offer each other" (109). Meeting with a support group provide an opportunity for hurting parents to share their pain and to find resources for healing. Sharing the pain helps to get conflicts, disappointments, hurts, and resentments, out into the open where they can be viewed objectively. Sharing the pain also makes the pain easier to bear. Persons in a support group bear one another's burdens, lightening the load for each individual. The sharing of feelings creates an atmosphere in which other persons can interpret and reflect back what they have heard.

The hurting parent may have a number of people "holding their trampoline." But perhaps no person, or group of persons, offers as much hope and healing as does a support group of other hurting parents.

Howard Clinebell believes that "group caring and counseling methods constitute the single most useful resource for broadening and deepening a church's ministry of healing and growth" (349). From the disciples of Christ, to the Apostolic Church; to the monastic orders, to the Wesleyan revival, to the twelve-step programs, to the mega-church of Korea, the concept of small group ministry has been practiced as an effective way of establishing an arena in which persons can receive physical, emotional, and spiritual support, and experience personal growth as well.

Group support is a two-way street of giving and

getting. In an environment of learning and action, participants in a support group have their own needs met, and share themselves with other when they need support. The support given and received includes empathy, respect, self-disclosure, and an honest "reality check." The primary focus of a support group ministry is on the emotional, interpersonal, and spiritual growth of the members. Through group interaction, individual members are encouraged and enabled to more effectively use their own resources in dealing with real life situations. The principle goal of a support group ministry is to prepare the members for life in the real world, and not to facilitate a retreat from the crisis at hand.

The use of support group ministries is advantageous to the church for a number of reasons:

1. The pastor's time is better utilized. Since the pastor can be present to several persons at the same time, more persons can be ministered to than if individual counseling methods were employed.

2. Participants in the group help themselves, while helping, and receiving help from, other persons.

3. Because of the exchange of knowledge and ideas, people seem to learn better in a group.

4. The church is able to minister to persons who are not comfortable with, or who cannot afford, individual counseling sessions.

The advantages to the participants in a support group ministry are even more compelling. At the very least, participation in a support group will let the hurting parents know that they are not alone in their suffering. Most, if not all, families experience crisis at one time or another. But, in addition to this important revelation, supportive care can provide the hurting parent with:

1. the gratification of dependency needs, such as comfort, sustenance, guidance, instruction, and protection;
2. an emotional catharsis as the person begins to express and accept his or her true feelings;
3. an objective review of the situation and of possible alternatives;
4. the protection of ego defenses, including the allowance of a degree of repression or projection until reality can be faced and dealt with;
5. help with identification and implementation of corrective action;
6. periods of activity and structure during the time of crisis; and
7. the application of religious resources, such as prayer, scripture, and sacraments, which allow the hurting parent to transcend the present pain and to receive the support of the Holy Spirit (Clinebell 172-74).

Participation in a support group will also provide hurting parents with a setting in which they can model and

test new behaviors, attitudes, and reactions before applying them in real life situations. For example, if members find that the group does not reject them when they honestly express feelings of anger or frustration, they may then risk such an expression of feeling in their family setting. As they work together to find meaning and satisfaction within the group, members are learning skills in caring, respect, trust, and empathy that will be useful in their lives at home, at work, and in other settings.

Some people may feel that needing and seeking the support of other people is a sign of weakness. In fact, not being able to ask for support is the true sign of weakness.

What Are Some of the Theological Issues that Arise  
in the Life of the Hurting Parent

Hurting parents often ask the question, "Why did God allow this to happen to us?" In the search for an answer, the hurting parent may arrive at one of two conclusions. Some hurting parents perceive the present crisis as God's way of punishing them for their shortcomings, mistakes, and indiscretions. On the other hand, some hurting parents will see the present crisis as evidence that God not real, or at least is not to be trusted. In both cases, the question becomes, "Is it possible for parents in the midst of crisis--a crisis that God failed to prevent and for which the parent may be at least partly to blame--to find comfort and healing in God?" The answer, of course, is "yes," but only

if certain theological concepts are understood and applied in the life of the hurting parent.

### God as a Hurting Parent

In The Wounded Parent, Guy Greenfield argues that God, as both Father and Son, knows first-hand what it is like to be a hurting parent (121-26). Israel was often going astray, rejecting the love of the Father and chasing after other gods. Passages such as Isaiah 64:1-12 depict a father whose heart is broken by his wayward children. God knows what it is like to plead for the return of a prodigal, only to have those pleas rebuffed (Jeremiah 3:21-25). However, in the midst of rejection, God is able to maintain the hope that his children will return to him (Jeremiah 31:1-9, 15-17). Who is in a better position to offer support and understanding to the hurting parent than a God who has known the pain of parenting the rebellious child?

Christ, too, knows the pain of parental rejection. In Matthew 23:37-39, Jesus laments the fact that, though he wanted nothing more than to nurture and protect his children, his efforts were thwarted by children who sought love in other places. In this passage, Jesus seems to grieve as a hurting parent whose wayward children stubbornly refuse to return and to be reconciled. Greenfield concludes, "Because Jesus knows something of the ordeal of a wounded parent, then with confidence we can draw near to God's throne of grace to receive mercy and find help in time



of need" (126).

Hurting parents should know that God loves their children even more than they do. God does not, and will not abandon the children because of their behavior. Nor will God punish the child for the sins of the parent. The wayward child is never out of God's reach. "Although the influence of your parenting may be blocked by circumstances and rebellious rejection, God's continuing parenthood cannot be stopped by wayward children" (Greenfield 128). God's love for, and pursuit of, the child know no boundaries.

#### Your Child's Free Will

John White, author of Parents in Pain, has this to say to all self-blaming parents: "But you, as a parent, have neither the right nor the ability to control your child's destiny. It is a matter that will be resolved between your child and God" (56). God has placed each person's ultimate destiny within his or her own hands. Each person is free to choose to do right or to do wrong. But, each person also must take responsibility for the consequences of those choices. When a parent is in pain because of the beliefs or behaviors of a child, it is not the fault of God, or the fault of the parent, but the fault of the child's free choice to do wrong. Often the parent's only "sin" is loving the child enough to hurt when the child makes mistakes.

#### Grace

It has already been established that guilt and shame

are two of the most damaging, yet most common, emotions experienced by hurting parents. These feelings are intensified when hurting parents hold themselves to the impossible ideal of perfection. In the mind of the perfectionist, mistakes are a sign of ineffectiveness or weakness. The perfectionist will respond to family crisis with exceptional pain, feelings of self-depreciation, legalism, anxiety, anger, and denial. Ironically, those who work hardest at being "perfect" parents, react most intensely to failure.

The cure for perfectionism is grace: freely given, undeserved, unmerited, unearnable, and unrepayable favor. "Grace is what God is and what God does when He meets the sinful and undeserving" (Seamands 85). Human beings, at their very best, are miserable failures when compared with God's standards of perfection. The parent is no exception. According to John White, "For most parents, parenting is an acquired skill, learned (if it is ever learned) through many humiliating mistakes and failures at the expense of its intended beneficiaries" (184). The bad news for hurting parents is that they are not perfect, and, in all likelihood, have made some mistakes in the parenting of their children. The good news to parents, and to all of humankind, is that God's love and acceptance is not dependent upon their goodness and worthiness. God unconditionally accepts God's people, with all their faults

and imperfections. God's acceptance lays the groundwork for self-acceptance. Robert Schuler's television ministry has capitalized on the saying, "God loves you, and so do I." Grace allows the hurting parent to look into the mirror and utter those same words: "God loves you, and so do I."

David Seamands, in his book Healing for Damaged Emotions, says, "The healing of perfectionism takes place in day-by-day believing, living, and realizing this grace relationship with a loving, caring heavenly Father" (85). Learning to love an imperfect self and an imperfect child is a process that begins with experiencing and responding to the unwarranted love of God. This process sometimes involves a reprogramming of the heart and mind, as old ideals, such as unrealistic expectation, impossible performance, conditional love, and a theology of works, are replaced by ideals of realism, unconditional love, and a theology of grace. Matthew 22:37-39 offers a reminder that the love of God, the love of others, and the love of self are all interrelated. In the words of an old song, "you can't have one without the other." The scenario goes something like this: "Because God loves me as I am, I can love myself as I am. Because God loves you as you are, I can love you as you are." The unconditional love of self and of others is grounded in, and modeled after, the unconditional love of God.

## Forgiveness

David Seamands concludes that the two major causes of emotional problems among evangelical Christians are these: "the failure to understand, receive, and live out God's unconditional grace and forgiveness; and the failure to give out that unconditional love, forgiveness, and grace to other people" (29). Seamands' conclusion applies to hurting parents as well. Forgiveness is a letting go of the feelings, memories, and obligations surrounding a certain event. Forgiveness is a cleansing, a wiping clean of the slate. In her book entitled How to Forgive Your Children, Quin Sherrer says forgiveness is a process that includes the following steps:

1. giving up the desire to punish or get even;
2. excusing for a fault or offense;
3. turning from defensiveness;
4. ceasing to feel resentful;
5. renouncing anger; and
6. absolving from payment (15).

God is the author and the model of forgiveness. God's forgiveness is free, without condition, unwarranted, and unlimited. Hurting parents need to know that God understands and forgives their shortcomings, faults, and mistakes. In like manner, God also forgives the shortcomings, faults, and mistakes of the wayward child. Only as hurting parents repent of their shortcomings and

wrongdoing, and are able to feel forgiven by God, can they begin to forgive themselves and to resolve the feelings, such as guilt; shame, anger; and hopelessness, that invade their lives in times of crisis.

The issue of forgiveness does not stop with the hurting parent and the wayward child being forgiven by God. In those instances where the parents have wronged the child and have contributed to the crisis, the forgiveness of the child should be sought. Such repentance and forgiveness often clears the way for healing and reconciliation.

But, the parable of the unforgiving servant, as recorded in Matthew 18:23-35, reminds persons that they are called to forgive as they are forgiven. For the hurting parent, this means taking the additional step of forgiving the child and other persons who may be involved in, or responsible for, the crisis. Buddy Scott, author of Relief for Hurting Parents, says: "Deep-cleansing forgiveness removes the grudges and reopens your arms and your heart to your child, and it is essential to the rescue, recovery, and reconciliation process for which you are hoping and praying" (93).

Margie Lewis claims that forgiveness is an act of will, a deliberate conscious choice (118). This means that the hurting parent has to decide to forgive themselves and others, even before knowing the end of the story, and even if the other persons involved never ask to be forgiven.

God-like forgiveness an unnatural choice for human beings. The tendency of many hurting parents is to want to punish the child, themselves, or other persons involved in the crisis, or the place conditions or limits on their forgiveness. But true forgiveness is all-encompassing, and is offered with no strings attached.

Sometimes, hurting parents need to go an additional step beyond accepting forgiveness from God and others, and granting forgiveness to themselves and other persons. They need to forgive God. Often God is wrongly blamed for causing, or at least allowing, the crisis to happen. Even though God has done no wrong, hurting parents need to forgive God and release God from any blame if they are to be totally forgiving, and totally forgiven.

Margie Lewis ends her discussion of forgiveness with these words:

We can't possibly overestimate the power of forgiveness. There is a longing and a desire for it in every human heart. The appealing attraction of loving, accepting forgiveness draws every sinner toward the open arms of our heavenly Father. The same kind of forgiveness will draw our sons and daughters back to us and to faith in him. (123)

### Unconditional Love

The concept of unconditional love is closely aligned with the idea of grace. Margie Lewis describes unconditional love as "a love without reservation or prerequisites. It demands no reciprocation, no reward--not even a response"(91). John 3:16 speaks of God's

unconditional love for humanity. In spite of thousands of years of being rejected, God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son so that the world might be reconciled through him. In 1 Corinthians 13:7, Paul speaks of a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. That is a good description of the unconditional love of God for humanity, and of hurting parents' unconditional love for their children. The expression of unconditional love is an unnatural response to a crisis situation. Because it is an unnatural response, the showing of unconditional love must be a conscious choice on the part of the parent. Regardless of what he or she has done, the child should know beyond any doubt that he or she is loved.

But, parents do not have to compromise their own moral convictions in order to show unconditional love to their children. Parents must be able to distinguish between love of the child and love of the child's lifestyle. Every expression of unconditional love communicates the fact that the child is a person of infinite worth, regardless of the child's behavior (Greenfield 73). But, unconditional love is not the same as the unconditional acceptance of the child's behavior. It is healthy for the hurting parent to be able to say to the child, "I love you, but I hate what you are doing." In some instances, unconditionally loving the child will mean allowing the child to feel the pain of

his or her choices. In other cases, unconditional love may involve letting go of the child, and releasing the child into God's care. These aspects of love will be discussed in more detail in the section entitled, "What is the difference between letting go and giving up?"

Unconditional love is exemplified by the waiting father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). It is a love which says to the child, "Even though you have hurt me, and even though I disapprove of your choices, you will always be my child and I will always love you no strings attached."

### Prayer

According to Kevin Huggins, author of Parenting Adolescents, "Parents of teens won't be able to face conflict in their family and use it to cultivate maturing and deeper relationships unless they, too, regularly find strength from God to endure loneliness and pain" (175). Consider the example of Jesus as he knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of his betrayal and arrest (Matthew 26:36-46). When facing the final crisis of his ministry, Christ turned to his Father in prayer. When his death was at hand, Christ again turned to God in prayer, this time praying for those who had rejected him (Luke 23:34). Following the example of Christ, hurting parents can draw strength from God through the discipline of prayer. According to Richard Foster, "It is the discipline of prayer



itself that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing" (30).

In Mark 11:22-24, Jesus assures his listeners that, "whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." What good news this is for the hurting parent! Prayers offered on behalf of the wayward child will be answered, and God will intervene. Nothing is too difficult for God. God's power is without limits.

To pray, according to John White, "is to collaborate with God" (226). Prayer is the seeking of God's will in the life of the parent and the child. Again, Jesus' prayer in the Garden serves as a model prayer for hurting parents. After voicing his petition, Jesus asked nothing more than that God's will be done. Hurting parents must "go to God with their problems and wait in his presence. They are to express their concerns fully and to tell him of their bewilderment. They are to tell him, too, that they know he hears and that they cannot understand what is happening" (White 229). In effect, to pray is to ask, "God, what is your will in my life and in the life of my child?" But the prayer is not complete until the person can add, "Let your will be done."

Hurting parents need to pray with the knowledge that God's will may be different from their will. If prayers are offered in such a way that the only acceptable answer is

"yes," then disappointment with God is a likely result. God's answer may be "yes," but God may also answer with "not yet" or "no." If, like Jesus, hurting parents are ultimately seeking God's will, then they can accept an answer that appears to be in direct contradiction to their own desires. Hurting parents will find more comfort in prayer if they remember:

1. Whether we see him or not, God is there working all the time (Lewis 146).
2. God is oblivious to time (Lewis 148).
3. Our Lord is the God of the second chance (Lewis 149).

Like Jesus, hurting parents need to be constant in prayer. It is not enough to pray once and to drop the issue. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed the same prayer three times (Matthew 26:36-46). In 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, Paul tells of praying three times for the removal of a "thorn in his flesh." Three times God refuses his request, offering only his grace in answer to Paul's prayer. Some answers come only after years of faithful praying. Some answers never come in the form expected. But God hears and answers all prayer. The role of the person is to ask, seek, and knock; to listen, believe, and receive; to worship, love, and adore. God's responsibility is to listen and to answer in a manner that will bring the highest good to the person, and the greatest glory to God.

There is more reason to pray than just to get a desired result. Thomas Albin defines prayer as "a dialogue between two person who love each other" (31). There is purpose and power in the resulting relationship between God and the praying person. Through prayer, a person makes known to God his or her deepest thoughts and feelings. In return, the true essence of God is revealed to the person. A relationship of love and trust is built and nurtured. That relationship may be the source of strength and comfort needed if the hurting parent is to endure times of crisis.

Thomas Albin offers some helpful thoughts on prayer:

1. Anytime is the right time to pray.
2. Any place is the right place for prayer.
3. Any posture is the right posture for prayer.
4. Silent prayer and audible prayer are both acceptable to God.
5. Both written and spontaneous prayers had a place in Jesus' life.
6. Prayer for persons of all ages, stages, conditions, races, and sexes is appropriate.
7. Any number of people is the right number for prayer (104).

The hurting parent needs to be in communication with God. Prayer may not provide easy answers about, or solutions to, the present crisis, but prayer will lift the hurting parent into the presence of a loving, caring God.

In the presence of God, hurting parents will find the strength to endure times of trial, and will find the hope of a brighter tomorrow. In the words of Judith Briles, author of When God Says No,

"We live in a complex world filled with wars and pressure and unfairness. Somewhere in the tyranny of this life, there is a refuge that we can find in a good, loving, and kind God. There is a principle I've learned over the years: If you blame God as the source of your problems, you cut off the source of your help. In the midst of your problems, in the midst of not understanding, if you turn to Him, He'll comfort you and give you the peace He promised: "the peace of God which passes all understanding." (34)

What Is the Difference Between Letting Go  
and Giving Up?

Some hurting parents unwittingly make matters worse with their children by trying to control all circumstances surrounding the crisis, even when such control is futile. Sometimes love demands the relinquishing of parental reins. Guy Greenfield goes so far as to suggest that parents should be working themselves out of the job of being parents and ease into becoming friends to their children (87). As children mature, the parent/child relationship changes. Judging is replaced by respect; talking at the child is replaced by talking with, and listening to, the child; control is replaced by communication; fear is replaced by trust. This is all part of the process of letting go. In letting go, the parent is saying, "My child has the right to be what he or she wants and chooses to be, rather than being

what I want and need my child to be." Letting go means accepting and respecting the rights, differences, and opinions of the child.

Jay Kesler refers to this letting-go process as "de-parenting" (35-44). De-parenting shifts appropriate age-level responsibility from the parent to the child. Kesler likens the process of de-parenting to a bird learning to fly. At the mother bird's nudging, the baby bird leaves the nest, tries its wings in short flights, and returns to the safety of the nest. As the bird gains skill and confidence, the flights become longer until finally, the baby bird leaves the nest for good. So it is with de-parenting. The parent must let go gradually, yet steadily, until the day when the child leaves the safety of the nest for good.

For the hurting parent, an important element of letting go involves the conscious decision to cease playing a role in the child's misbehavior, and allowing the child to face the consequences of his or her own choices. To some parents, this may seem to be abandonment. Hurting parents need to know that loving behavior sometimes includes allowing the child to learn from the pain.

Abandonment is a sign of hopelessness and despair. Letting go, on the other hand, is an expression of faith. In letting go, the parent is trusting that God, and not the parent, is in full control of the child's destiny. In relinquishing their children to God, hurting parents affirm

their trust in God's ability to manage the child's life. Margie Lewis assures the hurting parent that "something unexplainable happens when we build up enough faith or when we get desperate enough to release our children, to entrust them totally to God" (145). Letting go of the child takes the hurting parent out of God's way, allowing God to freely work in the life of the child. In the words of Greenfield, "God works so much better and more quickly when we are not interfering with his efforts" (93). Releasing the child into the hands of God also frees the parent from needless worry and from the need to manipulate, allowing the hurting parent to concentrate on those things that bring healing--forgiving, accepting, and loving the child.

Abandonment is sometimes used by the hurting parent as a weapon of aggression or retaliation. Parents believe that the withholding of love, support, communication, and/or affirmation will cause the child to cave in to their demands. In truth, abandonment is more likely to separate, to tear apart, and to wound all parties involved. Letting go, however, is an act of love. Alfred Ells, in his book One-Way Relationships, says that "true' love seeks the best for the object of the love" (34). No matter how serious the child's misbehavior might be, no matter how intense the pain might become, the hurting parent is never justified in wishing harm to the child, or in desiring to get even with the child. But Ells goes on to say, "If it (love) breeds

self-centeredness and irresponsibility, it is not true healthy love" (34). Holding on to the child, and protecting the child from responsibility, stifles the emotional and spiritual growth of the child. Letting go with love says to the child, "I want you to be all that you can be."

If hurting parents want to discern whether they are letting go or abandoning their child, they should ask themselves the question, "Is my motivation to heal or to hurt my child?" Letting go will bring healing and growth to the child, and to the parent. Abandonment will bring hurt to the child, and will, in all likelihood, add to the crisis.

John White offers a helpful list of what the hurting parent gives up in the process of letting go (165-74). This list includes giving up

1. the right to be proud of the child;
2. the right to the uninterrupted enjoyment of the child;
3. the right to possess the child;
4. the right to receive repayment from the child;
5. the right to uninterrupted tranquility;
6. the right to be respected and free from gossip;
7. the right to save the child from pain; and
8. delusions about being able to control the destiny of the child.

Letting go does not exempt the hurting parent from

further concern, but it lays the responsibility for change right where it belongs--with God and the child. By letting go, hurting parents avail themselves of God's resources for dealing with what, humanly speaking, is an impossible situation.

### What Can Storytelling Contribute to Pastoral Care?

#### A Definition of Pastoral Care

Howard Clinebell describes pastoral care as "the utilization by persons in ministry of one-on-one or small group relationships to enable healing, empowerment, and growth to take place within individuals and their relationships" (25-26). He goes on to say that pastoral care involves "the utilization of a variety of healing methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully and thus to experience healing in their brokenness" (26). This dissertation is concerned with a pastoral care approach that combines two healing methods: small group support and storytelling. The importance of small group support in the life of the hurting parent has already been established and discussed in a previous section of this chapter. This section will deal with the important contributions of storytelling.

Pastoral care givers seek to bring healing, sustenance, guidance, nurturing and reconciliation. Pastoral care givers are primarily concerned with helping persons to find



healing and meaning in the midst of the crisis, and not with the resolution of the crisis itself. Pastoral counseling is, more than anything, listening to and interpreting the story of the counselee. People seek out pastoral counseling because they need someone to listen to them. The role of the pastoral counselor, according to Groome, is primarily "to listen to and act as co-interpreter of people's stories . . . and, because it is pastoral counseling, to make accessible and co-interpret the Christian community's story/vision a propos the person's life issues" (412). The Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling adds: "Pastoral care involves assisting persons to move from talking generally about themselves and specifically about their problems to talking specifically about themselves and generally about their problems" (Rodney J. Hunter, ed. 894). Given these definitions of, and statements about, pastoral care, it is clear that the ability to tell, interpret, and listen to stories can be a valuable asset to the care giver.

#### A Definition of Storytelling

William R. White suggests that "our lives are stories and, in a sense, any good story is about us" (12). To be a person is to have a story to tell. Persons are drawn to a story because they can find themselves in the midst of the drama. Through the sharing of stories it is possible for people to identify common needs, problems, feelings, and expectations. Persons are united by their stories.

According to William J. Bausch, "Life is made up of wild dreams, half-seen visions, impulses, and nameless shadows we relate in our stories (19). A person's story includes the events, characters, beliefs, values, and emotions that have shaped that person's past, present, and future. Storytelling, then is the sharing of those events, characters, beliefs, values, and emotions. The telling of stories can be facilitated by the use of dialogue, role-play, reflection questions, drawings, collages, fairytales, and any other tool that encourages reflection and sharing.

#### Scripture as Story

Storytelling certainly is not a new phenomenon. In his book entitled To a Dancing God, Sam Keen states:

Preliterate man lived in a world which received its intellectual, religious, and social structure through the story. Each tribe had its own set of tales, myths, and legends which defined the metaphysical context within which it lived, gave a history of the sacred foundation of its social rituals, and provided concrete models of authentic life. Membership in the tribe involved retelling and acting out the shared stories which had been passed on from generation to generation since the beginning of time. (87)

Since the earliest of times, persons have found their meaning and identity through the telling of stories, both factual and fictional. Perhaps nowhere is this better portrayed than in the biblical narratives. The whole history of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a story for which God has provided the script. The stories of Israel, complete with the patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis, the

judges, the kings, and the prophets, have formed the basis of a long-standing storytelling tradition. When the people of Israel wanted to understand God's will, needed to feel God's presence, and sought to make sense of their present situation, they rehearsed the story of their past and recalled all of God's promises of a brighter future. The story included details of creation and the fall, of God's calling, of God's faithfulness, and of their own unfaithfulness. The story included great heroes and great villains. As the rabbis and the people remembered and shared the great stories of the past, they found healing and understanding in the present. God became present and active in the storytelling event. The people could find themselves in the stories of old, and come away with the assurance that what God had done in the past, God would do again. Their present was inescapably linked to the past and the future through the sharing of stories.

The stories were important because they provided the family, the household, the clan, the tribe, and the nation with a sense of meaning, a common identity, and a sense of unity. But the stories were important to the individual as well. The story of Israel parallels the story of every individual: a story of innocence, fall, and the recovery of innocence. Sam Keen sees every person as a wayfarer, an Adam, who is "never totally lost, because he knows the story of the garden from which he came and the kingdom toward

which he travels" (To a Dancing God 93). Therefore, when a crisis becomes difficult to bear, there is, at least, the comfort of knowing that others have experienced and survived similar journeys, and enjoyed and realized the promise of a homecoming. For thousands of years, the retelling of the stories of Israel has enable people to know the God of Abraham, Jacob, and Isaac.

The New Testament provides further evidence of the use of story. The stories of Jesus miracle birth, his earthly ministry, and his death and resurrection became for the people stories of God's involvement in human history. Jesus, himself a rabbi, used story as a means of teaching. When he wanted to teach about sacrifice, Jesus told the story of a poor widow who gave to God her last few coins. When Jesus wanted to teach about commitment, he told the story of a rich young ruler who refused to give up his wealth to follow God. When he wanted to teach about forgiveness and unconditional love, Jesus told the story of a prodigal son. Through the use of stories, Jesus enabled his listeners to grasp the mysterious character of God, to feel God's abiding presence, and to make for themselves connections between the stories and their own life situations. For decades, when people wanted to know about Jesus, someone would orally tell them the stories of who he was, what he said, and what he did.

The stories of Jesus, now recorded in the Scriptures so

they can be relearned and retold, have served for centuries as the source of humanity's knowledge of God, and of God's plan of salvation. If any doubt remains regarding the role of story in Scripture, just consider the power of the Christmas story, or the Easter story. Putting all theology aside, there is power in simply telling the story. God knew it. The rabbis of old knew it. Jesus knew it. Now, pastoral care givers can know it, and can claim the power of sharing the Gospel story as an effective counseling tool.

As important as the Gospel story is, it is not the only story that exists. Every community, every family, every local congregation, and every denomination has its own unique story. Likewise, every person has his or her own story to tell. It is when the individual and community stories are connected with, and interpreted in light of, God's story that true revelation takes place and the healing presence of God is made real. "If we were pressed to say what Christian faith and life are, we could hardly do better than hearing, telling, and living a story" (Steimle, Niedenthal and Rice 13).

### Storytelling as Pastoral Care

In his book Storytelling: Imagination and Faith, William Bausch identifies several characteristics of story (30-63). These characteristics help to explain why storytelling can be an effective pastoral care tool:

1. Stories provoke curiosity and compel repetition

(30). A good story gets and holds the listeners attention.

2. Stories unite humanity in a holistic way to nature and, thus, to the Creator and all of creation (32).

3. Stories are a bridge to one's culture, one's roots (33). Stories link the listener to their history and help to give the person a sense of identity, a sense of belonging.

4. Stories bind together all of humanity into the universal human family (34). Through stories, persons gain a sense of community and kinship.

5. Stories help people to remember their past, their history, their successes, their defeats, their shames (36). In remembering, persons are called to confession, and in confession, find forgiveness and the possibility of wholeness.

6. Stories provide escape (43). Stories can remove persons from the immediacy of the present, and give them time to regroup, reform, and reenter life.

7. Stories invoke right-brain imagination, tenderness, and therefore wholeness (47). Stories are the carriers of deep insights which cannot be verbalized, but which help persons to cope with a bewildering world. Stories can lead to repentance, laughter, peace, insight, and true faith.

8. Stories promote healing (54). Imagination is the key to unlocking and healing one's past, present, and future.

9. Every story can be personalized and internalized (58). Stories link persons with their deepest selves. Stories should be heard with this question in mind: "What does the story mean, and what does it mean for me?"

10. Stories provide a basis for hope and morality (60). Sometimes the only way out of a seemingly hopeless situation is to imagine other possibilities. Imagination gives birth to the hope that persons can rise again from moral, spiritual, emotional, or physical ruin. Scripture calls persons to envision a different and better future.

11. Stories are the basis for ministry (62). Bausch quotes John Shea as suggesting that "ministry to others and for others really begins at the intersection between God and his people revealed in their stories and conversations" (62). Shared stories provide a "port of entry" for the caregiver, and for the healing power of God.

Storytelling, because it touches the very fabric of life, can help to close the gap between the listener and abstract ideas, concepts, and doctrines. Story is real. It is concrete. "As a picture language, stories help us to see, helps us understand, even when we don't want to see" (White 12). Through the use story, fairytales, drawings, collages, and reflection questions, persons can probe their conscious and subconscious memories, in an attempt to discover who they are, where they came from, and where they are going.

As individuals rehearse and share their own story, and share in the stories of others, common needs, experiences, and desires are identified, and a sense of community and belonging develops and a healing bond is formed. In the sharing of stories, persons are healed of isolation and loneliness. In the words of Thomas Boomershine, "Persons who tell each other stories become friends. And men and women who know the same stories deeply are bound together in special ways" (18). Shared story links all of humanity and history together. We know one another by our stories. John Wesley apparently saw the value of shared story as a pastoral care tool. In a dissertation on Wesley's instructional growth groups, David Henderson points out that the essential ingredient in Wesley's bands and classes was the sharing of a person's life story as a means of tracking one's journey of faith. Wesley's penitent bands were a separate system for people suffering from compulsion disorders and other problems. In these penitent recovery groups, the life story of the participant was equally important (103-186).

Similarly, modern day twelve-step programs employ the sharing of one's life story in the recovery process. Step five involves the three-part process of admitting to God, to oneself, and to another person the exact nature of one's wrongs. According to Hemfelt and Fowler, this sharing of one's story has four positive results:



1. The person's shame is reduced through confession.
2. Sharing enables the expression of feelings of grief, resentment, anger, and fear that, when repressed, prevent persons from living life to the fullest.
3. In the sharing of their darkest secrets and private hurts, persons take a major step toward honesty.
4. Sharing breaks down the barriers of isolation (45-47).

Boomershine goes so far as to claim story as a sacrament, since it is through the sharing of story that persons find the presence of God (19). He goes on to state that "when the spiritual energy of a story from the tradition of Israel connects with the spiritual needs of a person, profound new perspectives can emerge. God is present to the person through the story" (105).

Sam Keen, in his book To a Dancing God, states that human stories, both collective and individual, consist of a past, a present, and a future (26). Memory and anticipation directly impact the person's present identity. While living in the present, persons are living out of their past and toward the future. Family crisis often causes an unhealthy regression into the past--a longing for the "good old days"--or an unhealthy projection into the future--the hope that better days are coming. The goal of pastoral care is to help troubled persons to find meaning and satisfaction, and to see themselves as acceptable and lovable in the present.

Hurting parents should be encouraged and enabled to learn from the past, and to redeem the past, without becoming slaves to the past. In some cases, healing is impossible until the hurting parent is able to reform and redeem their history. Forgiveness makes it possible for the hurting person to accept and bless the past and to be free from its crippling wounds (Keen 34).

If hurting parents are to avoid the tragedy of despair, they need the promise of a meaningful tomorrow. For the Christian, this hope has its foundation in the knowledge and the love of a God who is persistent and eternal, who knows no finality, and who never quits. The troubles may not all melt away, the wayward child may never return, but God can give meaning and purpose to every life in every situation. This is the message and assurance offered by the pastoral counselor.

According to Sam Keen, only 10% of a person's story is visible or consciously known, leaving 90% of the story locked in the person's subconscious (Your Mythic Journey 11). If healing lies in the sharing of story, and 90% of the story is not readily available to the conscious mind, then what is needed is a tool to tap the unconscious and to release the lost parts of the story. With his book entitled Sharing Faith, Thomas Groome offers such a tool. Groome describes the sharing of stories as shared praxis (135). Shared praxis consists of three components: the active

(present), the reflective (past), and the creative (future). The history of the people of Israel serves as an illustration of Groome's concept of shared praxis. In times of persecution or backsliding, the people of Israel, through the rehearsal of their story, were able to recall and reclaim their historical identity, and to use that identity to shape their present faith life and to plan for the future and the fulfillment of God's promise. Likewise, present day Christians can find identity, meaning, and fulfillment through the rehearsal of story--God's story and their own story. In the retelling of stories, persons can once again feel the presence and comfort of the past, and gain a vision of hope for the future.

Groome breaks the process of shared praxis into five movements (146-48). The first movement is the naming of the present action. Through the use of probing questions, reason, memory, and imagination, the person is enabled to identify and to express a life theme that demands attention. This life theme may be expressed in symbol, word, gesture, dance, or story. This first movement answers the question, "What is the problem?"

For the hurting parent, this is an important first step. In the midst of denial, blame, and shame, hurting parents may not be able to readily identify the real problem. Storytelling in general, and this movement specifically, can facilitate the breaking down of barriers

and lead to the admission that there is, indeed, a problem.

The second movement involves critical reflection on the present action. Again using probing question, reason, memory, and imagination, persons are encouraged to move toward a deeper understanding of the identified life theme. This critical reflection is, in effect, a probing of one's own story, with all its reasons, assumptions, prejudices, and sources. This movement begins to answer the question, "What lead up to this present problem?"

Hurting parents sometimes fail to look to the past to find underlying causes for the present crisis. For some hurting parents, the past has been painful and they simply wish to leave the past alone. Other hurting parents want to avoid reliving past mistakes. For still others, the past has been filled with happiness and bliss, and appears to have no direct bearing on the present problem. This movement gives hurting parents cause to probe the past, as uncomfortable or unnecessary as that probing may seem to be. This step moves the person closer to a knowledge of, and a claiming of, their whole story--past, present, and future.

The third movement in shared praxis involves making accessible the Christian story and vision. This is accomplished by bringing to bear on the present action appropriate scripture, tradition, and liturgies. The purpose of this movement is to enable persons to uncover and appropriate the life-giving truths and values in the

Christian story. Groome offers the following word of caution: ". . . for many people who seek pastoral counseling, their religion is pathogenic--sickness-producing and growth-blocking. The last thing they need is to have their religious stories, symbols, and practices raised up again in rigid, authoritarian, reality-denying, idolatrous ways (422). The counselee should be guided to interpret the Christian story in a way that is "most likely to empower the realization of the values of God's reign--love, freedom,, peace, justice, healing, right relationship, faithfulness, forgiveness, hope, and so on--in this person's life and, through him or her, in the world" (Groome 422).

Remember that two of the four needs of hurting parents identified by Charles Swindol involved the need for a reliable savior, and the need for an unshakable faith. Those needs will begin to be met in this step, as hurting parents come to know God's story of faithfulness and hope, and are able to draw comfort and strength from a God who understands, and is present in, their crisis.

In the fourth movement, persons appropriate the Christian story into their own lives and present action. According to Groome,

The most brilliant insights of the counselor and of the social sciences and the most life-giving paradigms from the faith tradition are of little avail for health and wholeness unless counselees come to recognize them for themselves, to personally appropriate them and make them their own. (Groome 423)

Techniques such as writing, role-play, open-ended questions, and guided meditation make possible personal connections with the Christian story. William R. White, in Speaking in Stories, suggests that the "goal of preaching is not to inform. What preaching is about is inviting people to faith. Through the spoken word, we are to help people make connections between the biblical word and the stories of their lives" (24). Since preaching is nothing more than the sharing of the Story, then White's definition can easily be applied to storytelling as well.

For hurting parents, this means claiming for themselves the past, present, and future promises of God. In this step, hurting parents move from a knowledge of what God has done in the past to a belief that "what he's done for others, he'll do for me."

The fifth and final movement brings the person to a time of decision and response. Pastoral counseling, whether its intent is to heal, sustain, guide, reconcile, or nurture, should encourage and enable people to live and act in more healthful, holy ways. This movement reminds the pastoral care giver to provide persons with the opportunity to change attitudes and behaviors. This movement, which begins to address the future aspect of shared praxis, answers the question, "Where do I go from here?" The importance of this component of shared praxis is further explored in the final section of this chapter.

Groome's concept of shared praxis addresses and meets the four needs of the hurting parent, as described by Charles Swindol (247). The need to be realistic is met by the honest appraisal of the present crisis (present praxis) in movement one; the critical reflection on the present crisis in movement two; and the shaping of a realistic response to the crisis in movement five. The need for a friend is addressed in the fact that the very nature of shared praxis demands at least one other person with whom the story is shared. As already mentioned, a sense of community and belonging develops as the stories are shared. When the movements of shared praxis form the basis for a curriculum of small group support, the need for a friend is even more fully met. The needs for a Savior who is reliable, and a faith that is unshakable are met in movements three and four, as persons begin to access and appropriate the Christian story.

For the Christian, each story is actually a combination of three inter-connected stories: the person's own story, the story of the community, and the story of God. Effective pastoral care, then, involves

1. enabling persons to interpret their conscious life and to probe their unconscious;
2. helping persons to see the social context of their existence and to see themselves as a part of a whole; and
3. bringing the Christian story to bear in their lives.

It is my contention that a Christian support group for hurting parents, using the discipline of storytelling, will accomplish these three tasks. In the words of Sam Keen:

Our stories and myths don't dispel ignorance, but they help us find our way, our place at the heart of the mystery. In the end, as in the beginning, there will be a vast silence, broken by the sound of one person telling a story to another. (Your Mythic Journey 128)

### Helping Hurting Parents to Develop a Plan of Action

In the previous discussion of storytelling, it was established that every story involves a past, a present, and a future. No story, or interpretation of a story, is complete until the question is asked, "What do I do now?" In their book If You Really Loved Me, Drs. Jordan and Margaret Paul suggest that the crisis is not the most immediate concern for hurting parents. Rather, the most immediate concern is what they will do, or how they will react, in the face of the crisis (16-17). The Paul's go on to say, "When there is a conflict between parents and children, the most important question to be asked is, 'What is the loving thing to do in this situation'" (45).

A loving response is one that fosters the emotional and spiritual growth of all persons involved in the crisis. A loving response is caring, creative, and non-judgmental, and is characterized by an honest sharing of feelings and an appreciation for both sides of the story. Any action or reaction on the part of the parent should be grounded in the



desire to learn from the crisis and to move all parties toward wholeness and understanding.

An unloving response, on the other hand, is one that stifles growth, and feeds the crisis. The unloving response is automatic, learned, and reactive. It is often characterized by criticism, ridicule, anger, blame, manipulation, or silence. In extreme cases, an unloving response can include threats, violence, and physical force. Hurting parents who respond in unloving ways are seeking to avoid responsibility, feelings, pain, and self-examination.

How, then, does the hurting parent plan for and work toward a loving response to their child's crisis? The Toughlove Parents Manual offers the hurting parent a simple, yet effective, three-step formula for change (Phyllis and David York 28-38). The emphasis of this formula is on changing the responses and behaviors of the parent, and not on changing the behaviors of the child. These steps should be taken with the question in mind, "What is the loving thing to do in this situation?" Planning for change does not mean that the parent stops loving or caring for the child.

Step One requires the hurting parent to take a "stand." A stand is a long-term goal based on an honest review of the crisis. Hurting parents have the right to refuse to live in ways they do not want to live, and to refuse to live with children who mistreat them. A stand represents the hurting

parent's refusal to accept and enable the problem behavior of a child, or to passively accept the consequences of the child's behavior. When declaring a stand, the parent is making a statement about how the family is going to live in and through the crisis. The members of the support group may offer input to the hurting parent, but the parent, or parents, must take sole responsibility for choosing and declaring the stand. Most often, the stand is written as an "I will not. . ." statement, for example, "I will not bail my child out of jail again."

Step Two is the formulation of a "bottom line." A bottom line is a small step that, when taken, will move the parent toward the fulfillment of the "stand." For example, if the parent's stand is, "I will not lie for my child," an appropriate bottom line might be, "I will not sign any more excuses when my child skips school." At each meeting of the support group, parents will review their attempts to implement the bottom line, and, with the input and support of the group, will either formulate a new bottom line or re-dedicate themselves to the implementation of the existing bottom line.

Step Three is the ongoing process of using the support group as a resource in sticking to the bottom line. Bottom lines can be difficult to implement and to enforce. The child and other family members may not agree with the tactics of the parent. Some parents will feel guilty as

they test out their new behaviors. Other parents will find it is easier to put up with the status quo than to deal with the pain of change. Members of the support group can provide much needed encouragement, insight, and assurance as hurting parents struggle with implementing their bottom lines and moving toward the fulfillment of their stands.

Change is rarely easy to accept, but change is often needed. The alternative for the hurting parent is to continue to live the way things are. With the loving support of fellow travellers on the road to healing, hurting parent can have the hope, and the reality, of a brighter future.

#### Summary

This chapter has presented a lot of important information, including a discussion of the feelings and reactions of hurting parents, a discussion of what needs to happen if hurting parents are to experience healing and wholeness, and a discussion of the importance and influence of small group support and storytelling. To my knowledge, no one has ever attempted to wed storytelling and small group support in an effort to provide pastoral care to the hurting parent. For this reason, the information was drawn from a number of unrelated sources.

Based on the research, the joining together of small group support, storytelling, and pastoral care to hurting parents would appear to be an effective marriage. The

following chapter will discuss in some detail how all this information was brought together and utilized in the development of a support group curriculum. Chapter Four will report on the use of that curriculum in an actual pastoral care setting. The final chapter will present a summary of the content and impact of this dissertation.

## CHAPTER 3

## Design of the Study

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

According to a study by Church Information and Development Services, 27 percent of the 1470 households living within a three mile radius of the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church are concerned about dealing with the problems of their children and teens. Unfortunately, there are few or no locally available resources to help hurting parents respond to and cope with the problems of their children. This dissertation was designed to address the lack of help and support for parents with children in crisis. The Wyalusing Area and Elk Lake School Districts seem to do an effective job of addressing the needs and concerns of the children, and informing parents about the causes of crisis. Other local churches and organizations have, on occasion, conducted parenting seminars, which focus on the avoidance of crisis situations through more effective parenting. However, resources that specifically address the needs and concerns of the hurting parent, without attempting to solve the crisis or to better train the parent, are still in short supply.

The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to employ the discipline of storytelling in the development and testing of a support group curriculum for hurting parents, with the goal of facilitating the examination of, and

effecting a positive change in, the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the parent.

### Research and Operational Questions

This dissertation/project is based on the hypotheses that a combination of peer-group support and directed sharing and reflection using storytelling techniques will facilitate the examination of, and effect a positive change in, the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the hurting parent.

This hypotheses leads to several research and operational questions.

1. What are the common feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of hurting parents?
2. What are the most immediate needs of hurting parents?
3. Can storytelling be effective as a pastoral care tool in ministering to the hurting parent?
4. Can peer-group support play a role in bringing healing to the hurting parent?
5. Is the average hurting parent willing and able to apply the techniques of storytelling?
6. Can the hurting parent find healing even when the child does not change his or her beliefs and behaviors?

### The Subjects of the Study

This project employed what Leedy describes as a nonprobability, convenience or accidental sampling (152).

This means that the sampling/population was limited to those hurting parents who voluntarily chose to participate in the support group. As a result, it was impossible to control all bias. The subjects for this study were identified through personal invitations, from referrals by other pastors and laypersons, and by public announcements in church newsletters and local newspapers. Five parents volunteered to be a part of this project.

#### Researcher-Designed Tools

There were two researcher-designed tools used in this project: the H.O.P.E. (Healing Our Parenting Experiences) Support Group Curriculum, which is the variable to which the subjects were exposed, and the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire, which was used to measure changes in the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the subjects in this study.

#### H.O.P.E. Support Group Curriculum

The complete curriculum is included as Appendix A. The design of this curriculum is based on Thomas Groome's concept of shared praxis (shared story). The steps or movements of shared praxis, which are fully explained and expanded in his book entitled Sharing Faith, include (1) a focusing activity, (2) the naming of the present action, (3) critical reflection on the present action, (4) making accessible the Christian story, (5) making connections between the Christian story and the individual's story, and

(6) making decisions about how to live in the world based upon the information gathered and reflected upon in the first five movements (146-148). The format of the support group units is designed to carry the participant through these six movements. Each unit begins with a focusing activity, namely a brief devotional. Next, the participant is exposed to a personal story and a biblical story, both specifically chosen to cause the participant to focus upon and to name the present praxis or theme. In the next step, participants are led through a series of questions and/or exposed to a storytelling technique designed to facilitate personal reflection upon the stories shared and to encourage the making of connections between the personal example, the biblical story, and the participant's own story. Finally, participants are presented with an action component designed to enable persons to make important decisions concerning how they intend to live in the face of crisis.

The specific topics addressed in the six units were chosen after a reading of Margie Lewis' The Hurting Parent. According to Lewis, the hurting parents must (1) realistically admit and examine the crisis (Chapter 1); (2) honestly explore their feelings of isolation, rejection, anger, guilt, and despair (Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, and 10); (3) find meaningful support and fellowship (Chapter 3); (4) learn to forgive and to show unconditional love (Chapters 7 and 9); (5) find hope in God (Chapter 11); and (6) let go of



their children and entrust them to God (Chapter 12).

The overall goal of this dissertation/project is to assist hurting parents in finding meaningful support and fellowship. Each of the six units was designed to meet one of the concerns raised by Lewis. Unit One leads the participants in an examination of the present crisis. Unit two encourages the identification and examination of the feelings associated with family crisis. The third unit examines the role of prayer and private devotions in the life of the hurting parent. Unit Four is a study of unconditional love and forgiveness. The fifth unit is designed to enable the parent to turn their child over to God, allowing the child to face the consequences of his or her own choices.

The sixth unit introduces a process whereby hurting parents change their own reactions and behaviors. This unit is based upon a process outlined in Phyllis and David York's Toughlove Parents Manual (28-38). The first step in this process is taking a "stand." The stand is a long-term goal for how the parent will live with the child. The second step is the setting of a "bottom line" on a weekly basis. The bottom line is a short-term goal that when implemented will move the parent toward their "stand." The stands and bottom lines are determined by each individual participant with the input and support of a group of peers. Group support is essential as the stands and bottom lines are

enforced.

The storytelling techniques utilized in this project were taken from the personal experience of the researcher, both as a chaplain at the Scranton Counseling Center and as a student under Dr. Charles Killian, a professor of preaching and drama at Asbury Theological Seminary. Some of the reflection questions were adapted from the "Something to Think About" section at the end of each chapter in Margie Lewis' The Hurting Parent. Other questions were framed by the researcher as a result of the reading and research done for this dissertation.

Each unit was "road tested" with approximately eight persons in the young adult discussion group which is led each Sunday morning by the researcher, and with six to ten persons in the Congregational Reflection Group. The entire curriculum was then tested with two hurting parents who had refused to be a part of the actual support group, but who agreed to privately work through the curriculum. While these tests helped to define and to refine the curriculum, the true test of reliability came only when the curriculum was applied in an actual support group setting.

#### The Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire

The Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire is included in this dissertation as Appendix B. The purpose of this document is to measure changes in the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, reactions, and behaviors of the hurting parent due to their

exposure to the support group curriculum. Each participant completed a questionnaire prior to the first meeting, and again at the end of the sixth unit. A comparison of the two documents was made to determine what changes had occurred.

The statements to which participants were asked to respond were based on an extensive survey of the literature relating to hurting parents. The questions were framed around the most common feeling, beliefs, reactions, and behaviors of hurting parents as identified in such works as Margie Lewis' The Hurting Parent; William and Candace Backus' What Did I Do Wrong; John White's Parents in Pain; Guy Greenfield's The Wounded Parent; and Buddy Scott's Relief for Hurting Parents. The questions were grouped into the following categories: feelings and attitudes about the child and the crisis; reactions to the crisis and to the child; feelings about the role of faith and prayer; the parents' feelings about themselves as parents and as persons; beliefs about the need for differentiation in the parent/child relationship; and beliefs regarding the need for, and the health of, a support system.

The participants were asked to respond to each question using a sliding scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating an answer of "no" and 5 indicating an answer of "always," or an extreme intensity of agreement. This scale was chosen in order to establish degrees of feeling or agreement rather than simply determining the presence or absence of feeling

or agreement. As a result, the instrument was able to measure changes of intensity or frequency even in cases where the old feelings, beliefs, reactions, and behaviors remained following the intervention.

The questionnaire was pretested in three settings. First, ten members of the young adult (ages 25-41) discussion group, which meets at the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church and is led by the researcher, were asked to complete the questionnaire, giving special attention to questions that were unclear, questions that seemed irrelevant, and questions that should be added. The key question asked in attempting to establish the content validity of the questionnaire was: Does this document in fact measure the feelings, attitudes, beliefs, reactions, and behaviors of the hurting parent? Second, the questionnaire was distributed to nine members of the Congregational Reflection Group. These persons were asked to complete the questionnaire using the same criteria given the first group. Finally, the questionnaire was completed by, and reviewed with, the two parents who had also worked through the support group curriculum. The input of this third group was especially helpful in establishing the content validity of the document. Based on the input from these three groups, the document was refined into its present form.

## The Variables

### Independent Variables

Independent variables are those variables over which the researcher has control and is able to manipulate or change at will (Leedy 219). The independent variables in this project include

1. the content of the curriculum and the design of the pretest/posttest questionnaire,
2. the specific storytelling methods and probe questions used in each session,
3. the amount of time spent on each session on each specific question within the session,
4. the level of sharing within the group, and
5. the presentation of information and ideas beyond what is contained in the curriculum.

### Dependent Variables

Dependent variables are those variables which occur as the result of the influence of the independent variables, and over which the researcher has no control (Leedy 219). The dependent variables in this project include

1. the parent's feelings and attitudes about the child and about the crisis,
2. the parent's reactions to the child and to the crisis,
3. the religious life of the parent, i. e. how much importance the parent places on prayer and how the parents

sees the role and the presence of God in the midst of crisis,

4. the parent's feelings about himself or herself as a parent and as a person,

5. the degree to which the parent derives meaning and esteem from the child (differentiation), and

6. the presence of and/or importance of a support system for the parent.

### Measuring the Variables

This dissertation/project combines the case study method of research (Leedy 90) with the pre-experimental methodology known as the "one group pretest/posttest design" (Leedy 220). The key component is the qualitative comparison of the results of the pretest and the posttest surveys of the feeling, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of hurting parents. Emphasis was placed upon identifying and reporting notable changes that occurred in the subjects as a result of their being exposed to the support group setting and curriculum. Because the "Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire employs the sliding scale, it was possible to determine not only when a change had taken place, but also the degree of change that had occurred.

### Control of Confounding Variables

There are several extraneous variables that may have affected the outcome of this project. These variables include the age of the participants; the family history; the

sincerity of the participant; the marital status of the participant; the participants relationship to the child, i. e. birth parent or step-parent; the educational level of the participant; the emotional health of the participant; the age of the child in crisis; the type and severity of the crisis; the relationships within the group, for example, do the participants share a history apart from the group setting, or are there family relationships within the same group.

Because the nature of this project called for the use of a convenience or accidental sampling (Leedy 152), it was not possible to control all of these variables. In Part Seven of the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire, participants were asked for some basic information concerning their age, sex, marital status, and relationship to the child, as well as information regarding the age of the child, the type of crisis, and the presence or absence of previous counseling. Because of the small size of the sample, however, it was impractical to attempt to make valid distinctions based on these extraneous variables.

#### Data Analysis

The primary method of data analysis is a descriptive comparison of the data gathered through use of the pretest/posttest document. This analysis identified common shifts in the feelings and actions of the hurting parents. The findings are presented in narrative form in Chapter 4,

as well as in tabular appendices. The "Pretest Summary" (Appendix D) and the "Posttest Summary" (Appendix E) document the responses of each participant, and show the simple average of the group's response to each statement on the questionnaire. The "Comparison of the Pretest and Posttest Data" (Appendix F) shows the simple average of the group's pretest and posttest responses to each statement. This document also shows the amount of change between the pretest and posttest responses.



## CHAPTER 4

## Findings of the Study

A Brief History of the Support Group

In response to a number of personal invitations, newspaper articles, and bulletin announcements at the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church and several neighboring United Methodist Churches, five persons volunteered to participate in a support group for hurting parents. The support group utilized the H.O.P.E. (Healing Our Parenting Experiences) Curriculum which was developed as a part of this project (see Appendix A). I served as the facilitator for the group.

An orientation meeting was held on September 13, 1992, and the first meeting of the group took place on September 20, 1992. The decision was made to meet each Sunday evening from 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., at the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church. To date, fifteen meetings have taken place, the group has worked through the six-session curriculum, and the members have pledged to continue to meet indefinitely. Thanks to the commitment of the persons involved, there was perfect attendance at all sessions. The Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire (see Appendix B) was completed by each person prior to the first session, and again following the fifteenth session. The results of the pretest and posttest are presented in a later part of this chapter.

### The Subjects of the Study

Following are brief sketches of the participants in this project:

Participant A is a white male, age 47. He is the step-father of a daughter and two sons. The children range in age from eighteen to twenty-seven years. Two of the children, the eighteen-year-old son and the twenty-two-year-old son, are presently in crisis situations. This person has had no previous connection to the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church, and, for many years, has not been connected with any church. Participant A has been to a number of marriage counseling sessions in the recent past.

Participant B is the wife of Participant A. She is a white female, age 48. She is the biological mother of two children, and the adoptive mother of a third child. Her adopted son, age twenty-two years, and her biological son, age eighteen years, are the children involved in crisis-causing behavior. This couple has been married for fifteen years. Participant B has been involved in the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church for about four years, although her attendance has been sporadic. This person has been in crisis counseling with both of her sons, and in marriage counseling with her husband, Participant A.

Participant C is a white female, age 46. She had been widowed for about four years, and is the biological mother of three children: a grown daughter age twenty-one, who

caused a previous crisis when she rebelled against her mother and moved in with her boyfriend; a daughter age seventeen years, who is the child in involved in the present crisis; and a son age nine. Participant C has been an active and committed member of the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church since her childhood.

Participant D is a white female, age 35. She is married, and is the biological mother of three children: a ten-year-old son; an eight-year-old daughter; and a fourteen-year-old daughter, who is the product of a previous marriage, and who is the child in crisis.

This person occasionally attends the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church.

Participant E is a white female, age 49. She is married, and is the mother of seven children who range in age from five to twenty-nine years. The crisis-causing child in this case is a fourteen-year-old adopted daughter. This participant is an active member of the Braintrim Independent Baptist Church in Laceyville, PA.

The results and conclusions of this project are based solely on the experiences and responses of these five hurting parents. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to make sweeping generalizations regarding hurting parents as a whole.

#### Information About the Crises

This section addresses the question, "Do the various

crises exhibit any common characteristics?" A brief description of each crisis situation is given, and all identified commonalities are presented.

#### The Crises Described

At the first meeting of the support group each participant was asked to complete a Crisis Assessment (see Appendix A, Addendum 4). The completion of this form served three purposes. First, the parents were forced to begin a realistic examination of the present crisis, and of their child's behaviors and attitudes. Secondly, the information on this form provided the group facilitator with a brief glimpse into the history, and the intensity, of the crisis. Finally, the information recorded on this form was used by the individual parents as they began to develop strategies for change. For example, in Unit Six, parents were asked to review the Crisis Assessment in an effort to identify those attitudes and behaviors that would no longer be tolerated.

The responses to the Crisis Assessment have been summarized so that any common elements of the crises can be identified (see Appendix C). While there are several commonalities, the specifics of the crises, as learned through informal conversation with each parent, from information shared in the group sessions, and from the information appearing in the Crisis Assessment Summary, vary greatly from case to case.

Participants A and B are dealing with two separate

crises: an eighteen-year-old son who has moved out of the house and into the home of his girlfriend; and a twenty-two-year-old son who has spent time in jail for the theft of a car and other offenses, and who is presently being sought by authorities for parole violations. With both children, the problems have been reoccurring for several years, and have occasionally involved verbal and physical violence.

Participant C is dealing with the defiant behavior of a seventeen-year-old daughter who seems to rebel against all parental authority. Her behavior is attributed, in part, to the cancer death of her father nearly four years ago. The daughter's misbehavior, which includes smoking, drinking, lying, and driving the car without permission and without a driver's license, began about two years ago.

The problems of participant D stem from the behaviors of a fourteen-year-old daughter who is also rebelling against parental authority and is experimenting with smoking, drinking, and dating. This child's misbehavior began about one year ago. The daughters of participants C and D often act as a team in their misbehaving.

The behavior of the fourteen-year-old adopted daughter of participant E includes the direct defiance of parental orders; the refusal to wear the clothes purchased for her by the parent; planned tardiness for family, school, and church events; and general laziness and sloppiness. These traits have been present for some time, but have become more

problematic in the past year.

### Common Characteristics of the Crises

As varied as the overall crises are, the Crisis Assessment Summary identified the following common characteristics. When a child is in crisis:

1. arguing and dissention erupts between the parents of the child;
2. parents worry, lose sleep, and fear for their child's safety;
3. parents feel their authority has been challenged and/or rejected;
4. other family relationships are disrupted;
5. there is lying on the part of the child;
6. the child criticizes the parents' faith and values;
7. parents feel they are forced to lie to protect the child and the family;
8. the child begins to miss curfew and/or to stay away from home for extended periods of time;
9. the child is late for, or absent from, school; and
10. the child's grades begin to fall.

Even though the details of the crises differ greatly from child to child, there is much similarity in the hurt, disappointment, and pain caused to, and felt by, the parents in such situations. The following section of this chapter offers a more detailed look at how a child's crisis affects the life of the parents.

### Results of the Pretest

Prior to the first meeting of the support group, each parent was asked to complete the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire. This was done in order to document the feelings, attitudes, and reactions of each hurting parent prior to their being exposed to the curriculum and to the support group setting. The information from the individual questionnaires was then summarized to show, on a sliding scale of one to five, the responses of each participant, and the simple average of the five responses to each question (see Appendix D). This data was compared to the information presented in the literature review in an effort to discover similarities and differences between the experiences of the other writers and the experiences of this test group. The pretest data also was compared with the posttest data (see Appendix E), in order to document significant changes in the feelings, attitudes, and reactions of the parents as a result of their exposure to the H.O.P.E. Support Group Curriculum and to group support.

#### Common Feelings, Attitudes, and Reactions of the Hurting Parents

This section summarizes the pretest data, contained in Appendix D, concerning the question, "What are the common feelings, attitudes, and reactions of hurting parents?"

Common Feelings. The literature review (see Chapter 2) identified several common feelings experienced by hurting

parents. Among those feelings are embarrassment, anger, guilt, hopelessness, fear, and remorse. The pretest data support these findings. The following feelings were found to be experienced with moderate to extreme intensity: worthlessness, embarrassment, guilt, depression, rejection, anger toward the child, inadequacy, shame, and hopelessness (see Appendix D, Part One, Question 14). While fear and remorse were not provided as options on the questionnaire, the parents did express these emotions throughout the support group sessions. For example, one mother, fearing the possible death of her child, talked about what it is like to live without the hope of seeing her child grow old. Two other parents expressed the fear that other family members will discover the truth about what is happening. Two of the parents expressed fear for their own safety. In addition being expressed in such direct and dramatic examples, the emotion of fear plays a supporting role in feelings of shame, embarrassment, guilt, and hopelessness. Hurting parents often fear what other people will think. Some hurting parents fear that they may be to blame for their child's problems. Other hurting parents live with the fear that conditions will never improve.

For purposes of this dissertation, remorse was defined as sadness over chances missed, a longing for what used to be, or a yearning a brighter future. Perhaps the most telling display of remorse came in the collages. Each of



the five collages depicted an escape from reality and a flight into what could have been. The collages were dominated by pictures of small children, harmonious family relationships, smiles, bright colors, and cheeriness. In some cases, the pictures represented the parent's desire to return to the past, when life was more simple and the parents felt competent and valued. In other cases, the collages exposed the parent's desire to move into the future, where the present crisis will be only a memory, and life will be more normal. In at least two cases, the collage depicted the parent's dreams of what life could, or what should, have been. In each case, the parent exhibited feelings of remorse over the fact that at the present time, life is not what they want or need it to be.

There were additional feelings revealed in the results of the pretest. Despite all the problems and the pain, the parents showed unanimity in expressing extremely intense feelings of love for their children. In addition, all participants expressed confidence in the basic goodness of their children. Feelings of failure and of loneliness were expressed by each of the participants, with an average intensity of between moderate and high. The feelings of loneliness were due, at least in part, to the perception that other family members, such as parents and siblings, were not supportive. The parents in the group share the false belief that no one else is experiencing, or has

experienced, similar problems. As a result, the hurting parents believe that no one can understand or share their pain. This belief serves to intensify the feelings of loneliness and isolation. Margie Lewis points out that feelings of loneliness and isolation are directly related to the issue of shame (36). Shame often causes the hurting parent to withdraw from the very persons who could and would be of help in the times of crisis.

In addition to filling out the pretest questionnaire, the participants in the group were asked to simply make a list of the feelings they had experienced in times of crisis. In addition to the feelings already mentioned, the parents listed mistrust, frustration, confusion, and disappointment. They also acknowledged feeling that they were out of control and were being used by their children.

There were two other emotions expressed that I have not seen addressed in any of the literature. Two of the parents expressed a desire for revenge. As one of the parents expressed it, "I want my child to hurt like I have hurt." This desire for revenge does not express the parent's wish to harm the child, but expresses the desire to have the child know how their behavior is affecting the parent. Three of the five people in the group expressed the feeling of being in competition for their child's affection. In two of the cases the competition was a boyfriend or girlfriend. In the third case, the competition was a same-sex friend

with whom the child was spending an excessive amount of time. In some sense, the parents were jealous of, or felt threatened by, the third party.

These results indicate that the participants in the group have honestly examined and expressed their true feelings. However, when asked to respond to the statement, "It is wrong to feel the way I feel," all participants answered in the affirmative, with three expressing a moderate level of agreement, and two expressing a high level of agreement. This creates additional turmoil for the parents since, on one hand, they are getting in touch with their deepest feelings, but, on the other hand, they feel that those feelings are not acceptable.

Common Attitudes and Beliefs. A review of the Pretest Summary (Appendix D) reveals a number of common attitudes and beliefs held by the hurting parents in this case study. Some of the attitudes and beliefs regarding the present crises and the children are:

1. Parents have a right to be proud of their children.
2. Parents have a right to enjoy their children.
3. Parents have a right to know where their child is going and with whom the child will be.
4. It is wrong for parents to be angry with their children.
5. It is possible to hate the child's behavior while still loving the child.

6. The children have given their parents cause to mistrust them.

7. There is plenty of blame to go around. Three of the parents sometimes or often blame themselves; one parent sometimes blames the spouse; a peer group is often to blame according to four parents, and sometimes to blame according to one parent; the school system is seen to share the blame, at least some of the time, by three parents; and the child often or always, deserves the blame according to all five parents.

8. Better parenting would not have prevented the present crisis.

The pretest summary also provides the following insights into the participants' feelings about themselves as parents:

1. With a high degree of intensity, they consider themselves to be effective parents, and feel that they have done more things right than they have done wrong.

2. With the same degree of intensity, they see themselves as "good" persons, who do a number of things well.

3. The participants understand that their children are responsible for their own choices, and refuse to accept all the blame when their children make mistakes.

4. The parents see themselves as being responsible for cleaning up the messes left behind by the child.

5. The parents believe that, in spite of the crises, their children love them and perceive them to be good parents.

Common Reactions. Hurting parents react to crises, and to the children involved in the crises, in similar and predictable ways (see Appendix D, Part Two). For example, the hurting parents in this study:

1. deny their own needs to rescue their child;
2. refrain from confronting their children out of fear that the confrontation will just make matters worse;
3. often stay awake at night, worrying about their children, especially when the child is not safely at home;
4. cover up for their children by doing tasks that the children are supposed to do;
5. sometimes withhold time and conversation from their children;
6. take out their frustration on other family members;
7. turn to food, spending money, and religion for escape; and
8. blame the child's peers, the school system, and/or themselves for the child's crisis.

#### The Hurting Parents' Need for Support

Part Six of of Appendix D provides insight into the question, "What role can small group support play in providing ministry to hurting parents?"

When asked to respond to the statement, "I need the

support of other people," all five participants answered in the affirmative, with an intensity level of 4.6 on a sliding scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating an extreme degree of agreement. The group also concurred with the statement, "No one understands how I feel," this time with a moderate level of agreement. Hurting parents need the support and understanding of other people. But, there are two pieces of information which indicate that support was lacking for the participants of this study. First, four parents indicated that their families sometimes provide the needed support, and one of the parents admitted that the family rarely provides the desired level of support. Secondly, the responses indicate that the hurting parents and their spouses rarely agree on how to raise their children. Thus, another primary source of support is taken away.

On the positive side, all of the parents believe that they can provide a source of strength and support for other hurting parents, and each participant expressed a high level of comfort with the idea of sharing in a small group setting.

In summary, the pretest questionnaire documents the hurting parent's need for support and understanding, and indicates a willingness on the part of the parents to give and to receive that support.

#### Theological Issues

The following information deals with the question,

"What major theological issues affect the life of, and ministry to, the hurting parent?"

In Chapter Two, a number of theological issues were identified and explored. The pretest summary (Appendix D) provides insight into the participants understanding of some of these issues.

The Child's Free Will. The parents' responses to various statements indicate a realistic understanding of the concept of free will. For example, when asked to respond to the statement, "My child's crisis is the result of his or her own choices," four of the parents indicated a high level of agreement, and the fifth parent indicated a moderate level of agreement. This knowledge of the child's free will, however, does not appear to protect the parent from experiencing feelings of guilt and failure in times of crisis.

Grace. When asked to respond to the statement, "I believe that God loves me and understands me," the parents indicated a level of affirmation of 3.4, or moderate agreement. To the statement, "I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings, the parents responded with a level of agreement of 4.4, a high degree of affirmation. Each of the parents appears to have a basic understanding of, and sees himself or herself to be the recipient of, God unmerited love and acceptance.

Forgiveness. The literature review identified the

issue of forgiveness as one of the most important theological concerns for hurting parents. The results of the pretest affirm the relevance of this issue. Each of the five parents\ admitted the need to forgive a child and to forgive himself or herself. The average levels of agreement were 3.4 (moderate) and 4.0 (high) respectively.

Ironically, the parents responded to the statements, "I could never forgive my child," and, "I could never forgive myself," in the affirmative, with an average intensity of 3.0 (moderate). What this means is, the parents sense the need to forgive, but cannot imagine such forgiveness becoming a reality in their lives.

Each of the parents has a strong belief that God has forgiven his or her parenting mistakes. In response to the statement, "I believe that God has forgiven my mistakes as a parent," each respondent answered in the affirmative with an average intensity of 4.4 (high). The immediate concern for these parents is the need to grant forgiveness, rather than the need to receive forgiveness.

Unconditional Love. Several statements in the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire address the issue of unconditional love, which includes God's unconditional love for his children, and the parents' unconditional love for their children. The results of the pretest indicate that these parents have a healthy awareness of having received and given unconditional love.



Parents were asked to respond to the statements, "I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings," and, "I believe God loves and understands me." As a group, the parents responded in the affirmative, with average intensity levels of 4.4 (high) and 3.4 (moderate) respectively. But there were some interesting differences in the answers to these two statements. Three of the parents gave very similar answers to both statements. But two of the parents responded with a high or extreme degree of agreement to the first statement, but with a low degree of agreement to the second statement. This difference seems to indicate that while these persons believe that God can accept their thoughts and feelings, they are not convinced that God unconditionally loves them as persons.

The parents also share a strong sense of being loved by their children, in spite of the children's crisis-causing behaviors. The average of their responses to the statement, "My child loves me," was 4.2, indicating a high level of agreement.

There was very little variation in the responses to statements concerning the parents love for their children. The statement, "I love my child," received a affirmative response of 5.0, which indicates extreme agreement, from each of the five parents. When the statement was changed to, "I can love my child, even if there is no change in his or her behavior or attitudes," the group response dipped

only slightly to an average level of agreement of 4.8, still an extreme level of affirmation. To the statement, "I can show love for my children without showing approval of their behaviors or beliefs," the parents again responded with a high level of concurrence. When asked if they ever withhold love from their child in times of crisis, the parents responded with a resounding "no."

The parents also express the belief that their children are the beneficiaries of God's unconditional love. However, the degree of affirmation is somewhat lower than in the previous examples. In reply to the statement, "I believe that God is at work in the life of my child in a positive way," they indicated a moderate degree of agreement. As the issue of God's love for the children was discussed in the group sessions, the parents were able to verbalize their belief that God loves their children, even though God could never approve of some of their behaviors and attitudes.

Prayer. Prayer is of extreme importance in the lives of three members of the group, of low importance for one member, and of moderate importance to the final member. The parents pray for themselves as often as they pray for their children. Three of the parents admitted that they sometimes pray only as a last resort. The other two members claim that they rarely or never turn to prayer as a last resort.

Four of the parents believe that, to some extent, God has answered the prayers offered on behalf of their

children. Only one parent admitted to feeling that God had not yet answered her prayers. Even though, in some cases, the prayers of the parents seemingly have gone unanswered, each of the parents expressed a high or extreme degree of agreement with the statement, "I believe that in everything God works for good with those who love him." The parents have not given up on God's ability to bring their children through the present crisis.

#### The Importance of Letting Go of the Child

One of the research question presented in Chapter 1 is, "What is the difference between letting go and giving up?" That question is addressed in this section.

The parents in this group are heavily invested in their children. When confronted with the statement, "My child's welfare is my primary concern," the parents answered in the affirmative, with an average intensity of 4.8 (extreme). Their level of agreement with the statement, "My child is my primary source of joy," was only slightly less intense at 4.0 (high). All of the parents expressed at least a moderate level of agreement with the statement, "My child is my best friend." The good news in all of this is that the parents have not given up on their children, and want to be in a mutually loving and fulfilling relationship with their children. The bad news is that the parents may be too attached to their children, to the point that their feelings of self-worth and competence are grounded in their children.

When the children cease to be a source of joy, or when the children no longer want to be best friends with their parents, the hurt for the parents is all the more intense because the parents have invested the bulk of their time and energy in the parent/child relationships. This fact underscores the hurting parent's need to find additional sources of support and affirmation.

All of the parents express the belief that they are responsible for the happiness of their children, and for controlling the actions of their children. This information appears to contradict previous data showing that the parents believe that their children are responsible for their own choices and must be allowed to face the consequences of those choices. Throughout the support group meetings, parents discussed the folly of trying to take responsibility for what their children do, how their children think, or how their children feel. While these parents aren't giving up, neither are they letting go.

#### Findings from the Group Sessions

"Can storytelling be used as an effective pastoral care tool in a support group ministry to hurting parents?" The hurting parents in this test group were exposed to a researcher-designed curriculum which employs a number of storytelling techniques, including stories and fairytales, collages, drawings, and reflection questions. This section provides a review of the various units of the curriculum and

a description of what happened as the parents worked through those units. The description of the sixth unit speaks to the question, "Can the support group assist hurting parents in the identification and implementation of needed changes in beliefs, attitudes, actions, and reactions?"

### Unit One

The first unit in the H.O.P.E. curriculum is entitled, "How Did I Get in this Mess, and How Do I Get Out?" In this unit parents were encouraged to honestly identify and express their pain, and to realistically examine the present crises. The test group spent two meeting period, or three hours, on this unit. During this introductory unit, the parents began to make connections with God's story of love and grace, with humanity's story of rebellion and redemption, and with the stories of other hurting parents. As one member put it, "For the first time I don't feel alone."

As they worked through this unit, the parents reached some profound conclusions. They came to a more clear understanding of the presence and power of other influences in the lives of their children. For example, when discussing Proverb 22:6, one participant commented that the parent is not the only person involved in "training up" a child. Peer groups, other relatives, teachers, and television also have important input into the life of the child. That parent concluded, "Since the parent is not the

only influence, the parent cannot be solely to blame if the child goes astray."

Some other important conclusions and results are:

1. The parents began to see God as a hurting parent who knows how it feels to watch as a child rebels and goes astray. God, then, can fully understand the feelings and reactions of the hurting parent.

2. The parents were able to verbalize their hopes for the future. They were asked to write an ending to the story of Mark Lewis (Lewis 19-24). They were then able to make connections between their hopes for Mark and their hopes for themselves and their children.

3. After participating in an exercise based on Donald Joy's description of the hand-held trampoline (1-13), the parents were able to identify important gaps in their support systems, and to express a desire to fill in one of those gaps with group support.

## Unit Two

The second unit is entitled "Feelings! Oh, Oh, Oh, Feelings!" As the title suggests, this unit was designed to facilitate the identification and expression of the hurting parents' true feelings. The group spent two meetings on this unit. By the end of this unit, the parents were able to identify a number of feelings which they have experienced in times of crisis. Among those feelings are anger, anxiety, embarrassment, fear, mistrust, frustration,

confusion, hurt, disappointment, rejection, inadequacy, guilt, and selfishness. Reflecting on the story of the cleansing of the temple, as recorded in John 2:13-17, the parents began to understand that even Jesus showed strong emotion. The parents were able to make connections between their feelings and Jesus' feelings, and to understand that feelings must be acknowledged and expressed, rather than judged and repressed. They also learned that certain feelings, such as anger and hate, can be directed at their child's behavior and not necessarily at the child.

A major component of this unit was the creation and sharing of collages. The parents were asked to take a piece of poster paper and to fill it with cut-out pictures, words, symbols, or phrases. Each person was then asked to share their collage with the other members of the group, explaining why certain items were included. When the members of the group were asked to identify dominant themes or feeling in the collages, they used words like happiness, warmth, joy, togetherness, strength, love, nostalgia, and regret. Ironically, all five collages elicited nearly identical responses. In assembling their collages, parents seemed to transcend reality. In some cases they were regressing into the past, when the children were young and predictable, and times were more serene. In other cases, the parents were projecting into the future, longing for the day when their pain would end and their crises would cease.

This exercise provided the parents with the opportunity to identify, express, and explore thoughts and feelings of which they were not immediately aware.

### Unit Three

"When You Pray, Will You Pray for Me?" is the title of the third unit in the H.O.P.E. curriculum. This unit had a two-fold purpose: to encourage hurting parents to pray for themselves, their children, and other hurting parents; and to show hurting parents that God's answer to their prayers may be different from the answers they desire. The group spent two meeting periods on this unit.

After sharing in the biblical stories and the human dramas, the parents were able to identify three possible answers to prayer: yes, no, and not yet. They discovered the importance of seeking God's will rather than their own will. Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, as recorded in Matthew 26:36-46, became a model for the prayers of these parents.

The group discussed the fact that when Jesus needed the support of his disciples, he found them sleeping. The parents were able to identify key persons and groups from whom they need support, and to express the feelings they experience when those persons are found "sleeping."

Using the story of Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) as a discussion starter, the group shared their feelings about God's apparent refusal to grant



Paul's request, and about God's answer, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." One parents summed up the discussion by saying, "In my head I know what the Scripture is saying, but in my heart I still want God to fix everything." The opinion of the group was that a lot of time will pass before they are able to move from praying for, and expecting, specific answers to praying for, and accepting, God's will. When the parents were asked to imagine what Jesus might say to them if they were kneeling beside him in the Garden, they agreed on the following words of comfort: "Be patient; trust me; be strong."

At the end of the first meeting of this unit, the parents were asked to pray each day for the other members of the group and for all of the children involved. At the next several meetings, the parents were asked to share the feelings they experienced during times of prayer. One person said, "I'm not crying as much as I used to." Another parent stated, "When I pray for the other members of the group, I can feel their support." A third parent responded, "Praying for the group, and praying for the children, reminds me of the problems of others and that I am not alone anymore."

#### Unit Four

The fourth unit of the curriculum is entitled, "Loving the Unlovable; Forgiving the Unforgivable." This unit was

designed to address the giving and receiving of forgiveness and unconditional love. Two meeting periods were devoted to this unit.

The parents' discussion during this unit supplements and supports the findings of the pretest summary. Each of the parents was able to express a healthy understanding of unconditional love, and to give evidence of having given and received such love. One parent confessed, "I have to admit I don't always like my child, but I always love him." As the parents reviewed the genograms which were prepared in Unit One (see Appendix A, Addendum 6), they were able to identify persons from whom they have received unconditional love, and to see how certain patterns of response continue from generation to generation.

The parents were in agreement regarding the difficulty in forgiving certain behaviors, such as lying, as well as the difficulty in forgiving themselves. Much of the discussion concentrated on the difference between forgiving and forgetting. One parent expressed this view, "I don't think I can ever erase from my memory all that my child has done. But maybe I can put it on the back burner, and refuse to use it as a weapon against my child."

#### Unit Five

"Let Go, and Let God" is the title of Unit Five. This unit was designed to address the issues of responsibility and trust. The completion of this unit required two meeting

periods. The following conclusions were expressed by the parents at the end of this unit:

1. Parents should not automatically lower their standards just to avoid conflicts with their children.

2. Children have the choice to accept their parents' standards and stay at home, or to reject their parents' standards and live elsewhere.

3. Protecting a child from the consequences of his or her own choices may prevent the child from ever realizing the need to change.

4. The child's pain may be what motivates him or her to change.

5. Parents cannot change their children.

6. No matter how bad things may seem, there is always hope that God will intervene in the life of a child.

7. It is easier to talk about allowing a child to face the consequences of his or her choices, and releasing a child into the hands of God, than it is to actually do the releasing.

8. The support of this group will become even more important as the parents begin to experiment with new behaviors and new ways of reacting to crisis.

#### Unit Six

The sixth and final unit is entitled, "Taking Steps Toward Wholeness--the Process of Change." This unit led participants into the ongoing process of meeting to report

progress on, or problems with, "stands" and "bottom lines." A stand is a long-term goal set by each participant. A bottom line is a short-term strategy that, when implemented, will move the participant toward realization of the stand. To date, the group has spend five meeting periods on this unit.

All of the information and insights gained in the previous sessions were brought to bear on taking a stand. The parents were asked to review their crisis assessments, their collages, and their short stories in an effort to establish their long-term goals. In addition, other members of the group were asked to offer suggestions based on their understanding of the individual crises. The discussion and reflection questions in this unit encouraged parents to realistically consider the risks, as well as the benefits, of the proposed changes.

At the conclusion of the first meeting of this unit, the parents chose the following stands:

Participant A--"I will not allow our children to come between my wife and me."

Participant B--"I will not give in and allow my son to return on his terms."

Participant C--"I will stand my ground and enforce my rules and my disciplines."

Participant D--"I will not let my child dictate how our family is going to live."

Participant E--"I will not let my child control me."

For four meetings, the participants have reported on small steps, or bottom lines, that have been taken in efforts to realize their stands. Each of the parents has taken actions that would not have been possible without the guidance and support of this group. For example, one parent refused to allow her eighteen-year-old son and his girlfriend to move into a spare bedroom, even though she knew such action might mean that the son would never move back home. She told the group, "Before coming to this group, I would have let him move in under any circumstances. Now I realize that there are some things more important than having him back home. I did what was right for me, and for my family." Other parents have made similar statements. The mother of a fourteen-year-old girl sent the child to her room for the evening, refusing to give in to the child's pleas for mercy. She defended her actions by saying, "I just refused to ruin another evening putting up with her actions. Now she knows I mean business." These changes may be small, but they are significant. The success of this unit, and of the curriculum as a whole, is summed up by the mother who said, "Not a lot has changed, but the pain is not as bad as it used to be. I now feel that there is hope, both for me and for my child."

#### Some General Reflections on the Group Process

Based on my experience as the group facilitator I offer

the following observations:

1. The parents in this group had a tendency to want to concentrate on solving the problems of their children. It was difficult to keep them focused on their own wants and needs.

2. One or two members of the group tended to dominate the conversation. Other members of the group seemed content to let this happen. As facilitator, I had to make sure that everyone got a chance to speak.

3. Sometimes the parents just needed to talk, whether or not their conversation fit into the curriculum plan. Any plan must be flexible enough to allow for the unexpected.

4. Some of the participants came to the group looking for answers and quick fixes. As facilitator, I had to strike a balance between giving my opinion and giving advice. Participants were encouraged to come to their own conclusions regarding how they would deal with their individual crises.

5. There was an extremely high level of trust among group members. To my knowledge, there have been no breaches of confidentiality.

6. In one case, the child's crisis grew more serious as the group meetings progressed. The group truly became a life-line for this parent.

7. The closing worship became a very important part of the meeting plan. In the closing worship we were able to

summarize all that had gone on in the meeting, and to depart from the meeting with a sense of hope and unity.

8. One participant, who had not been to church in many years, has begun to attend Sunday services with his wife. He gives the support group credit for his new-found interest in matters of faith.

9. Now that the group has bonded together, it would be very difficult for new members to come into the group. A second group may be formed as additional persons express interest in the process.

10. The participants had little problem employing the storytelling techniques, such as collages, short stories, and drawings. There was some hesitancy, however, to explore hidden meanings and repressed feelings.

11. Members of the group were able to connect their own stories with the stories of other hurting parents and with the biblical stories. Ten weeks after the group had reflected on the story of the Prodigal Son, one mother commented, "I keep going back to the story of the Prodigal Son. I wonder how their relationship changed after the son returned. The bible stories really do apply to my life."

#### Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results

The stated purpose of this dissertation/project is "to employ the discipline of storytelling in the development and testing of a support group curriculum for hurting parents with children in crisis, with the goal of facilitating the

examination of, and effecting a positive change in, the feelings, attitudes, reaction, and behaviors of the parents." Information presented earlier in this chapter indicates that curriculum did, indeed, facilitate the examination of feelings, attitudes, actions, and reactions. The question now becomes, did the curriculum and the group process effect positive changes in the feelings, attitudes, actions, and reactions of the participants. At the conclusion of the fifteenth meeting, which was the fifth meeting period devoted to Unit Six, the parents once again were asked to complete the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire. The purpose of the posttest was to document the feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and reactions of the participants after their exposure to the curriculum and the support group structure. The results of the posttest were summarized to show the individual responses to each statement on the questionnaire, as well as the group average for each statement (see Appendix E). A comparison of the pretest and posttest results was made in an effort to identify significant changes in the beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and reactions of the participants (see Appendix F).

Part One of the questionnaire was designed to measure the hurting parents' feelings and attitudes about the crises and about their children. The most notable changes are in the area of blame. As a group, the parents moved from sometimes blaming themselves for the problems of their



children to rarely blaming themselves (a decrease from 3.2 to 2.0). Similar changes occurred regarding the blaming of a spouse and the blaming of the school system. In response to the statement, "Allowing my children to face the consequences of their own behavior seems uncaring," the parents moved from a moderate intensity of agreement (2.8) to a low intensity of agreement (1.8). These changes indicate that the parents are moving toward a more realistic understanding of the crises and of the responsibility of all persons involved.

The comparison of the pretest and posttest data reveals few significant changes in the feelings of the parents. As a group the parents feel slightly less lonely, decreasing in intensity from 3.8 to 3.2; less angry at others and at God, decreasing in intensity from 2.8 and 2.4 to 2.4 and 1.6 respectively; but slightly more shamed, increasing in intensity from 2.6 to 3.2. This unexpected increase in the level of shame probably indicates a better understanding of the emotion rather than signaling a real increase in the intensity of the shame. The group's feeling of hopelessness decreased from an intensity level of 3.6, or high, to a level of 2.6, or moderate.

Perhaps the most significant change came in the parents' acceptance of their feelings. The parents were asked to respond to the statement, "It is wrong to feel the way I feel." The results of the pretest indicate an

agreement level of 3.6, or high. The posttest shows an agreement level of 2.6, or moderate. A similar change is seen in the group's response to the statement, "It is wrong to be angry with my children." The level of agreement changed from 3.6, or high, to 2.0, or low. These results indicate that while there was little change in the specific feelings experienced by the hurting parents, the parents were better able to accept their feelings without judgement or condemnation.

Part Two of the questionnaire dealt with the hurting parents' reactions to the crises and to their children. The most notable changes are in the ways hurting parents support or enable their children's crises. The parents are less likely to cover for their children by performing tasks the children leave undone (the change being from 3.6, or often, to 2.2, or rarely). The parents also report a decrease in the time spent lying awake at night worrying about their children (the change being from 4.0, or often, to 2.8, or sometimes). Such changes indicate that the parents are no longer giving in to the wishes and demands of their children. They are refusing to be enablers of the crises, and are beginning to think about, and care for, their own needs.

The third part of the questionnaire addressed the religious life of the parents. Some of the most significant changes are:

1. The parents have a stronger belief that God is at work in their lives, and in the lives of their children (the change being from 3.6 and 3.0, to 4.4 and 4.2 respectively).

2. The parents are more convinced that God gives them the strength to endure each crisis situation (the change being from 3.6 to 5.0).

3. The parents more strongly believe that God loves and understands them (the change being from 3.4 to 4.8).

4. The parents are more likely to forgive themselves, their children, and other persons (the degree of positive change being 1.2, 1.4, and 1.0 respectively).

I believe that these changes reflect a religious awakening in the lives of these parents.

Part Four addressed the participants' feelings about themselves as parents and as persons. There was notable change in two areas. First, the average response to the statement, "Loving myself is acceptable," increased from 3.2, or moderate agreement, to 4.2, or high agreement. Secondly, in responding to the statement, "I am responsible for cleaning up my child's messes," the parents moved from a moderate level of agreement (3.2) to a low level of agreement (1.4). These changes show that the parents have come to realize that taking care of oneself is not to be equated with being selfish.

Differentiation was addressed in Part Five of the questionnaire. The more important changes are:

1. The parents find it increasingly difficult to be happy when their children are unhappy. The average level of agreement with the statement, "I cannot be happy when my child is unhappy," rose from 2.8 (moderate) to 3.6 (high).

2. The parents are more likely to allow their children to make important decisions for themselves. The average response to the statement, "My child is allowed to make important decisions for him/herself," changed from 2.8, or sometimes, to 4.0, or often.

3. The parents better understand that they cannot control the actions of their children. The average level of agreement with the statement, "I am responsible for controlling my child's actions," changed from 4.0 to 2.2

Part Six of the questionnaire was designed to address the presence or absence of support in the life of the hurting parent. The posttest revealed increased tension between one participant and her spouse over how to deal with their child's crisis. The results also show that the participants share a continuing need for support and a willingness to be a source of support for other persons.

### Summary

The results of this study show that the parents have, indeed, begun to take a realistic look at themselves and their crises, and have taken important steps toward change. Their healing is a process that, though not complete, is well under way.

## CHAPTER 5

## Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The problem addressed in this dissertation/project is that hurting parents tend to find little support, and few resources that promote healing, in their communities and churches. The stated purpose of this study was to employ the discipline of storytelling in the development and testing of a support group curriculum for hurting parents, with the goal of facilitating the examination of, and effecting a positive change in, the feeling, attitudes, reactions, and behaviors of the parents. This program was intended to help hurting parents survive the crises of their children, but was not intended to solve the problems that cause the crises.

Following a review of the available literature that addressed the needs and concerns of hurting parents, the H.O.P.E. Support Group Curriculum was developed. The design of this six-unit curriculum is based on Thomas Groome's concept of "shared praxis." The stories of the Bible, of other hurting parents, and of the individual parents are shared in a small group setting. Through the use of reflections questions, short stories, fairytales, collages, and drawings, participants are led to make connections with, and to interpret the implications of, the biblical stories and the stories of other parents. The sharing of stories

encourages the hurting parent to examine conscious and subconscious feelings and attitudes, and to explore how their actions and reactions affect the crisis situation. Ultimately, the parents are invited to identify areas of their lives where change is necessary, and to take steps toward implementing those changes.

Five hurting parents agreed to form the test group for this curriculum. The group began meeting on September 20, 1992, and met each Sunday evening from 8:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Prior to the initial group session, each parent met for an informal conversation with the facilitator, and was asked to complete the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire. The parents then were exposed to the six-unit curriculum. The process of working through the curriculum required fifteen two hour meetings. At the present time, the group is still meeting and plans to continue indefinitely. In future meetings, the participants will review the units already completed, and will share the successes and failures they experience as steps are taken toward the realization of long-term and short-term goals.

Following the fifteenth meeting, the parents once again completed the Pretest/Posttest Questionnaire. A comparison of the pretest and the posttest responses was made in a effort to identify significant changes in the feelings, attitudes, actions, and reactions of the hurting parents. The findings of the pretest, the posttest, and the

pretest/posttest comparison are reported in descriptive form in Chapter 4, as well as in tabular appendices

### Conclusions

On page six of the introductory chapter, nine goals were put forth. The time has come to review those goals and to determine whether or not those goals have been met.

1. Participants in the group will find caring, non-judgmental support. This goal was realized. When one mother was lamenting past mistakes, another person gave her a hug and said, "You can't undo the past. All you can do is try to make a better future." There were numerous expressions of love and compassion. In several instances, the parents would phone one another seeking the support needed to get them through until the next scheduled meeting. No one was made to feel that he or she was to blame for the present crisis in the child's life. The fact that the group has pledged to continue meeting is an additional witness to the success of the program.

2. Parents will better understand some of the dynamics of parent/child relationships. The previous chapter contains information that proves the parents in this test group did gain new insights into the responsibilities of parents and of children. The participants learned that the role of the parent changes as the child grows older--there is a time to hold on to the child and a time to let go. The parents also were better able to distinguish between crises

resulting from normal growing pains, and crises resulting from serious, deviant behavior.

3. Parents will be able to name their true feelings and attitudes, without judging those feelings and attitudes to be appropriate or inappropriate. As reported in Chapter 4, the participants came to the understanding that their feelings are acceptable, and that God can understand and accept their deepest emotions.

4. Parents will be enabled to find worth and meaning as persons, apart from being the perfect parents of perfect children. The Posttest Summary indicates that the parents do, indeed, have a healthy view of themselves as persons and as parents. They see themselves as good, lovable people who do a lot of things well.

5. Parents will develop long-term and short-term strategies for reacting to, and dealing with, their crises. Unit Six of the curriculum presented the participants with an opportunity to begin the process of change. The group has now spent five sessions sharing their successes and failures in implementing their chosen changes. Each of the parents has made significant progress in moving from being controlled by the crisis to being in control of the crisis. Chapter 4 offers more detailed documentation of these changes.

6. Parents will receive support from other members of the group as their strategies were implemented. This, too,



has happened. As one parent explained, "Change is never easy, but at least I know there are five other people who understand why I'm doing what I'm doing." The support of the group has truly become a lifeline for these hurting parents.

7. Participants will better understand the theological concepts involved in their relationships, with emphasis on grace, repentance, forgiveness, unconditional love, and reconciliation.

8. Parents will develop an appreciation for the power of intercessory prayer, private devotions, and communal worship. Sufficient evidence has been presented in Chapter 4 to prove that the seventh and eighth goals have been realized. The opening and closing devotions, the sharing of the biblical stories, and completion of the unit on prayer were especially influential in the achievement of these two goals.

9. Participants will take the lead in establishing an on-going, lay led program of support. This goal has not yet been realized. The group has agreed to continue meeting indefinitely. I am making a concerted effort to turn over more of the leadership to other members of the group. I firmly believe that the group has bonded together to such an extent that the members will continue to meet even as I fade into the background, becoming a resource person rather than the facilitator.

This project was guided by a number of research questions. Proof that research questions one through eight, as presented on pages seven of Chapter 1, have been answered can be found in the literature review and in the results of the study as reported in Chapter 4.

Research question nine asks, "Can there be healing for the hurting parent without the active participation of the child?" The results of the study, as reported in Chapter 4, support an answer in the affirmative. While the members of this test group cannot be defined as healed, the process of healing has begun. The parents enjoy better emotional and spiritual health than they enjoyed prior to participation in this program.

The tenth research questions asks, "Is it possible for hurting parents to find healing even if the prodigals never return?" It has already been established that healing has taken place. In each of the five crisis situations presented in this dissertation, the crisis continues to plague the family. The only thing that has changed is the way the parents react to and deal with their crises. And so, the answer is yes--hurting parents can find healing even when their children continue to go astray.

The final research question asks whether it is possible to separate the effects of the curriculum from the effects of the group process. The answer is no. It is impossible to determine whether there would have been similar results

if the hurting parents had been brought together in a group setting with no set curriculum or agenda. This case study proved that the use of the curriculum in an actual support group setting brought the expected and desired results. It is not possible to conclude whether or not the same results could have been brought about by other means.

The curriculum was developed, and the project was conducted with four basic needs in mind (Swindol 247):

1. the need to be realistic,
2. the need for a friend,
3. the need for a Savior who is reliable, and
4. the need for a faith that nothing can shake.

The curriculum did address the need to be realistic. Unit One encouraged parents to realistically examine the causes and the effects of their crises. The second unit provided participants with the opportunity to realistically examine their feelings. Unit Five led the members of the group into a realistic review of the responsibilities of the parents and the children.

The entire project was designed to address the need for a friend. The hurting parents in the group became the needed friends for one another.

The needs for a Savior who is reliable and for a faith that nothing can shake were addressed directly in Unit Three and Unit Four. The third unit dealt with the issue of prayer, and the fourth unit raised the issues of forgiveness

and unconditional love. The presentation of, and reflection on, appropriate biblical stories and personal stories of faith provided additional opportunities for the participants to confront their needs for a reliable Savior and an unshakable faith.

What conclusions can be drawn as a result of this project?

1. The project has met the all of the expressed goals.
2. All of the research questions have been addressed and answered.
3. The H.O.P.E. Support Group Curriculum sufficiently addressed the needs and concerns of the hurting parents in the test group, and provided the necessary impetus for change.
4. Storytelling can be an effective pastoral care tool in addressing the needs and concerns of hurting parents. Storytelling encouraged the parents to explore feelings and motivations that were not immediately know to them, and to bring to bear on their problems the stories of the Bible and the stories of other hurting parents.

I cannot say with certainty whether or not the application of storytelling techniques brought about any major revelations in the lives and minds of the participants. Three of the five persons have a long history of denying the seriousness of the problems in their families, and of denying any possible role they may have

played in the crises of their children. Although I have no hard data to support my claim, their occasional tears and lapses into silence convinced me that the sharing of stories did, in fact, move these parents closer to reality.

5. The support of other hurting parents is an important ingredient in ministry to hurting parents. Group support offers a cure for isolation, and provides a setting in which thoughts and feelings can be shared without the worry of judgement or retribution.

6. The changes in the feelings, attitudes, and actions of the parents were not as significant as I would have expected. The results of the pretest indicate a greater degree of emotional and spiritual health than my personal observations would have suggested. It is possible that the participants (1) gave the answers they thought were more acceptable, (2) were able to deny their true thoughts and feelings, or (3) subconsciously gave the answers they wished were true. For purposes of this project, however, their answers must be accepted at face value.

7. The male in the group was more uncomfortable with the storytelling techniques than were the females. He was usually a week late with the assignments, as if he were waiting to see what the other members produced before he would take the risk. The women were more creative and enjoyed the challenges presented by the assignments.

8. Some of the parents in this group displayed a

tendency to substitute the love found in the support group for the love they crave from their children. As a result, these parents may become too dependent upon the support group. The focus of the curriculum and of the group meetings must be on preparing hurting parents for life in their families, and not on providing an escape from their families.

9. After this group of parents had met three or four times, the possibility of new persons entering the group was exhausted. As additional hurting parents come forward seeking support, it will be necessary to begin a second group.

10. One of the assumptions behind this project is that parents are not totally responsible for the behavior of their children. Healthy families can produce emotionally and behaviorally unhealthy children. However, only one of the five families represented in this test group could be labeled as healthy. The family of participants A and B, the husband and wife team, has a history of alcohol, sexual, and physical abuse. The children are simply following in mom's and dad's footsteps. The family of participant C is the most healthy. The father died of cancer four years ago. At least some of the stress in this family is the result of the family's inability to accept and process his untimely death. The family history of participant D includes two bitter divorces, various rumored affairs, and the abuse of alcohol.

Again, the child is acting out the behaviors she has witnessed at home. The family of participant E has a history of alcohol abuse and rebellious behavior.

In this test group I was not dealing with basically "good" parents who produced "bad" children. While this dynamic did not significantly affect the success of the project, it did place added importance on the issues of forgiveness and unconditional love.

### Looking Ahead

As I was preparing for the oral presentation of this dissertation, I received a call from the District Superintendent advising me of the Bishop's intention to appoint me to the Cooperstown (New York) United Methodist Church, effective July 1, 1993. Cooperstown is approximately a three-hour drive from my present appointment. This pending move has important implications for the future of the support group at the Skinners Eddy United Methodist Church.

I regret that I have not had sufficient time to cultivate lay leadership within the group. Although I have advised and encouraged the present participants to continue to meet following my move, I am not convinced that the group can or will continue to function effectively without some leadership from outside the group. My fear is that if the group meets on its own, the meetings may become little more than gab sessions. But I am also not convinced that a new

pastor, even if he or she is interested in becoming involved in such a ministry, will be able to assume leadership of this existing group. The absence of a proven record of trustworthiness on the part of the pastor will, I believe, have a negative impact on the level of sharing in the group. And so, six months after its beginning, this ministry of support for hurting parents faces an uncertain future.

On the positive side, participation in the support group did help these parents survive difficult crisis situations. Even though the crises have not ended, in each case there has been resolution to the point where continued participation is not crucial. On one hand I feel like I am abandoning these people at a crucial time in their lives. On the other hand, I believe that God is at work in this move and that the current participants will survive--with or without the continuation of the group process. Perhaps this move is God's way of preventing the members from becoming dependent on me rather than on each other.

When I met with the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee of the Cooperstown United Methodist Church, the members were very excited about the prospect of starting a support group for hurting parents in that community. As I contemplate that possibility, there are some things that I will do differently. First, I will make a concerted effort to find a layperson who is willing to share in leadership responsibilities. Second, I will attempt to share the



duties of facilitator with other members of the group.

Third, I will have the group meet less often. With weekly meetings too much information was presented in too short a time period. As a result, the participants did not have enough time to reflect upon all that was being presented.

Fourth, I will have a personal interview with each potential group member. This will be even more important in a setting where I have little or no previous relationship with the persons, and have limited knowledge of the crisis situations. Finally, I will keep a journal of my own experiences, insights, and observations. This information will be very helpful when evaluating the success of the process, and when reflecting on my personal growth.

The H.O.P.E. Support Group curriculum will be an important tool in my ongoing ministry to hurting parents. The success of this initial test gives me reason to believe that other hurting parents can benefit from this approach to ministry. It is my hope that other persons will find this resource to be of value in their ministry to hurting parents.

**H. O. P. E.**  
(HEALING OUR PARENTING EXPERIENCE)  
**Through**  
**Storytelling**

**A Support Group Curriculum for Hurting Parents**

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# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT RATIONALE AND GOALS

The phone rings at 5:00 a.m. The unknown voice on the other end explains to an anxious mother that her sixteen year old son has been arrested for drunken driving following an all-night drinking party. The mother reacts in anger, shouting into the phone, "I can't take this any longer. Just keep him there!" But in a few hours she is at the police station bailing out her son, just as she has done several time before.

A father sits in the principal's office, feeling embarrassed and betrayed, as he learns that his daughter has been skipping classes for weeks, and is about to be expelled for smoking marijuana in the girl's bathroom. In desperation the father cries out, "Where did we go wrong? We've told her and told her, but she just doesn't listen to us anymore. I don't know what we're going to do."

Every day, in every community, young people are involved in behaviors that go against everything they have been taught, and everything their parents stand for. The behaviors are varied, ranging from skipping school to using and dealing illegal drugs. And every day, in every community, parents become frustrated in dealing with their children's behaviors. Their emotions include blame, guilt, confusion, shame, anger, and embarrassment. The parents may feel helpless, victimized, betrayed, and disappointed.

The parents' task of dealing with crisis-causing children is further complicated when their sense of worth comes primarily from being the "good" parents of "good" children. When the child strays from the expected norms and values, the parents whole world crashes down. The common assumption reached by parents in this situation is, "I must be a bad person and a bad parent--it's all my fault." What they fail to realize is that in many cases, the crisis is the result of the child's own choices, and not the result of poor parenting. Rather than hearing the voice of condemnation and blame, hurting parents need to hear a voice of love and understanding, assuring them that they are not alone in their suffering, that they are not totally to blame for their child's actions, and that there is hope and healing to be found in faith and in the church family.

While the problems are quite common, few parents are

motivated or qualified to meet the problems head-on. Many suffer in the silence of cover-ups and denial. Other retreat behind walls of shame and guilt. Still others count on drugs and alcohol to dull the pain of the crisis. The result is more pain and more crisis.

It is my belief that the church must take the lead in providing support and healing to parents in crisis. Too often the church's response is to fix blame and, like the Pharisees, to lament, "Thank God we're not like them." Much of the available literature on parenting is directed toward the improvement of parenting skills, or toward solving the problems of the child. What is needed is a program that addressed the specific needs of the parent of children in crisis, without assuming that the parent has in some way failed the child. We need a program that will help "pretty good" parents to feel "good" about themselves, even when their children go astray.

This curriculum is intended to meet that need. Bringing together the disciplines of storytelling, family-systems theory, and small-group ministry, this program is designed to effect a positive change in the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors of the hurting parent. This curriculum will help the parent answer the question, "Where do I go from here?" The primary purpose of the curriculum is to facilitate the sharing of stories: the Biblical story, the story of others who have endured similar crises, and the personal story of each participant. Through the telling and hearing of stories, together with time for reflection and brainstorming, healing and change will be initiated.

This curriculum is built on the underlying belief that the family is a system. Any change, positive or negative, in one part of the system will, by necessity, cause a change in the other parts of the system. Thus, it may be possible to effect a change in the crisis-causing child by bringing about a change in the attitudes and the behaviors of the parent. Remember that the focus of this program is on the parent. However, since their lives are not lived out in a vacuum, other persons will be affected by the parent's participation in this process. There is a further assumption that the family and faith provide the best hope for surviving the present crisis and the best protection against future crises. This program will attempt to strengthen the family unit as well as the religious and theological base on which the family is built.

Participation in the support group should be open to all parents who are not satisfied with the present behavioral or relational make-up of the parent/child relationship. Availability of this ministry can be announced by a general

invitation in the newspaper or church newsletter, or by special invitation. The optimum size of the group would be 10-12 persons. If there are more than twelve persons interested, two groups should be formed.

It is suggested that interested persons be invited to an orientation session prior to the official start of the support group. A video, such as "Fractured Families" or "The Prodigal" may be shown as a discussion started. Potential participants should be made aware of the expectations concerning attendance, sharing, confidentiality, and meeting schedules. The H.O.P.E Group Covenant (see Addendum 1) may be reviewed at this orientation or may be held until the first meeting of the support group.

Each group will decide on the frequency of meetings. The group should be no more than once each week, and no less than once each month. Every other week (i.e. every other Monday) is suggested. The length of each meeting should be one and one-half to two hours, not counting time for refreshments and informal sharing. While the curriculum consists of six units, it is not intended that one full unit be covered at each meeting. Depending on the level of participation and sharing, the completion of a single unit could take two or three meetings. Further, it is not intended that the support group end after completion of the sixth unit. The format of Unit Six provides for an indefinite number of meetings. The group should continue as long as it meets the needs of the participants. As new participants come into the group, previous units may be repeated, or new groups formed.

Through participation in this support group, parents will:

1. Find caring, non-judgmental support from people who understand and share their pain and who can assist in an objective evaluation of the situation.
2. Better understand some of the basic dynamics of parent/child relationships.
3. Be able to name their true feelings and attitudes without judging them to be appropriate or inappropriate.
4. Find worth and meaning as a person, apart from being the "perfect" parent of "perfect" children.
5. Develop both long-term and short-term strategies for reacting to, and dealing with, the child in crisis.
6. Receive support from other persons in the group as those strategies are implemented.
7. Come to a better understanding of the theological concepts of grace, repentance, unconditional love, forgiveness, and reconciliation.
8. Develop an appreciation for the power of intercessory prayer, private devotions, and communal worship.

9. Be in a position to take the lead in providing an ongoing, lay-led program of support in their church or community.

John Wesley once wrote, "If your heart is as my heart, then give me your hand." Heart to heart, and hand in hand, hurting parents can find hope and healing, and come to know that there is life beyond the present crisis.

## UNIT ONE

### "How Did I Get In This Mess, How Do I Get Out?"

*"Common sense says that all the blame does not necessarily lie with you (the parent) if one of your children goes badly wrong." (White, John. Parents in Pain. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1979. Pg. 29.)*

*"Naming the pain is the first step in healing the pain."*

Goal: In this unit, participants will begin the process of naming their pain and identifying the source of their pain. In effect, the goal of this session is to answer the questions, "What is the problem?" and "Where do I go from here?" By the end of this unit, participants will:

1. Understand that the parent is not responsible for every crisis in their child's life;
2. Have gained a basic understanding of how the parent is controlled by the behaviors and attitudes of the children and other family members (including family members from the past);
3. Have insight into the real source of the family crisis and of their pain; and
4. Express a desire to change the present situation through group process and with group support.

#### Suggested Meeting Plan

- I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or a member of the group (approx. 5 minutes).
- II. Telling the Story
  - A. The Biblical Story: Proverbs 22:6  
Deuteronomy 30:15-19  
Luke 2:39-52
  - B. The Human Drama: Read or tell the story of Ralph and Margie Lewis' son, Mark. (Lewis, Margie. TheHurting Parent. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988. Pages 19-24. Share a personal experience of dealing with a child in crisis.

#### III. Discovering the Personal Stories



1. Reflect on Proverbs 22:6. What have you done to teach your child the right way, and to provide good models of Christian living? What went wrong? Who is to blame for the choices your child has made?
2. Does Proverbs 22:6 make sense to you in light of your present family situation?
3. Reflect on Deuteronomy 30:15-19. What are the benefits of Godly choices? What are the consequences of unGodly choices? Is it fair that God demands such a high price for humanity's wrong choices?
4. Why do you think God allows persons the choice of life or death? Why is it important that your child have similar choices, and similar consequences?
5. In the passages from Luke, how did Jesus' behavior affect Mary and Joseph? How might you react in a similar situation? How do you think your child would react to Mary's correction?
6. How do you think Mary and Joseph felt while they were searching for Jesus? When they found him? Do you have similar feelings when your child acts in unacceptable ways?
7. Did Jesus understand and appreciate his parents' feelings? Does your child understand and appreciate your feelings?
8. What character traits do you admire in Jesus? In Mary and Joseph? What character traits do you share? Do you lack?
9. How well did your parents understand you? Did you ever give them cause for alarm? How did they react? How did you need for them to react?
10. In the personal story shared by the group leader, what first caught you attention? With which character can you most identify? Which character troubles you most.
11. What would you change in the characters in the personal story shared by the group leader?
12. Write you own ending to Mark's story. How does the ending reflect your hopes for your own situation?

13. In his book entitled, Bonding, Donald Joy asks the reader to imagine a hand-held trampoline with five to eight persons holding each side. The persons on side one are immediate family, such as parents, children, and spouse. The persons on side two are other relatives, such as aunts, uncles, grand-parents, and cousins. Side three is held by your current friends. The fourth side is supported by acquaintances from work, from church, from clubs, and from other sources. Who is holding your trampoline? Which groups are lacking in number? Where can this group fit in? Your spouse? Your children?

#### IV. Action

1. What general truths about parent/child relationships can you identify from the above discussion and information? Accumulate these truths on newsprint for future reference.

2. Complete the "Crisis Assessment."

3. Prepare a simple genogram (see Addendum 6 for an example). What patterns of behavior, perceptions, and thinking can you trace from generation to generation? Are there specific issues, such as money, alcohol, sexuality, drug abuse, and marriage problems, that keep appearing generation after generation? Are there any patterns that you would like to see broken? What need to happen? Who needs to change?

4. For the first meeting of the next unit, make a collage approximately 22"x 28" in size. From magazines or newspapers, cut out words, images, pictures, or phrases that speak to you in any way. There is no right or wrong way to put your collage together. Just let your energy and the Spirit guide you. Be prepared to share your creation with the group. NOTE: The group facilitator will foster interpretation of the collage by means of the questions found in the appendix.

5. Read and sign the Covenant (see Addendum 1).

V. Closing Worship. Read the Covenant and offer a prayer of commitment. Recite or sing hymn #266 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "Heal Us, Emmanuel, Hear Our Prayer."

#### VI. Refreshments and Informal Sharing



## UNIT TWO

### "Feelings! Oh, Oh, Oh, Feelings!"

*"Emotions must always be accountable to the faculties of reason and will. That accountability is doubly important for those of us who purport to be Christians. If we are to be defeated during life's spiritual pilgrimage, it is likely that negative emotions will play a dominant role in that discouragement." (Dobson, James. Emotions: Can You Trust Them? Ventura: Regal Books, 1980. Page 11.)*

*"Until you make friends with your feelings, until you and your emotions are on a first name basis, your own actions and reactions will continue to puzzle you and confuse your situation." (Backus, William and Candace. What Did I Do Wrong, What Can I Do Now. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990. Page 67.)*

**Goal:** In this unit, the participants will begin to identify and to discuss the feelings associated with family crisis. This unit is intended to help the participants to name and to understand their feelings, but is not intended to be a therapy session in which those feelings are processed in detail. This curriculum will encourage an honest appraisal of each person's feelings, but will not attempt the healing of negative or damaging feelings. For some participants, that healing will come about as a result of the sharing and the self-examination done in the group meetings. For others, the healing may require more intense therapy. By the end of this unit, participants will have:

1. Begun to name their true feelings, without passing judgment on those feelings;
2. Begun to understand that these feelings are normal, and are not unique to them or their situation;
3. Begun to see that the presence or absence of certain feelings does not destroy their personhood--e.g., "good" people do get angry; and
4. Come to believe that God understands how they feel, and accepts them as they are.

### Suggested Meeting Plan

- I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or a member of the group (approx. 5 minutes).
- II. Telling the Story
  - A. The Biblical Story: John 2:13-17 and/or Acts 7:54-58
  - B. The Human Drama: Read or tell the stories of "battles with the night" from Dobson's, Emotions: Can You Trust Them?, Pages 7-9. (Dobson, James. Emotions: Can You Trust Them? Ventura: Regal Books, 1980.)
- III. Discovering the Personal Stories
  1. How many different emotions can you identify in the reading from the Gospel of John? In the reading from Acts? Are there emotions that are common to both readings? Can you give an example of an emotion that seemed "right" in one instance, but "wrong" in another?
  2. Can you identify with Jesus' apparent anger and frustration? If you could clean out a place like Jesus did, what place would you clean out? Who or what would need to be cast out?
  3. What, if anything, in your own life needs to be cleansed? Are there feelings and emotions that you would want to throw out? Are there feelings and emotions you want to embrace?
  4. What does this story tell you about Jesus' demands for holiness? How might those demands be transferred to your family situation? Were Jesus' demands unreasonable? Are your demands unreasonable?
  5. How do you feel about the money changers? How do you feel about Stephen? What is similar? What is different?
  6. What do you think of Stephen's ability to face persecution with a forgiving spirit? What are the implications for your situation?
  7. What persecutions or trials have you had to face recently? How did you feel? How did you react? What role did God play?
  8. On newsprint, list as many feelings as you can that accompany family crisis. Which feelings are acceptable? Which are unacceptable? What makes the

difference? (NOTE: Feelings are neither "good" or "bad" in and of themselves. What is important is how a persons acts upon their feelings.)

9. What can happen when a person determines a particular feeling is not acceptable?

10. At whom or what was Jesus' anger directed? Is it possible to separate your feelings about your child's behavior from your feelings toward your child?

11. Place the collages around the room, without identifying the creator. What feelings are expressed by each collage? What feelings do the collages cause in you?

12. Are there positive ways to express negative emotions? Are there negative ways to express positive emotions? What lesson can you learn from this?

13. Is it possible to repent of emotions? Is it necessary?

14. Is it possible to repent of the way you act on certain feelings? Is it necessary?

15. Can you give any examples from Scripture in which God or Jesus expressed emotion? How do you feel about God's expression? How do you think God feels about your expression of emotion?

16. What general truths can you identify concerning feelings? Write them on newsprint for future reference.

#### IV. Action

1. Share your collage in a one-on-one setting, explaining why you chose to include certain pictures, words, images, etc. (NOTE: The questions in Addendum 2 may be helpful in this sharing and analysis of collages.)

2. The group will gather around a table or on the floor, with a large sheet of paper in the middle. Each person will draw a picture of how they feel about their crisis. Each person will briefly explain their drawing and the emotions represented. If anyone else can identify with that emotion, they will draw a solid line from their own picture to the one being explained. (NOTE: The purpose is to show how the group is connected by common emotions--the person is not alone!)

3. Write a short story or a fairytale, approximately 2-3 pages in length. This is to be your own creation. There are no other guidelines or restrictions. Just let your mind and your imagination run free. This assignment is due before Unit Six.

V. Closing Worship. On a 3x5 card, each person will complete the following statement: "Dear God, today I feel \_\_\_\_\_. " As the group sings Hymn #347 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "Spirit Song," members will place their cards on the altar (or table) asking God to accept how they feel and to guide them as they respond to those feelings. A closing prayer should be offered which gathers up all the feelings of the group, and invites God into each situation.

## VI. Refreshments and Informal Sharing

## VII. Other Resources

A. Biblical:	I Corinthians 13:4-7	Galatians 5:19-23
	Hebrews 4:14-16, 5:7-9	Matthew 26:37-38
	Psalms 22:12-2	Psalms 69:1-3
		19-21
	Isaiah 53:2-3	Matthew 27:46

B. Other: Bartosch, Bob and Pauline. Freed Handbook. La Habra: Overcomers Outreach, Inc., 1990. For Scripture references on specific feelings, see pages 23-30.

Davis, Ron Lee. Healing Life's Hurts.  
Dallas, WORD Publishing, 1986.

Dobson, James. Emotions: Can You Trust Them? Ventura: Regal Books, 1980. Parts I and III.

Hemfelt, Robert and Fowler, Richard.  
Serenity: A Companion for Twelve Step  
Recovery. Nashville: Thomas Nelson  
Publishing, 1990.

Lewis, Margie. The Hurting Parent. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 1988. Chapt. 2-10.

Seamands, David A. Healing for Damaged Emotions. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989.

## UNIT THREE

### "When You Pray, Will You Pray For Me?"

*"It is the discipline of prayer itself that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing."*

(Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline. New York: Harper and Row, 1978. Page 30.)

**Goal:** The purpose of this unit is to help the participants identify and explore their own feelings and attitudes about how one is to pray and what is expected when one prays. By the end of this unit, participants will:

1. Have identified examples from their own lives of prayers that were answered and prayers that seemingly went unanswered;
2. Understand that sometimes God's answer to prayer is "no" or "not yet;"
3. See that prayers do not have to follow a particular format or structure;
4. Have gained some biblical and personal insights into prayer, with emphasis on prayers that seem to go unanswered or where the answer is delayed;
5. Begin to feel God's presence and power, even in the midst of crisis; and
6. Be in a position to pray for themselves, their child, and each other.

#### Suggested Meeting Plan

- I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or a member of the group (approx. 5 minutes).
- II. Telling the Story
  - A. The Biblical Story: Matthew 26:36-46  
2 Corinthians 12:7-10
  - B. The Human Drama: Read or tell the story of "Aurelius Augustine." (Graham, Ruth. Prodigals and Those Who Love Them. Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1991. Pages 1-11.



### III. Discovering the Personal Stories

1. How many options did God have in answering Jesus prayer? Paul's Prayer? Did God answer Jesus' prayer? Paul's prayer? Does your style of prayer leave God with any options?
2. What kind of emotions did Jesus experience as he prayed? What kind of emotions do you experience when you pray for yourself? For your child? For other persons?
3. What can you learn from Jesus' prayer?
4. When Jesus needed the support of his disciples, he found them sleeping. From whom do you need support today? How do you feel when you find that person(s) "sleeping?"
5. Was God being fair to Paul? How might you have reacted if you were Paul?
6. Do you have a "Gethsemane"--a place where you can go to be alone with God? If you do, what is special about that place? If you do not, how can you find such a place?
7. When have you had to wrestle with God? What was the outcome?
8. What "cup" would you ask God to let pass from you? What is your "thorn in the flesh?" Can you formulate a prayer that leaves God in the driver's seat?
9. What do the words, "Thy will be done," mean to your family situation? The words, "My grace is sufficient for thee?"
10. Who benefits most from prayer, the person being prayed for or the person doing the praying? Why do you pray?
11. What is your responsibility when you pray? What is God's responsibility when you pray?
12. Paul listened and heard God's answer, even though it was not the answer he sought. Do you take time to listen for God's answer to your prayer?
13. How does the story of St. Augustine and his mother, Monica, speak to your situation? What did Monica's prayers do for her son? For her?

14. How important is prayer in your life? In the life of your child?

#### IV. Action

1. Imagine yourself kneeling next to Jesus as he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He places his arm around your shoulder, and whispers into your ear. Write a brief account of what you think he would say to you, and what you need for him to say.

2. Write an ending to your story of family crisis. Formulate a prayer (written or verbal), modeled after Jesus' prayer in the Garden, in which you ask God to bring about the ending you desire. Make a pledge to pray that prayer several times each day. Ask the group members to include you and your child in their prayers. Covenant to pray for others in the group.

3. For the next meeting, record in your journal your feelings when you prayed. Make special note of those times when God seems especially close or especially distant. Also note the reactions of family members. Be prepared to talk about how praying is affecting your life and the life of your child.

#### V. Closing Worship.

Sing or recite hymn #496 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "Sweet Hour of Prayer."

#### VI. Refreshments and Informal Sharing Time

#### VII. Additional Resources

- |              |  |                 |
|--------------|--|-----------------|
| A. Biblical: | 2 Chronicles 7:11-16   | James 5:13-16   |
|              | Luke 11:9-11   | John 16:23-24   |
|              | Philippians 4:6-7  | 1 Thes. 5:16-18 |
|              | 1 Peter 5:7  |                 |
| B. Other:    | Albin, Thomas. <u>Teach Me to Pray</u> . Nashville Graded Press, 1985.   |                 |
|              | Graham, Ruth. <u>Prodigals and Those Who Love Them</u> . Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1991. |                 |
|              | Lewis, Margie. <u>The Hurting Parent</u> . Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 1988. Pgs. 136-154.                    |                 |

## UNIT FOUR

### "Loving the Unlovable; Forgiving the Unforgivable"

"Parental love can be powerful; it is instinctive up to a point. but unconditional love is even more powerful; and it is not instinctive. In fact, it is unnatural. (Unconditional love is) a love without reservation or prerequisites. It demands no reciprocation, no reward--not even a response" (Lewis, Margie. The Hurting Parent. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988. Page 91.)

"So if we as guilty, hurting parents are going to experience God's forgiveness for our sins and mistakes, we also have to forgive the children who hurt us. And we should use God as the parental model for that forgiveness." (The Hurting Parent. Page 116.)

Goal: In this unit participants will gain an understanding of unconditional love: God's unconditional love toward them, and the unconditional love of a parent for a child. Participants will also see the relationship between unconditional love and forgiveness. By the end of this unit, participants will:

1. Have identified at least one concrete way in which they can show unconditional love to their child;
2. Appreciate the difference between showing love for the child and expressing approval of the child's behavior; and
3. Begin to move toward reconciliation with the self, with the child, with God, and with others.

#### Suggest Meeting Plan

I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or by a member of the group.

II. Telling the Story

A. The Biblical Story: Luke 15:11-32  
1 Corinthians 13  
Matthew 22:34-40

B. The Human Drama: Tell the story of the Farrone family. (Lewis, Margie. The Hurting Parent. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988. Pages 88-91.)

OR

Share a personal experience in which you have given or received unconditional love.

### III. Discovering the Personal Stories

1. In the story of the Prodigal Son, do you think it was more difficult for the father to let the son go or to welcome the son upon his return?
2. What feelings might the father have experienced during this ordeal? Do you think the father's feelings toward his son changed during the experience? If so, how?
3. With which character can you best identify; the father, the wandering son, or the older son? Which character would you like to be? What stands in your way?
4. In what ways did the father's response to the crisis affect the behavior and attitudes of the younger son? What are some other ways in which the father might have responded? What would the outcome have been?
5. What does this parable teach us about sin, repentance, and God's love? How might these teachings apply to your situation?
6. In what ways do you show unconditional love to your child? In what ways do you show conditional love to your child? How do you distinguish between showing love for the child and showing approval for your child's behavior?
7. Do you think it is possible to love another person unconditionally without having received unconditional love? Why?
8. From whom do you receive unconditional love? From whom do you desire it?
9. Can you identify other scripture passage that speak of unconditional love? How do they speak to you?
10. Review your Crisis Assessment, which you completed after Session One. Which of your child's behaviors do you find the most difficult to forgive? The easiest to forgive?

11. Who benefits most from forgiveness, the person being forgiven or the person doing the forgiving? Is it possible to forgive someone who doesn't ask for forgiveness or who refuses to accept it?
12. Is it more difficult for you to forgive your child or to forgive yourself?
13. Who do you need forgiveness from today? Your child? Yourself? Other family members? God? Who do you need to forgive today?
14. How does your relationship with your child reflect and impact your relationship with God? What are the similarities? The differences? Which relationship most need to change?
15. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 13:7. Is there anything that could cause you to stop loving your child? How do you think your child would answer this question?
16. Have you ever been in a situation like Carol and Joe Farrone? How did you feel? How did you react? Is there anything you would change?
17. Three months later, Tony is found unconscious in a crack house. A "friend" calls Tony's parents to let them know of the desperate situation. You are Tony's parent. What would you think? What would you do?
18. Reflect on Matthew 22:34-40, "The Great Commandment." What does this passage say about self-love? How do you feel about the concept of loving yourself? What, if anything stands in the way of loving yourself?
19. What general truths can you concerning forgiveness and unconditional love. Record these truths on newsprint for future reference.

#### IV. Action

1. Review the genogram you made in Unit One. Can you identify patterns of conditional and unconditional love? Is there a correlation with the success or failure of the relationships involved? Identify the persons from whom you receive love. Use these persons as resources in times of crisis.
2. Identify a person or a behavior that you need to forgive. Draw a picture of the person or the event.

3. Identify one concrete way in which you can show unconditional love to your child before the next session. In your journal record your feelings at the time of each expression. You may also want to record your child's reaction, but remember that the emphasis is on you.
4. Bring a picture (snapshot, drawing, etc.) of your child to the first meeting of the next unit. Be sure the picture is one that you do not want returned.
5. Share your experiences in prayer since the previous unit. How did you feel when you prayed? When you forgot or failed to pray? What was the reaction of other family members? Share any answered prayers and on-going concerns.

V. Closing Worship. Arrange chairs in a circle, with a large container in the center. As the group sings or recites hymn #560 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "Help Us Accept Each Other," each participant will drop into the container the picture they drew in the action component. The leader or designated person will close with an appropriate prayer of love and reconciliation.

## VI. Refreshments and informal sharing

## VII. Additional Resources

- A. Biblical: Romans 5:8 Mark 11:26  
Ephesians 3:17-19 John 15:9-17  
John 18:15-27, 21:15-19 Genesis 50:14-21  
Matthew 6:14-15 Luke 17:1-4
- B. Other: Backus, William and Candace. What Did I Do Wrong? What Can I Do Now?  
Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers,  
1990. Chapter 13.
- Lewis, Margie. The Hurting Parent.  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing  
House, 1988. Chapters 7 and 9.
- Scott, Buddy. Relief for Hurting Parents. Nashville: Oliver Nelson Books, 1989. Pages 74-82.
- Sherrer, Quin. How to Forgive Your Children. Lynnwood: Aglow Publications, 1989.

## UNIT FIVE

### "Let Go, and Let God"

*"Children seem to be born with the spirit of Patrick Henry. 'Give me liberty, or give me death!' is their motto. It rarely occurs to them that liberty means responsibility."*

*The Golden Rule of Parenting: "Let every child do what he can for himself. If he can do it, don't do it for him!"*

*(Backus, William and Candace. What Did I Do Wrong, What Can I Do Now. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990. Pages 115 and 121.)*

**Goal:** The goal of this unit is to encourage and to enable participants to let go of false hopes; to let go of their child, allowing the child to take responsibility for, and to experience the consequences of, his or her choices; and to release their child into the hands of God. By the end of this unit, the participants will:

1. Begin to understand that shielding the child from pain may perpetuate the crisis causing behavior;
2. See that letting go is not the same as abandonment;
3. Be aware that in some instances, the child has to learn from his or her mistakes;
4. Begin to develop a strategy for letting go; and
5. Gain an assurance that God's presence will sustain the child.

#### Suggested Meeting Plan

I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or a member of the group (approx. 5 minutes).

II. Telling the Story

A. The Biblical Story: Genesis 22:1-14 I Corinthians 5:4-5  
Mark 10:17-22 Luke 15:11-32

B. The Human Drama: Read or tell the story of "Consequences." (Backus, William and Candace. What did I Do Wrong, What Can I Do Now. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990. Pages 120-121.)

OR

Use the optional story, "A Leap of Faith," found at

the end of this session.

### III. Discovering the Personal Stories

1. What choices did the man in Mark 10:17-22 have? What factors guided his choice? What choices does your child have concerning his or her crisis causing behavior? What factors contribute to your child's decisions? What choices do you have in dealing with your child's behavior? What factors guide the choices you make?
2. What were the consequences of the man's decision? Why didn't Jesus stop him? Why didn't Jesus lower his requirements? What are the consequences of your child's decisions? What would happen if your responded like Jesus, allowing your child to face the consequences of wrong choices?
3. In the story of the Prodigal Son, why didn't the father go after the son and force him to return? Would the son's life experience have been better or worse if the father had intervened? What can you learn from the father's response?
4. In the story about Kevin, do you agree with the way his parents handled the situation? How might you have reacted?
5. How do you think Jesus felt, watching the man walk away? The father of the Prodigal Son? How do you feel when your child makes bad decisions? How do you feel about the prospect of watching your child walk away?
6. Consider this statement: "Change occurs when the pain of doing a wrong becomes greater than the pleasure received from doing the wrong." Can you think of lessons you have had to learn the hard way? What are the implications for your child's growth? For your parenting?
7. Is "letting go" the same as abandonment?
8. What obstacles are in the way of God's healing for you? Are you able to remove those obstacles?
9. What brings you the most happiness? How do you feel about letting go and presenting it as a gift to God?
10. What would you have to give up to more fully follow Christ and to more fully receive his blessings?



11. "If you keep bailing out your child, supplying their every need, erasing their every pain, how can your child every learn to be independent and responsible?" How would you feel about letting go of your role as provider protector, and watchman? Who would benefit most from this release?

12. Read I Corinthians 5:4-5. Replace the words, "this man" in verse 5 with the name of your child. How is it possible that releasing a person to Satan might result in that person's salvation? How do you feel about releasing your child into the hands of Satan and into the protection of God? Is this freeing for you? Is it abandonment?

13. When you and your child fight for control, who usually wins? How do you feel about that? Is there any way you can both emerge as winners?

14. What are your child's short-term and long-term goals? Do those goals meet with your approval?

15. Upon whom is your child most dependent: You? A friend? Him/herself? God? Other? Upon whom would you like your child to depend? How can your behavior facilitate that?

16. Abraham never truly received his son until he was ready to give him up to God. How do you feel about releasing your child into God's care? What is standing in the way of such a release? How can this group help you?

#### IV. Action

1. Write an ending to the story in Mark 10:17-22. Share your story with the group. How does the ending to this story compare with the expected ending to your story? To the ending you desire?

2. With you taking the role of your child, and other group members playing your part as parent, role play one or more of the following situations: (1) "What I need from mom and dad." (2) "What I want out of life." (3) "Why don't you love me enough to stop me." (4) "But you can't leave me in jail." Talk about the feelings you experienced during the role play. What did you learn from the role play that might apply to your real-life situation?

3. For the first meeting of the next unit, identify one thing you are now doing for your child,

for which your child could and should take responsibility. Covenant with the group that you will implement this transfer of power. Record your feelings and experiences in your journal. Also record your child's reactions. Be prepared to share your successes and failures with the group.

4. Share the experiences you have had since the previous unit regarding the giving and receiving of unconditional love and forgiveness. How did you feel? What were the reactions of other family members?

5. REMINDER: Your short story/fairytale is due at the next unit. Suggested length: 2-3 pages typed, double-spaced.

- V. Closing Worship (may best be conducted in the sanctuary). Suggested hymn: #354 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "I Surrender All." As the hymn is sung or recited, the participants will come to the altar with a picture of their child. Laying the pictures on the altar, the parents will join in this variation of a Wesleyan Covenant Prayer:

*My child is no longer mine, but thine.  
Put him (or her) to what thou wilt, rank him with  
whom thou wilt.  
Put him to doing, put him to suffering.  
Let him be employed by thee or laid aside for  
thee,  
exalted for thee or brought low by thee.  
Let him be full, let him be empty.  
Let him have all things, let him have nothing.  
I freely and heartily yield my child and all  
things to thy pleasure and disposal.  
And now, O glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
thou art mine, and we are thine. So be it.  
And the covenant which I have made on earth,  
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen*

#### VI. Refreshments and Informal Sharing

#### VII. Additional Resources

A. Biblical:	Psalm 46	Jeremiah 17:7-8
	Psalm 127:1-2	Luke 11:11-13
	I Corinthians 13:11	2 Corinthians 1:8-11
	Psalm 139:6-12, 17-18	Ezekiel 18:1-4

- B. Other: Greenfield, Guy. The Wounded Parent.  
Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990.  
Pgs. 87-97.
- Huggins, Kevin. Parenting Adolescents.  
Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989.  
Pgs.141-159.
- Lewis, Margie. The Hurting Parent.  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan Books, 1988.  
Pgs. 136-154.
- Scott, Buddy. Relief For Hurting Parents  
Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers,  
1989. Pgs. 46-62.
- White, John. Parents In Pain. Downers  
Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978. Pg.  
163-176, 218-220.
- York, Phyllis & David. Toughlove Parents  
Manual. Doylestown: Toughlove  
International, 1989. Pgs. 20-39.

### "A LEAP OF FAITH"

(Optional Story to Address the Human Drama)

A man was hiking near the edge of a high cliff when he lost his footing and began to fall. Half way down the face of the cliff he managed to grab onto the branches of a small tree that was growing out of the rocks. There he hung--safety was 200 feet straight up, and 300 feet straight down. In desperation he began to cry out, "Is anybody up there who can save me?" He was weary from shouting when he heard a voice that seemed to descend from heaven. "I am here, my son, I will save you."

Man: God, is that you. Please help me, and hurry!

God: Yes, I am here. But do you truly believe that I am God, and that I can save you?

Man: Of course I do. I've always believed in you. Now, get me out of here, please!

God: Have you obeyed my commandments? Do you love me above all others, and do you love your neighbors?

Man: God, you know I do. I've always tried to do everything you ask. But Lord, my arms getting tired from holding on. Do something, quickly!

God: Are you willing to obey my every command?

Man: Yes, Lord, anything you ask--anything at all.

God: Alright my son, I will save you. Simply let go of the branch!

Man: (he looks up, looks down, sums up the situation then cries out) Is there anyone else up there who can save me?

Additional question to be used with this story

1. Think of a time when you have had to take action on pure faith, trusting in God alone? What were the results? How did you feel?

2. Think of a example from your life when God turned an impossible situation into triumph. What was God's role? What was your role?

3. Of what would God have you let go today? How do you feel about letting go and trusting God? What needs to happen before you can let go?

4. If you can trust God for your own life, can you also trust God to care for the life of your child?

## UNIT SIX

### "Taking Steps Toward Wholeness--The Process of Change"

*"How your teenager (or younger child) behaves is his or her choice and responsibility. How you behave is your choice and responsibility. If you always respond in the same way your kids will always know which buttons to push to get what they want. We prescribe as an antidote changing your pattern of response." (York, Phyllis and David. Toughlove Parents Manual. Doylestown: Toughlove International, 1980. Page 25.)*

*"Change will not occur until the pain of responding in a certain way exceeds the pleasure or comfort received from responding in a certain way--pain becomes the doorway to healing." (Bill Townsend)*

Goal: In this unit, the participants will be encouraged to begin the process of changing their patterns of responding to their child's behaviors and crises. It is important to remember that the goal is not to change the child, but to change the parent. Keep in mind, however, that any change in the family system will facilitate changes in the individual parts of that system. If the parent changes his or her pattern of response, the child will be affected, either positively or negatively. By the end of this unit, the participants will have:

1. Formulated a long-term goal for how they will respond to their child's crisis-causing behavior; and
2. Identified one concrete step that, when implemented, will move them toward the long-term goal.

#### Suggested Meeting Plan

I. Devotions led by the group facilitator or a member of the group (approx. 5 minutes).

II. Telling the Story

A. The Biblical Story: Luke 5:1-11

B. The Human Drama: Read or tell the story of Shirley in Parenting Adolescents. (Huggins, Kevin. Parenting Adolescents. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989. Pages 152-154.)

OR

Relate a story from personal experience in which a change in the parent's approach to dealing with crisis brought about healing.

### III. Discovering the Personal Stories

1. Jesus asked Peter to consider a fresh and unusual method of fishing. Peter "had never done it that way before." What risks did Peter incur by being willing to change? What risks might you incur by changing how you respond to your child? Is it worth the risk? Why or why not?
2. How do you think Peter felt after fishing all night with no success? Have you ever felt that way? Do you feel that way now?
3. How do you think Peter felt about Jesus' command to cast out into deep water? What "deep water" is God asking you to try? How do you feel about casting off?
4. Why do you think Peter was willing to do as Jesus asked? Are you ready to try a new approach to dealing with your crisis? Why or why not?
5. What does this story teach you about Peter? About Jesus? About yourself?
6. How might Peter's life have been different had he not been willing to change in this one instance? Have there been missed opportunities for change in your family life? What are the risks of refusing to change now?
7. Why is it so difficult for some persons to accept change in their lives? How do you feel about change?
8. Why did Shirley endure the abuse of her husband and daughter? Can you relate to her feelings and motivations?
9. What changes took place in Shirley and in her approach to dealing with her daughter's behavior?
10. What could have happened when Shirley stood up to her daughter? What gave Shirley the strength to take the risk? What might have happened if the daughter never came back? How do you feel about doing what Shirley did?

11. Is the absence of conflict always a sign of a healthy family? Why or why not?
12. Do you believe you can change your present pattern of response to you child's crisis-causing behavior? What is your role in bringing about this change? Your child's role? God's role? This support group's role?
13. Why is it so important that you, and no one else, chart the course for change in your life and in your relationships?
14. What general truths can you identify concerning the process of change? Record these truths on newsprint for future reference.

#### IV. Action

1. Share your short story with the group. How do the characters change during the story? Is the change for the better? Which character are you? How do the changes in the character relate to the changes needed in your life? What can you learn from the characters in the story?
2. In the previous unit you were asked to identify one thing you are doing for your child for which your child could and should take responsibility. If you were able to execute that transfer of responsibility, share how you felt and how your child reacted. If you were unable to execute the transfer, share what went wrong, how you felt at the time, and how you feel now.
3. Review you Crisis Assessment, making a list of the times your have "bailed out" your child, or have had to deal with unacceptable behavior. Do you want to deal with these same problems again? Do you want to keep cleaning up the messes your child makes?
4. Using the list developed in Question 2, circle those problems that you never want to deal with again. Write down a series of "I will not \_\_\_\_\_" statements (see Toughlove Parents Manual, Page 31). This list will constitute your long-term goal, or you "stand."
5. Share your stand with the group. After some brainstorming, you will develop one "bottom line"--a step that you can take between now and the next session that will move you toward your "stand." You may want to incorporate your "bottom line" into the following statement:

"I love you very much, so I'm going to make some things clear to you. In case I haven't told you straight out, I don't like it when you \_\_\_\_\_. I want you to know that because I love you."

Furthermore, I will expect you to \_\_\_\_\_ from this point on, so that it will be clear that I'm not making your behavior easier for you. I intend to carry this out by doing the following things:

\_\_\_\_\_.

I want you to know, too, that I don't intend to harp on these things, just to carry them out as I have described them.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

6. As you enforce your "bottom line," record your feelings and your child's reactions in your journal. Remember that the emphasis, however, is on you, and not on your child.

NOTE: Future meetings will consist of: (1) Reporting on the implementation of your "bottom line;" (2) The development of a new "bottom line," using input from the group; (3) Discussion of how you are moving toward your long-term goal, or "stand."

V. Closing worship. Sing or recite hymn #382 in the United Methodist Hymnal, "Have Thine Own Way, Lord." Pray for each participant by name, especially pray that they may keep their covenant to change and to enforce their "bottom line."

VI. Refreshments and Informal Sharing

VII. Additional Resources

A. Biblical: 1 Samuel 2:29 Proverbs 22:15  
Proverbs 19:15 Ephesians 6:4  
Hebrews 12:5

B. Other: Backus, William and Candace. What Did I Do Wrong? What Can I Do Now?  
Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1990. Chapters 8 and 9.

Huggins, Kevin. Parenting Adolescents.  
Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1989. Pages 141-159.



Scott, Buddy. Relief For Hurting Parents.  
Nashville: Oliver Nelson Books, 1989.  
Part II.

Swindol, Charles R. Growing Wise in  
Family Life. Portland: Multnomah Press,  
1988. Part IV.

York, Phyllis and David. Toughlove  
Parents Manual. Doylestown: Toughlove  
International, 1980. Entire manual.

## H. O. P. E GROUP COVENANT

To assist us in achieving the goals of sharing, loving, caring, and healing, and to guide us in our mutual commitment to Jesus Christ and to one another, the following covenants are set forth:

I pledge to accept each member of the group, no matter what they have done, are doing, or will do. I will attempt to love each member of the group, together with their children and other family members, as children of God. I will do all I can to model and to express God's affirming love in and to this group. In addition, I will honor each child and each parent/child relationship with-out judgment or condemnation.

I pledge to be faithful in attending the scheduled meetings of this group, and will notify the group facilitator if I must be absent. Further, I pledge to be available to support and care for other members of the group, with my prayers, my presence, and my resources.

I promise to pray for the group members and their families on a regular basis, and respectfully ask their prayers in return.

I agree to strive to be an honest and open person, to share my true feelings, opinions, struggles, joys, and hurts, to the best of my ability.

I will attempt to offer honest feedback to other group members, "speaking the truth in love that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head" (Eph. 4:15). I will strive to listen to what others are saying, to see their point of view, to understand their feelings, and to lift them up in love. I will attempt to give my feedback in a sensitive and controlled manner, in keeping with the spirit of healing and love.

I promise to keep whatever is shared within the confines of this group. I will not try to force anyone to share anything they do not wish to share. Likewise, I reserve the right to withhold information that I do not wish to share. I will speak to no one about our group process without the express permission of the persons involved.

I will not interfere in any parent/child conflicts without the permission of the persons involved and the support of the group facilitator. Our primary task is to "support," not to "fix."

In full acceptance of these covenants, I sign this document.

Signature\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING COLLAGES AND DRAWINGS

- A. Family dynamics--Are people doing things together or is everyone doing his or her own thing? What are the relationships portrayed? Who appears to have the "power" in the picture?
- B. Objects and action--What mood do they create? What feelings do they elicit? Do they act as barriers? Do they suggest aggression? Nurturing? Hostility? Control? Other?
- C. Placement--Who is close to whom and what does this tell us? Does this represent reality or is it projected fantasy? Using the quadrant theory of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, divide the picture into four sections, with the upper left quadrant being the far future, the upper right being the present, the lower left being the past, and the lower right being the near future. How does the placement of objects reflect the life of the drawer? What is at the center of the picture--what first catches the eye?
- D. Sizes of objects--Are people and objects in proportion to the surrounding environment? Are they too large or too small? What might this represent?
- E. Direction of movement--Who is moving toward whom? Who is moving away from whom? What objects or people look destined to collide? What could this mean?
- F. What is present and what is missing? What does this suggest to you? What do the images, both those present and those missing, represent to the individual? Is there anything threatening or anything comforting? Is there pain in the picture? Where is healing represented and where is healing possible?
- G. Is there anything especially odd about the picture? What clues might this give into the life situation of the creator?
- H. What objects stand out, and what objects appear obscure? Dark or heavily shaded objects may symbolize issues for serious consideration.
- I. Consider that each and every part of the drawing is an expression of each and every part of the person who drew the picture. Thus, what does this picture describe? Allow the creator to dialogue with the objects and/or characters.

- J. What colors have been used? Does the picture have a lot of color? Notice colors that appear to be out of place, for example a green cow. Notice colors that are not used. (see below)
- K. Be aware if the drawing is "out of season" or depicts the season in which it is drawn. Does the picture reflect the surrounding culture and values?
- L. What feelings does the picture convey? Happy? Sad? Frustration? Fear? Peace? Hope? Despair? Others?

### The Significance of Color

Red--May signal emotion or danger. Physically red may indicate acute illness.

Pink--May suggest the resolution of a problem. Physically pink may indicate health.

Purple--May indicate power, control, or responsibility.

Orange--May reflect a suspenseful situation, or decreasing energy.

Yellow--May suggest things of a spiritual or intuitive nature. Indicates great value or great energy. Pale yellow may suggest a precarious life situation.

Blue--May denote health or the vital flow of life energy. Pale blue may indicate distance--a fading away or withdrawing.

Green--May represent healing, growth, or newness of life. Pale green may denote weakness.

Brown--May suggest nourishment or health. Pale brown may indicate rot or decay, or a struggle to overcome destructive forces and return to a healthy state.

Black--May indicate the unknown, fear, a threat, or "dark" thoughts.

White--May reflect repressed feelings, or may signal life's completion.

REMEMBER: Colors do not tell the story, they merely amplify what the objects and action within the picture have to say.

NOTE: These questions are gleaned from handouts received from Dr. Charles Killian in his class, "Preaching and Storytelling."

## FACILITATING EMOTIONAL RELEASE

Emotional release can be encouraged by listening and responding to feelings, using empathic and understanding responses.

1. Avoid asking informational questions beyond the minimum needed to obtain essential factual data. Informational questions tend to pull the person away from feelings.
2. Ask about feelings--e.g., "How did you feel when your child rejected your advice?"
3. Respond to feelings rather than intellectual content. Reflect feelings using feeling words in doing so--e.g., "This really hurts down deep." Minimize judgmental and instructional responses.
4. Watch for doors which lead to the feeling level of communication. These include feeling words, expressions of emotion, and protesting too much. Respond with understanding.
5. Be especially alert for negative feelings. These are the most frequently repressed and the most in need of being brought to the surface. Respond with understanding.
6. Avoid premature interpretations and premature advice. It is also possible to err through premature reassurance. These are tempting traps since they offer the counselor ways of feeling useful, intelligent, in control, and less anxious.

Clinebell, Howard. Basic Types of Pastoral Care.  
Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966. Page 69.

## CRISIS ASSESSMENT

Think back over the past three months and record how often:

## HOME LIFE

- ☐ You and your spouse argued about your child's behavior
- ☐ You have withdrawn from your spouse
- ☐ Your spouse has withdrawn from you
- ☐ You have laid awake at night worrying about your child
- ☐ You have heard the phone ring and prayed your child was alright
- ☐ You have missed work because of your child's behavior
- ☐ You have felt guilty over your child behavior or your child's situation
- ☐ You have been "set up" against you spouse or ex-spouse
- ☐ Your authority as a parent has been challenged and/or rejected
- ☐ Your child has come home drunk or drugged
- ☐ Your child has missed curfew
- ☐ Your child has not come home at all
- ☐ Your child has lied to you about where he/she was going
- ☐ Your child has disrupted other family relationships
- ☐ Your child has run away
  - ☐ Overnight
  - ☐ Two to four days
  - ☐ A week
  - ☐ More than a week at a time
- ☐ Your child has been violent
  - ☐ Verbally
  - ☐ Physically to family members
  - ☐ Physically to others
- ☐ Your child has knowingly lied to you
- ☐ Your child has taken the car without permission
- ☐ Your child has taken money or other items from the home without permission

## CHURCH LIFE

- ☐ Your religious faith and values have been criticized by your child
- ☐ Your child has missed church unexpectedly
- ☐ You have missed church because you felt shame over your child
- ☐ You felt the need to lie to protect you child from scorn, and/or to protect yourself from judgment

- ☐ You have questioned God's love for you and your child
- ☐ You have been angry at God because of your child

#### SCHOOL LIFE

- ☐ Your child has been late for school
- ☐ Your child has been absent from school
- ☐ Your child has lied to you about being in school
- ☐ Your child has been in detention or has been suspended
- ☐ The school has called you about your child's behavior
- ☐ You have seen evidence of declining grades

#### THE LEGAL SYSTEM

- ☐ Your child has received traffic citations
- ☐ You have paid fines for your child
- ☐ Your child has been involved in a traffic accident
  - ☐ While driving
  - ☐ While as a passenger
- ☐ Your child has been arrested or questioned
  - ☐ For drug or alcohol use
  - ☐ For drug or alcohol sales
  - ☐ For shoplifting or other theft
  - ☐ For violent crime

Review the items you have checked and the number of times each event has occurred. Are you satisfied with the way things are now? Do you believe you and your child are in a crisis situation? Do you need help in dealing with the crisis?

If you have checked two or more boxes in any category, and especially if the numbers show repetitive behaviors, then a crisis may be building. Don't despair. There is H. O. P. E. (Healing Our Parenting Experiences), a support group for parents in crisis.

Filling out this Crisis Assessment is the first step toward healing. If you are ready for the second step, stay for the rest of today's meeting and make a pledge to return next time. Welcome aboard.

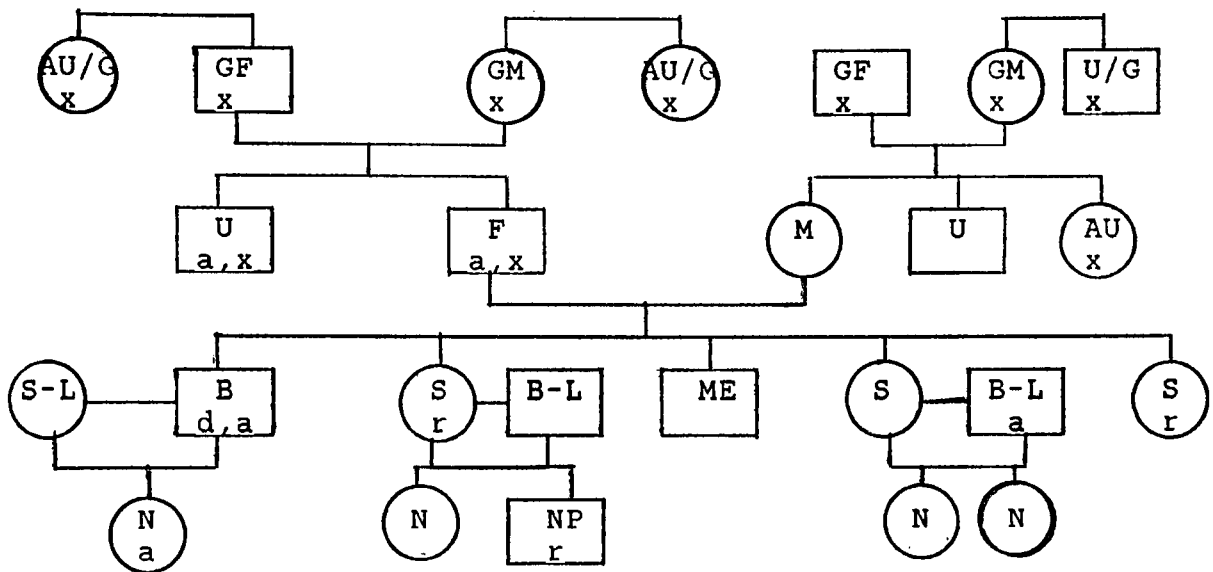
(Adapted from a document found in the Toughlove Parents Manual, Pages 14-17)

Fifteen Towers of Conviction for Parents  
(Buddy Scott's, Relief for Hurting Parents, Page 82.)

1. We are breaking through denial and admitting that our child is, in fact, ignoring our guidance on purpose.
2. Our child does wrong because of his or her choices, not because of mental illness or physical problems.
3. Our child can change, and it is our responsibility as parents to give him or her a decent opportunity to improve.
4. We have the right and are responsible before God to require our child to live as a good citizen in our home--to live a decent, legal, cooperative, and productive life.
5. We must raise our child consistent with how he or she will have to become to be successful in the real world:  
*If you are rude to the suppliers, you shouldn't expect new supplies.*  
*If you don't do your part in the family, you don't get family privileges.*  
*Mess it up, clean it up.*  
*Abuse it, lose it.*  
*Waste it, replace it.*  
*Want more, pay the extra.*
6. We refuse to be conned by our child.
7. We will cause our child's tools of intimidation and manipulation to become useless.
8. We will be sure the discipline we choose to use is a natural consequence of the offence (the punishment will fit the "crime").
9. We are responders, and our child is the teacher. We will respond fairly to what our child teaches us.
10. We will allow our child to experience the pain of his or her own wrong choices.
11. We will see the wrong crowd as family enemy #1.
12. We will strive for cooperation, not happiness.
13. We will not give up on our child.
14. We will help our child have opportunities for spiritual conversion (a change of mind-set).
15. We will model self-control before our children.



## Sample Genogram



## RELATIONSHIPS

GM Grandmother  
 GF Grandfather  
 F Father (add "S" for step father)  
 M Mother (add "S" for step mother)  
 A Aunt (add "G" for great aunt)  
 U Uncle (add "G" for great uncle)  
 B Brother  
 S Sister  
 B-L Brother-in-law  
 S-L Sister-in-law  
 N Niece  
 NP Nephew

## BEHAVIORS

d divorced  
 a alcohol/drugs  
 v violence  
 r rebellion  
 c serious crime  
 x deceased

## H.O.P.E. Support Group

## Pretest and Posttest Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to measure the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and beliefs of the hurting parent both before and after participation in the support group sessions. Each participant must complete a questionnaire. You do not have to give your name. Please be as honest and as accurate as possible.

Scale: 1=never or no  
 2=rarely, or low intensity of feeling or agreement  
 3=sometimes, or moderate intensity of feeling or agreement  
 4=often, or high intensity of feeling or agreement  
 5=always, or extreme intensity of feeling or agreement

Questions followed by an asterisk (\*) should be answered for each child in crisis. Simply circle your answer for each child and place the initial of the child above the answer.

PART ONE: YOUR FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE CRISIS AND THE CHILD  
 (Circle your chosen response)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I love my child.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My child is basically a good person.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have a right to be proud of my child.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I have a right to enjoy my child.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have a right to know where my child is going and with whom my child will be.       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. I distrust my child.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My child loves me.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. I can love my child, even if there is no change in his or her behavior or attitudes  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I believe the following persons are to blame for my child's crisis.                  |   |   |   |   |   |
| myself*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| my spouse*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| a peer group*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| school system*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| a relative*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| my child*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| other_____*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I feel like a failure when one of my children makes a mistake.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Allowing my children to face the consequences of their own behavior seems uncaring. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. My child's crisis is the result of his or her own choices.*                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. If I had been a better parent, this crisis probably would not have happened.            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. When one of my children is in crisis, I feel:   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Worthless   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| alone   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| embarrassed   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| guilty  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| depressed   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| rejected  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| angry at child  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| angry at others   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| angry at God  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| inadequate  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| shamed  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| hopeless  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| unforgiving   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| other_____  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. It is wrong to feel the way I feel.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. It is wrong to be angry with my children.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I can show love for my children without showing approval of their behaviors or beliefs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I hate my child.*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I hate my child's behavior.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART TWO: REACTIONS TO THE CRISIS AND TO THE CHILD (circle your chosen response)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My child's crisis is a sign that he/she doesn't love me.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. In the past two months I have lied to protect my child.*                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. In the last two months I have lied to protect my family's reputation.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The needs of my children take precedence over my own needs and the need of the family. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. In the past two months I have denied my own needs in order to rescue my child.*        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. In the past two months I have missed work because of my child's behavior.*             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Confronting my child will just make things worse.*                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. In the past two months I have stayed awake at night worrying about my child.*          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. In the past two months I have loaned money to my child, supporting his/her behaviors.* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. In the past two months I have bailed out my child.                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. In the past two months I have done tasks my child was supposed to do.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. It is easier to go along with my child's wishes than to deal with my child's anger.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. When my child is in crisis I withhold love.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| money.*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| time.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
|     | conversation.*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | other _____.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | When my child is in crisis, I get silent.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | When my child is in crisis, I get violent.                                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | When my child is in crisis, I take out my frustration on other family members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | In the past two months, I have tried to escape reality by turning to work.     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | drugs/alcohol.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | food.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | religion.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | hobbies.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | spending money.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | other_____.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART THREE: THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PARENT (circle your chosen response)

- |     |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  | I feel that God is at work in my life in a positive way.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2.  | I feel that God is at work in the life of my child in a positive way.*                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3.  | God gives me the strength I need to endure each crisis situation.                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4.  | I am ready to give God control of this crisis.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5.  | Prayer is an important part of my life.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6.  | I pray mostly as a last resort.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7.  | I often pray for my child.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8.  | I often pray for myself.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9.  | I believe that God loves me and understands me.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I need to forgive my child.*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | myself.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | others_____.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I could never forgive my child.*   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | myself.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|     | others_____.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I feel that God has forgiven my mistakes as a parent.                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | I believe that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." (Rom. 8:28) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | I believe that God has answered the prayers I've offered on my child's behalf.*        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | It is wrong to be angry with God.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | It is wrong to question or to doubt God.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings.                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART FOUR: FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF AS PARENT AND PERSON (circle your chosen response)

- |    |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I consider myself to be an effective parent. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----|--|---|---|---|---|---|

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. I consider myself to be a "good" person.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. My pain is a sign of my guilt.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I blame myself for my child's crisis.                                   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I lie about my child to protect my self-image.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. If my child makes mistakes, I am a bad parent.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Good parents protect their children from punishment.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My believe my child thinks I am a good parent.*                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Loving myself is acceptable.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. There are many things I do well.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. I am responsible for cleaning up my child's messes.                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. I'm concerned that others blame me for my child's crisis.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. In my parenting, I have done more things right than I have done wrong. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. I am a lovable person  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART FIVE: DIFFERENTIATION (circle your chosen response)

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My child's welfare is my primary concern.*                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. It is my responsibility to make my children happy.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I cannot be happy when my child is unhappy.                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I know my child's wants and desires.*                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I long for the "good old days" when my child was young and easy to manage. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. My child is an adult. I love him/her, but he/she is on his/her own.        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. I have to do everything for my child.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My child is allowed to make important decisions for him/herself.           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. I am responsible for controlling my child's actions.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. My child is my primary source of joy.*                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. My child is my best friend.*  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART SIX: YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM (circle your chosen response)

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. No one understands how I feel.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Other people would reject me if they knew the truth about my family and my child. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I need the support of other people.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I can be a source of support and strength for other hurting parents.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Admitting or showing pain is a sign of weakness.                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. My spouse and I agree on how to raise our child.*                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. My spouse and I agree on how to deal with our child's crisis.*                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. My family provides the support I need.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. There are things about my child and my family that no one else knows.             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. I am comfortable with the idea of sharing in a small group setting.              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

PART SEVEN: PERSONAL INFORMATION (fill in blanks and circle answers where applicable)

Name (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: M F

Marital Status: SINGLE MARRIED DIVORCED AND SINGLE  
DIVORCED AND REMARRIED WIDOWED SEPARATED

Education level: LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL HIGH SCHOOL TRADE SCHOOL  
COLLEGE GRADUATE SCHOOL OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of child in crisis:

Child one _____	BIRTH	STEP	FOSTER	ADOPTED
Child two _____	BIRTH	STEP	FOSTER	ADOPTED
Child Three _____	BIRTH	STEP	FOSTER	ADOPTED

Age of child in crisis:

Child one \_\_\_\_\_  
Child two \_\_\_\_\_  
Child Three \_\_\_\_\_

Sex of Child in Crisis

Child one M F  
Child two M F  
Child three M F

Age of child when crisis began:

Child one \_\_\_\_\_  
Child two \_\_\_\_\_  
Child three \_\_\_\_\_

How would you describe your child's present crisis? (place an "X" under terms that apply)

	SHORT-TERM	LONG-TERM
Child one	_____	_____
Child two	_____	_____
Child three	_____	_____
	ONE TIME	REPEAT
Child one	_____	_____
Child two	_____	_____
Child three	_____	_____
	LEGAL PROBLEM	MORAL ISSUE
Child one	_____	_____
Child two	_____	_____
Child three	_____	_____
	MAJOR	MINOR
Child one	_____	_____
Child two	_____	_____
Child three	_____	_____

Has your child's crisis involved episodes of violence?

Child one	YES	NO
Child two	YES	NO
Child three	YES	NO

Have you received any counseling for this crisis, or have you participated in another support group: YES NO

Are you aware of similar crisis in your family history?

Same generation	YES	NO
-----------------	-----	----

Previous generation	YES	NO
---------------------	-----	----

Two or more generations	YES	NO
-------------------------	-----	----

## CRISIS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

(NOTE: The letters appearing before each question are keyed to the support group participants as listed in Chapter 4.)

Think back over the past three months and record an "X" if:

HOME LIFE

- |           |     |  |
|-----------|-----|--|
| A B       | D E | You and your spouse argued about your child's behavior                     |
| A B       |     | You have withdrawn from your spouse  |
| A B       |     | Your spouse has withdrawn from you   |
| B C D     |     | You have laid awake at night worrying about your child                     |
| A B       | D   | You have heard the phone ring and prayed your child was alright            |
| B         |     | You have missed work because of your child's behavior                      |
| B C D E   |     | You have felt guilty over your child behavior or your child's situation    |
| A B       | D   | You have been "set up" against you spouse or ex-spouse                     |
| A B C D E |     | Your authority as a parent has been challenged and/or rejected             |
| A B       |     | Your child has come home drunk or drugged                                  |
| A B C D   |     | Your child has missed curfew   |
| A B C     |     | Your child has not come home at all  |
| A B       | D   | Your child has lied to you about where he/she was going                    |
| A B       | D E | Your child has disrupted other family relationships                        |
| A B       |     | Your child has run away  |
|           |     | ( ) Overnight  |
|           |     | ( ) Two to four days   |
|           |     | ( ) A week   |
|           |     | (A B) More than a week at a time   |
| A B C     |     | Your child has been violent  |
|           |     | (A B C) Verbally   |
|           |     | ( ) Physically to family members   |
|           |     | (A B ) Physically to others  |
| A B C D   |     | Your child has knowingly lied to you                                       |
| C         |     | Your child has taken the car without permission                            |
|           |     | Your child has taken money or other items from the home without permission |

CHURCH LIFE

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| B C | E | Your religious faith and values have been criticized by your child |
|     |   | Your child has missed church unexpectedly                          |
|     |   | You have missed church because you felt shame over your child      |



- B C D      You felt the need to lie to protect you child  
                  from scorn, and/or to protect yourself from  
                  judgment  
                  You have questioned God's love for you and your  
                  child  
       C      You have been angry at God because of your  
                  child

#### SCHOOL LIFE

- A B      D E      Your child has been late for school  
       A B      D      Your child has been absent from school  
                  Your child has lied to you about being in  
                  school  
                  Your child has been in detention or has been  
                  suspended  
                  The school has called you about your child's  
                  behavior  
       B      E      You have seen evidence of declining grades

#### THE LEGAL SYSTEM

- A B      Your child has received traffic citations  
       A B      You have paid fines for your child  
                  Your child has been involved in a traffic  
                  accident  
                  (    ) While driving  
                  (    ) While as a passenger  
  
       A B      Your child has been arrested or questioned  
                  (A B) For drug or alcohol use  
                  (    ) For drug or alcohol sales  
                  (    ) For shoplifting or other theft  
                  (    ) For violent crime

Review the items you have checked and the number of times each event has occurred. Are you satisfied with the way things are now? Do you believe you and your child are in a crisis situation? Do you need help in dealing with the crisis?

If you have checked two or more boxes in any category, and especially if the numbers show repetitive behaviors, then a crisis may be building. Don't despair. There is H. O. P. E. (Healing Our Parenting Experiences), a support group for parents in crisis.

Filling out this Crisis Assessment is the first step toward healing. If you are ready for the second step, stay for the rest of today's meeting and make a pledge to return next time. Welcome aboard.

(Adapted from a document found in the Toughlove Parents Manual, Pages 14-17)

## H.O.P.E. Support Group

## Pretest and Posttest Questionnaire--Pretest Summary

This questionnaire is intended to measure the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and beliefs of the hurting parent both before and after participation in the support group sessions. Each participant must complete a questionnaire. You do not have to give your name. Please be as honest and as accurate as possible.

Scale: 1=never or no  
 2=rarely, or low intensity of feeling or agreement  
 3=sometimes, or moderate intensity of feeling or agreement  
 4=often, or high intensity of feeling or agreement  
 5=always, or extreme intensity of feeling or agreement

Questions followed by an asterisk (\*) should be answered for each child in crisis. Simply circle your answer for each child and place the initial of the child above the answer.

PART ONE: YOUR FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE CRISIS AND THE CHILD  
 (Circle your chosen response)

	Participant	A	B	C	D	E	Avg
1. I love my child.*		5	5	5	5	5	5.0
2. My child is basically a good person.*		4	4	4	5	5	4.4
3. I have a right to be proud of my child.		4	4	4	4	4	4.0
4. I have a right to enjoy my child.		4	4	4	3	3	3.6
5. I have a right to know where my child is going and with whom my child will be		4	5	5	4	5	4.6
6. I distrust my child.*		3	3	4	4	2	3.6
7. My child loves me.*		3	5	4	4	5	4.2
8. I can love my child, even if there is no change in his or her behavior or attitudes		4	5	5	5	5	4.8
9. I believe the following persons are to blame for my child's crisis.							
myself*		2	2	5	4	3	3.2
my spouse*		2	2	n	2	3	2.3
a peer group*		4	4	3	4	4	3.8
school system*		2	3	3	3	2	2.6
a relative*		2	2	1	2	1	1.6
my child*		5	4	4	4	4	4.2
other_____*		4		3	3		2.0
10. I feel like a failure when one of my children makes a mistake.		3	3	3	4	4	3.4
11. Allowing my children to face the consequences of their own behavior seems uncaring.		1	4	3	3	3	2.8
12. My child's crisis is the result of his or her own choices.		4	4	4	4	3	3.8
13. If I had been a better parent, this crisis probably would not have happened.		1	2	4	3	3	2.6



14. When my child is in crisis, I get silent.	3 4 2 2 1	2.4
15. When my child is in crisis, I get violent.	4 1 2 2 1	2.0
16. When my child is in crisis, I take out my frustration on other family members.	3 3 2 3 2	2.6
17. In the past two months, I have tried to escape reality by turning to work.	1 4 1 2 3	2.2
drugs/alcohol.	1 1 1 1 1	1.0
food.	3 4 1 n 3	2.8
religion.	2 3 3 3 4	3.0
hobbies.	3 2 1 1 1	1.6
spending money.	3 4 1 2 1	2.2
other_____.	n n n n n	n

PART THREE: THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PARENT (circle your chosen response)

1. I feel that God is at work in my life in a positive way.	3 4 4 3 4	3.6
2. I feel that God is at work in the life of my child in a positive way.*	3 4 2 3 3	3.0
3. God gives me the strength I need to endure each crisis situation.	3 4 4 3 4	3.6
4. I am ready' to give God control of this crisis.	5 4 3 4 5	4.2
5. Prayer is an important part of my life.	2 5 5 3 5	4.0
6. I pray mostly as a last resort.	3 2 1 3 3	2.4
7. I often pray for my child.*	3 4 5 4 4	4.0
8. I often pray for myself.	3 4 5 3 5	4.0
9. I believe that God loves me and understands me.	2 5 5 3 2	3.4
10. I need to forgive my child.*	4 4 5 3 4	4.0
myself.	3 4 4 3 3	3.4
others_____.	n n n n n	n
11. I could never forgive my child.*	2 5 1 3 4	3.0
myself.	3 4 3 3 2	3.0
others_____.	4 4 2 3 2	3.0
12. I feel that God has forgiven my mistakes as a parent.	5 5 3 4 5	4.4
13. I believe that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." (Rom. 8:28)	5 5 4 4 5	4.6
14. I believe that God has answered the prayers I've offered on my child's behalf.*	4 5 2 3 3	3.4
15. It is wrong to be angry with God.	3 3 3 3 5	3.4
16. It is wrong to question or to doubt God.	5 5 5 5 5	5.0
17. I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings.	4 5 4 4 5	4.4

PART FOUR: FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF AS PARENT AND PERSON (circle your chosen response)

1. I consider myself to be an effective parent.	4 4 4 4 3	3.8
2. I consider myself to be a "good" person.	4 4 3 4 4	3.8
3. My pain is a sign of my guilt.	3 1 3 2 1	2.0

4.	I blame myself for my child's crisis.	1 2 4 3 2	2.4
5.	I lie about my child to protect my self-image.	1 1 1 1 1	1.0
6.	If my child makes mistakes, I am a bad parent.	1 1 3 2 1	1.6
7.	Good parents protect their children from punishment.	1 1 3 2 2	1.8
8.	My believe my child thinks I am a good parent.*	3 4 3 3 3	3.2
9.	Loving myself is acceptable.	4 4 2 3 3	3.2
10.	There are many things I do well.	4 4 3 3 3	3.4
11.	I am responsible for cleaning up my child's messes.	4 2 3 3 4	3.2
12.	I'm concerned that others blame me for my child's crisis.	4 2 3 2 1	2.4
13.	In my parenting, I have done more things right than I have done wrong.	3 4 4 4 4	3.8
14.	I am a lovable person.	4 4 4 3 3	3.6

## PART FIVE: DIFFERENTIATION (circle your chosen response)

1.	My child's welfare is my primary concern.*	4 5 5 5 5	4.8
2.	It is my responsibility to make my children happy.	3 5 5 4 5	4.4
3.	I cannot be happy when my child is unhappy.	4 1 4 3 2	2.8
4.	I know my child's wants and desires.	3 4 4 4 3	3.6
5.	I long for the "good old days" when my child was young and easy to manage.	2 4 5 3 3	3.4
6.	My child is an adult. I love him/her, but he/she is on his/her own.	1 1 1 1 1	1.0
7.	I have to do everything for my child.	3 1 3 3 3	2.6
8.	My child is allowed to make important decisions for him/herself.	1 4 2 3 4	2.8
9.	I am responsible for controlling my child's actions.	4 3 4 4 5	4.0
10.	My child is my primary source of joy.*	4 4 4 4 4	4.0
11.	My child is my best friend.*	3 4 3 3 3	3.2

## PART SIX: YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM (circle your chosen response)

1.	No one understands how I feel.	2 4 3 3 3	3.0
2.	Other people would reject me if they knew the truth about my family and my child.	1 1 2 2 1	1.4
3.	I need the support of other people.	5 5 5 4 4	4.6
4.	I can be a source of support and strength for other hurting parents.	4 5 4 4 4	4.2
5.	Admitting or showing pain is a sign of weakness.	1 1 3 2 3	2.0
6.	My spouse and I agree on how to raise our child.*	2 3 n 2 3	2.5
7.	My spouse and I agree on how to deal with our child's crisis.*	4 4 n 4 4	4.0
8.	My family provides the support I need.	3 3 3 3 2	2.8
9.	There are things about my child and my family that no one else knows.	3 2 2 3 1	2.2
10.	I am comfortable with the idea of sharing in a small group setting.	5 5 4 3 3	4.0

## H.O.P.E. Support Group

## Pretest and Posttest Questionnaire--Posttest Summary

This questionnaire is intended to measure the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and beliefs of the hurting parent both before and after participation in the support group sessions. Each participant must complete a questionnaire. You do not have to give your name. Please be as honest and as accurate as possible.

Scale: 1=never or no

2=rarely, or low intensity of feeling or agreement

3=sometimes, or moderate intensity of feeling or agreement

4=often, or high intensity of feeling or agreement

5=always, or extreme intensity of feeling or agreement

Questions followed by an asterisk (\*) should be answered for each child in crisis. Simply circle your answer for each child and place the initial of the child above the answer.

PART ONE: YOUR FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE CRISIS AND THE CHILD  
(Circle your chosen response)

	Participant	A	B	C	D	E	Avg
1. I love my child.*		5	5	5	5	5	5.0
2. My child is basically a good person.*		5	5	4	4	3	4.2
3. I have a right to be proud of my child.		5	4	5	4	3	4.2
4. I have a right to enjoy my child.		5	5	5	4	3	4.4
5. I have a right to know where my child is going and with whom my child will be		5	5	5	5	5	5.0
6. I distrust my child.*		3	4	4	4	3	3.6
7. My child loves me.*		4	5	5	4	4	4.4
8. I can love my child, even if there is no change in his or her behavior or attitudes		5	5	5	5	5	5.0
9. I believe the following persons are to blame for my child's crisis.							
myself*		1	1	3	2	3	2.0
my spouse*		1	1	n	1	3	1.5
a peer group*		4	5	3	3	3	3.6
school system*		1	1	3	2	1	1.6
a relative*		1	1	1	2	3	1.6
my child*		5	5	4	5	3	4.4
other_____*							
10. I feel like a failure when one of my children makes a mistake.		2	3	4	2	3	2.8
11. Allowing my children to face the consequences of their own behavior seems uncaring.		1	2	3	2	1	1.8
12. My child's crisis is the result of his or her own choices.		5	3	3	4	3	3.6
13. If I had been a better parent, this crisis probably would not have happened.		2	2	3	2	2	2.2



14. When my child is in crisis, I get silent.	3 3 4 3 3	3.2
15. When my child is in crisis, I get violent.	2 2 1 2 3	2.0
16. When my child is in crisis, I take out my frustration on other family members.	2 3 2 2 2	2.2
17. In the past two months, I have tried to escape reality by turning to work.	1 2 1 2 3	1.8
drugs/alcohol.	1 1 1 1 1	1.0
food.	2 4 1 2 3	2.4
religion.	2 2 1 1 1	1.4
hobbies.	2 2 1 1 1	1.4
spending money.	2 3 1 2 1	1.8
other_____.	n n n n n	n

PART THREE: THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PARENT (circle your chosen response)

1. I feel that God is at work in my life in a positive way.	5 5 4 4 4	4.4
2. I feel that God is at work in the life of my child in a positive way.*	5 5 4 4 3	4.2
3. God gives me the strength I need to endure each crisis situation.	5 5 5 5 5	5.0
4. I am ready to give God control of this crisis.	5 5 4 4 5	4.6
5. Prayer is an important part of my life.	5 5 5 4 5	4.8
6. I pray mostly as a last resort.	2 2 2 3 2	2.2
7. I often pray for my child.*	5 5 5 4 4	4.6
8. I often pray for myself.	4 2 5 4 4	3.8
9. I believe that God loves me and understands me.	5 5 5 4 5	4.8
10. I need to forgive my child.*	5 5 4 4 3	4.2
myself.	5 5 4 3 3	4.0
others_____.	n n n n n	n
11. I could never forgive my child.*	3 1 1 2 1	1.6
myself.	3 1 2 2 1	1.8
others_____.	3 1 2 2 2	2.0
12. I feel that God has forgiven my mistakes as a parent.	5 5 5 4 5	4.8
13. I believe that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." (Rom. 8:28)	5 5 5 5 5	5.0
14. I believe that God has answered the prayers I've offered on my child's behalf.*	3 3 4 3 3	3.2
15. It is wrong to be angry with God.	4 4 3 3 4	3.6
16. It is wrong to question or to doubt God.	5 5 5 5 5	5.0
17. I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings.	5 5 5 5 5	5.0

PART FOUR: FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF AS PARENT AND PERSON (circle your chosen response)

1. I consider myself to be an effective parent.	3 4 4 4 4	3.8
2. I consider myself to be a "good" person.	3 4 4 4 4	3.8
3. My pain is a sign of my guilt.	1 1 3 1 1	1.4



4.	I blame myself for my child's crisis.	1 1 3 2 3	2.0
5.	I lie about my child to protect my self-image.	1 1 2 1 1	1.2
6.	If my child makes mistakes, I am a bad parent.	1 1 2 1 1	1.2
7.	Good parents protect their children from punishment.	1 1 3 1 1	1.4
8.	My believe my child thinks I am a good parent.*	3 1 3 3 4	2.8
9.	Loving myself is acceptable.	4 5 3 4 5	4.2
10.	There are many things I do well.	4 5 4 4 4	4.2
11.	I am responsible for cleaning up my child's messes.	1 1 3 1 1	1.4
12.	I'm concerned that others blame me for my child's crisis.	4 4 3 3 3	3.4
13.	In my parenting, I have done more things right than I have done wrong.	3 4 4 4 4	3.8
14.	I am a lovable person.	3 3 4 3 3	3.2

## PART FIVE: DIFFERENTIATION (circle your chosen response)

1.	My child's welfare is my primary concern.*	5 5 5 4 5	4.8
2.	It is my responsibility to make my children happy.	4 5 4 4 3	4.0
3.	I cannot be happy when my child is unhappy.	4 4 3 3 4	3.6
4.	I know my child's wants and desires.	2 3 3 3 3	2.4
5.	I long for the "good old days" when my child was young and easy to manage.	3 5 5 4 3	4.0
6.	My child is an adult. I love him/her, but he/she is on his/her own.	3 3 1 2 1	2.0
7.	I have to do everything for my child.	1 1 2 3 3	2.0
8.	My child is allowed to make important decisions for him/herself.	5 4 3 4 4	4.0
9.	I am responsible for controlling my child's actions.	1 1 3 2 4	2.2
10.	My child is my primary source of joy.*	3 4 5 4 4	4.0
11.	My child is my best friend.*	3 4 4 3 3	3.4

## PART SIX: YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM (circle your chosen response)

1.	No one understands how I feel.	3 1 4 3 3	2.8
2.	Other people would reject me if they knew the truth about my family and my child.	2 2 2 2 3	2.2
3.	I need the support of other people.	5 5 4 4 4	4.4
4.	I can be a source of support and strength for other hurting parents.	5 5 4 4 4	4.2
5.	Admitting or showing pain is a sign of weakness.	3 1 2 2 1	1.8
6.	My spouse and I agree on how to raise our child.*	3 4 n 3 3	3.2
7.	My spouse and I agree on how to deal with our child's crisis.*	3 4 n 4 1	2.4
8.	My family provides the support I need.	3 4 3 3 3	3.2
9.	There are things about my child and my family that no one else knows.	3 5 2 3 3	3.2
10.	I am comfortable with the idea of sharing in a small group setting.	5 5 5 5 5	5.0

## H.O.P.E. Support Group

## Comparison of Pretest and Posttest Results (Group Averages)

This questionnaire is intended to measure the feelings, attitudes, reactions, and beliefs of the hurting parent both before and after participation in the support group sessions. Each participant must complete a questionnaire. You do not have to give your name. Please be as honest and as accurate as possible.

Scale: 1=never or no  
 2=rarely, or low intensity of feeling or agreement  
 3=sometimes, or moderate intensity of feeling or agreement  
 4=often, or high intensity of feeling or agreement  
 5=always, or extreme intensity of feeling or agreement

Questions followed by an asterisk (\*) should be answered for each child in crisis. Simply circle your answer for each child and place the initial of the child above the answer.

PART ONE: YOUR FEELINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT THE CRISIS AND THE CHILD  
 (Circle your chosen response)

	Pre- test	Post- test	Chg +/-
1. I love my child.*	5.0	5.0	-
2. My child is basically a good person.*	4.4	4.2	-0.2
3. I have a right to be proud of my child.	4.0	4.2	+0.2
4. I have a right to enjoy my child.	3.6	4.4	+0.8
5. I have a right to know where my child is going and with whom my child will be	4.6	5.0	+0.4
6. I distrust my child.*	3.6	3.6	-
7. My child loves me.*	4.2	4.4	+0.2
8. I can love my child, even if there is no change in his or her behavior or attitudes	4.8	5.0	+0.2
9. I believe the following persons are to blame for my child's crisis.			
myself*	3.2	2.0	-1.2
my spouse*	2.3	1.5	-0.8
a peer group*	3.8	3.6	-0.2
school system*	2.6	1.6	-1.0
a relative*	1.6	1.6	-
my child*	4.2	4.4	+0.2
other_____*	2.0	0.0	-2.0
10. I feel like a failure when one of my children makes a mistake.	3.4	2.8	-0.6
11. Allowing my children to face the consequences of their own behavior seems uncaring.	2.8	1.8	-1.0
12. My child's crisis is the result of his or her own choices.	3.8	3.6	-0.2
13. If I had been a better parent, this crisis probably would not have happened.	2.6	2.2	-0.4

14. When one of my children is in crisis, I feel:			
Worthless	2.8	3.0	+0.2
alone	3.8	3.2	-0.6
embarrassed	3.0	3.4	+0.4
guilty	3.6	3.8	+0.2
depressed	4.0	3.6	-0.4
rejected	3.8	3.4	-0.4
angry at child	3.2	3.2	-
angry at others	2.8	2.4	-0.4
angry at God	2.4	1.6	-0.8
inadequate	3.2	2.8	-0.4
shamed	2.6	3.2	+0.6
hopeless	3.6	2.6	-1.0
unforgiving	2.4	2.0	-0.4
other _____	n	n	n
15. It is wrong to feel the way I feel.	3.6	2.6	-1.0
16. It is wrong to be angry with my children.	3.6	2.0	-1.6
17. I can show love for my children without showing approval of their behaviors or beliefs.	4.4	4.8	+0.4
18. I hate my child*	1.4	1.0	-0.4
19. I hate my child's behavior.*	3.8	4.2	+0.4

PART TWO: REACTIONS TO THE CRISIS AND TO THE CHILD (circle your chosen response)

1. My child's crisis is a sign that he/she doesn't love me.	1.6	1.4	-0.2
2. In the past two months I have lied to protect my child.*	1.4	2.0	+0.6
3. In the last two months I have lied to protect my family's reputation.	1.2	1.2	-
4. The needs of my children take precedence over my own needs and the need of the family.	3.6	3.6	-
5. In the past two months I have denied my own needs in order to rescue my child.*	2.8	2.0	-0.8
6. In the past two months I have missed work because of my child's behavior.*	1.0	1.0	-
7. Confronting my child will just make things worse.*	2.6	3.4	+0.8
8. In the past two months I have stayed awake at night worrying about my child.*	4.0	2.8	-1.2
9. In the past two months I have loaned money to my child, supporting his/her behaviors.*	2.0	1.0	-1.0
10. In the past two months I have bailed out my child.	1.0	1.0	-
11. In the past two months I have done tasks my child was supposed to do.	3.6	2.2	-1.4
12. It is easier to go along with my child's wishes than to deal with my child's anger.*	3.0	2.6	-0.4
13. When my child is in crisis I withhold love.*	1.4	1.0	-0.4
money.*	1.2	3.4	+1.2
time.*	2.2	1.0	-1.2
conversation.*	2.6	2.2	-0.4
other _____.*	n	n	n

14. When my child is in crisis, I get silent.	2.4	3.2	+0.8
15. When my child is in crisis, I get violent.	2.0	2.0	-
16. When my child is in crisis, I take out my frustration on other family members.	2.6	2.2	-0.4
17. In the past two months, I have tried to escape reality by turning to work.	2.2	1.8	-0.4
drugs/alcohol.	1.0	1.0	-
food.	2.8	2.4	-0.4
religion.	3.0	1.4	-1.6
hobbies.	1.6	1.4	-0.2
spending money.	2.2	1.8	-0.4
other_____.	n	n	n

PART THREE: THE RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PARENT (circle your chosen response)

1. I feel that God is at work in my life in a positive way.	3.6	4.4	+0.8
2. I feel that God is at work in the life of my child in a positive way.*	3.0	4.2	+1.2
3. God gives me the strength I need to endure each crisis situation.	3.6	5.0	+1.4
4. I am ready to give God control of this crisis.	4.2	4.6	+0.4
5. Prayer is an important part of my life.	4.0	4.8	+0.8
6. I pray mostly as a last resort.	2.4	2.2	-0.2
7. I often pray for my child.*	4.0	4.6	+0.6
8. I often pray for myself.	4.0	3.8	-0.2
9. I believe that God loves me and understands me.	3.4	4.8	+1.4
10. I need to forgive my child.*	4.0	4.2	+0.2
myself.	3.4	4.0	+0.6
others_____.	n	n	n
11. I could never forgive my child.*	3.0	1.6	-1.4
myself.	3.0	1.8	-1.2
others_____.	3.0	2.0	-1.0
12. I feel that God has forgiven my mistakes as a parent.	4.4	4.8	+0.4
13. I believe that "in everything God works for good with those who love him." (Rom. 8:28)	4.6	5.0	+0.4
14. I believe that God has answered the prayers I've offered on my child's behalf.*	3.4	3.2	-0.2
15. It is wrong to be angry with God.	3.4	3.6	+0.2
16. It is wrong to question or to doubt God.	5.0	5.0	-
17. I believe God understands and accepts my deepest thoughts and feelings.	4.4	5.0	+0.6

PART FOUR: FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF AS PARENT AND PERSON (circle your chosen response)

1. I consider myself to be an effective parent.	3.8	3.8	-
2. I consider myself to be a "good" person.	3.8	3.8	-
3. My pain is a sign of my guilt.	2.0	1.4	-0.6

4.	I blame myself for my child's crisis.	2.4	2.0	-0.4
5.	I lie about my child to protect my self-image.	1.0	1.2	+0.2
6.	If my child makes mistakes, I am a bad parent.	1.6	1.2	-0.4
7.	Good parents protect their children from punishment.	1.8	1.4	-0.4
8.	My believe my child thinks I am a good parent.*	3.2	2.8	-0.4
9.	Loving myself is acceptable.	3.2	4.2	+1.0
10.	There are many things I do well.	3.4	4.2	+0.8
11.	I am responsible for cleaning up my child's messes.	3.2	1.4	-1.8
12.	I'm concerned that others blame me for my child's crisis.	2.4	3.4	+1.0
13.	In my parenting, I have done more things right than I have done wrong.	3.8	3.8	-
14.	I am a lovable person.	3.6	3.2	-0.4

## PART FIVE: DIFFERENTIATION (circle your chosen response)

1.	My child's welfare is my primary concern.*	4.8	4.8	-
2.	It is my responsibility to make my children happy.	4.4	4.0	-0.4
3.	I cannot be happy when my child is unhappy.	2.8	3.6	+0.8
4.	I know my child's wants and desires.	3.6	2.4	-1.2
5.	I long for the "good old days" when my child was young and easy to manage.	3.4	4.0	+0.6
6.	My child is an adult. I love him/her, but he/she is on his/her own.	1.0	2.0	+1.0
7.	I have to do everything for my child.	2.6	2.0	-0.6
8.	My child is allowed to make important decisions for him/herself.	2.8	4.0	+1.2
9.	I am responsible for controlling my child's actions.	4.0	2.2	-1.8
10.	My child is my primary source of joy.*	4.0	4.0	-
11.	My child is my best friend.*	3.2	3.4	+0.2

## PART SIX: YOUR SUPPORT SYSTEM (circle your chosen response)

1.	No one understands how I feel.	3.0	2.8	-0.2
2.	Other people would reject me if they knew the truth about my family and my child.	1.4	2.2	+0.8
3.	I need the support of other people.	4.6	4.4	-0.2
4.	I can be a source of support and strength for other hurting parents.	4.2	4.2	-
5.	Admitting or showing pain is a sign of weakness.	2.2	1.8	-0.4
6.	My spouse and I agree on how to raise our child.*	2.5	3.2	+0.7
7.	My spouse and I agree on how to deal with our child's crisis.*	4.0	2.4	-1.6
8.	My family provides the support I need.	2.8	3.2	+0.4
9.	There are things about my child and my family that no one else knows.	2.2	3.2	+1.0
10.	I am comfortable with the idea of sharing in a small group setting.	4.0	5.0	+1.0

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