

and sisters and overcoming all opposition, just like Nehemiah. Do not limit the power of our Father, Who is working even when we find it difficult to see how. Remember those words of Paul to Philemon cited at the beginning: "For perhaps he departed for a while for this pur-

pose, that you might receive him forever". There will be many times when we can only wonder, 'Perhaps this will turn out right', as Paul did. But we are assured that it is our Father's will that all in our family should be received by Him forever.

The changing scenes of life

Letting go: leaving home; marriage; grandchildren; and beyond

In this last part of the series looking at the different stages of parenting, Tecwyn and Mary Morgan (Washwood Heath, Birmingham, UK) considers what is involved in letting go so that children can begin to lead their own lives as young adults and ultimately establish families of their own.

GENESIS HAS been called 'the seed bed of the Bible' because so many Biblical themes and ideas have their roots there. Man and woman, made in God's image, were to have dominion, they were to help one another in their lifelong union, and so on. So it highlights the importance of coping with the changes of later life to realise that our first parents were instructed right at the outset about the need to let go and let their children leave home.

Adam had just said of Eve, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man", when the inspired comment comes, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:23,24). Who made that comment at the time is not immediately clear. It could have been an instructing angel, for the teaching that they were to be "one flesh" was extremely pertinent to their life together; they needed to realise that from the beginning. They were to develop a spiritual relationship, as well as a physical one, for the importance of 'oneness' of mind and spirit steadily grows (cf. Deut. 6:4,5; Mal. 2:14-16; Jno. 17:11; 1 Cor 6:16,17; Eph 1:10; 5:28-31).

Moses

In some respects it would be fitting if Moses had added the comment when he was bringing together the original patriarchal records in the first five books. (There are some indications that he added a few words of explanation here and there, all of them inspired and all intended to assist his early readers; for example, Genesis 13:10.) He was eminently qualified to write about leaving home. He left home once when still young, being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter; then he left his adopted home in Egypt twice, first in fear, then in faith (Ex. 2:15; 12:51). At each stage of his life Moses learned new skills and became suited for what God wanted:

- in Pharaoh's palace he learned about leadership
- in Jethro's home and out with the sheep he unlearned much and learned more about care and compassion
- with his young family in Midian he learned about fatherhood
- when called by God to redeem His people he learned to leave his family behind and go it alone
- in Egypt with Aaron he learned to be utterly God-dependent
- in the wilderness he learned patience, humility, meekness and much else.

With his family restored to him he saw his children and probably his grandchildren growing up, leaving the family home and making their own way in life.

So a man with this vast range of experience could indeed have given such excellent advice as is contained in Genesis 2:24 to newlyweds or those about to get married. Moses knew only too well that when change comes, as change must, there are times when a young couple have to work things out by themselves without undue interference from others. It is not only teenagers who 'need their own space'; so do families, young and old.

It was not that Moses had little regard for his parents or his in-laws. His later encounter with Jethro (Ex. 18) shows the nature of their relationship: "Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said" (v. 24), for it was good advice that he was given. But Jethro was a wise enough man to know that occasional advice was one thing, but continual advice would be seen as threatening, for it could undermine Moses' confidence. He knew that he was better employed at home, at least for the time being, so "Moses let his father in law depart; and he went his way into his own land" (v. 27).

What we are learning from this encounter demonstrates the wisdom of that Edenic command. Moses and Zipporah had left Midian, to make their own way in the world, with their children. It was their challenge, both as individuals and as a family, to find and enter the inheritance that God had promised them. They were journeying with others; living in close proximity to hundreds of thousands of others as it turned out. But, as the events of the wilderness journey showed, each person has to make his or her own choice. Nobody can make it for you, and sometimes even family loyalties have to be set aside for the sake of the Lord. When Moses issued his challenge against calf-worship, to which the Levites responded, he spelled that out clearly: "Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour" (32:27). Have you considered that Moses' own sons might not have responded to his call, or that their uncle Aaron might have been their executor?

Moses had to let go of his children in just the way that Jethro had let go of his daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, for there comes a time when all of us must stand alone before God. That's why God commanded that each family should respect and safeguard its own privacy and be responsible for the spiritual standard it sets and the way each member lives before God.

God's command

As it happens, Moses did not add the words as an editorial comment. It was God Who issued the command, which gives it even more weight and importance. Jesus explained that when he said this about marriage: "Have ye not read, that He Which made them at the beginning made them male and female, *and said*, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt. 19:4-6).

So, even before any children had been born in Eden, and when Adam and Eve had neither father nor mother, God decreed that, when there were fathers and mothers in the earth, those who were getting married should leave home and make their own decisions in life. It's that important. And just as Genesis is the seedbed for all sorts of other themes and ideas, there is a principle here that applies to more than just marriage and the relationship with the in-laws. It applies to any sort of interference (however well meant) when anyone tries to dictate, influence, control or direct how other people should live their lives. Advice is one thing, as Jethro showed Moses. Interference is quite another.

Finding the balance

The secret in life is to find the right balance. Moses did not leave home at once; he was very grateful for the initial support he was given in his new life in Midian, and the families lived together for some forty years. Today many new couples have no option but to start life with their parents, or to live in close proximity to them, and they might be extremely glad of their support and help, especially when the children are young. But, as God declared in Eden, if a marriage is to succeed the man and wife must form a relationship in which their union is closer and more intimate than that which could ever exist between parents and children. The word '*cleave*' later takes on connotations of fellowship, so it designates the new relationship as both spiritual and physical oneness (*cf.* Deut. 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Ps. 119:31).

So, anything that interferes with the development of that relationship, like secrets that are kept between one partner and parents, or excessive time spent with parents to the exclusion of the relationship between both partners, must be avoided. For it works both ways. Not only could such happenings hamper the development of

unity and oneness between the young couple; they could affect the older and more established relationship as well. Birds have the right idea, thanks to their God-given instincts. They care for the fledglings avidly while they cannot survive alone, but, having fed them and trained them in the arts of survival, they encourage them to leave home and make their own way in the world. The young birds have a new and challenging life ahead of them, and their parents have things they need to be doing as well.

Life in Christ

In certain circumstances the break is easy enough to make and to cope with. If one or both partners come from non-Christadelphian families, their coming together will form a partnership of a quite different nature, one which is based on spiritual principles. It will not be long before the things they do, the people they spend time with, and the attitudes and principles by which they live, lead to a natural separation between themselves and their former families. That doesn't mean that they will shun their respective parents or siblings; indeed, as their spirituality develops they will be even keener than before to have them share their faith. But the difference in attitude and aspiration will be obvious, and that difference is likely to grow over time.

It is a very different situation when one or both of the partners comes from a Christadelphian family, for the relationship already established is bound to continue, as part of the life in Christ, and it will grow and develop as the enlarged

family grows and new experiences are shared. The coming of children can enhance the richness of the family unit and widen both the experience and the challenge for all concerned. Scripture never suggests that those who have left home should isolate themselves from their parents, or that parents should opt out once the children have left. But the Edenic counsel does indicate that undue dependence upon parents, or undue interference by parents or grandparents, must be avoided. Let Jethro be your guide. He offered good counsel but he did not expect to take over the responsibility properly vested in Moses, on behalf of his own family and the family of God (the nation of Israel).

As the wheel of life turns, the help that parents were once able to offer their children might no longer be needed. Indeed, it could be the children who become the carers for their parents. Everything they were taught by the example of wise parents will now be seen to be advantageous for all concerned. No elderly person wants children who interfere unreasonably, boss them around, take control, or tell them what to do. They want to live their own lives and to get help when they ask for it, but not otherwise. How wise God was to have made it a first principle in Eden that each married couple should respect the independence and responsibility vested in that new and God-ordained relationship! If we make that our rule for life, we shall live in a way that keeps us happy, and confers a blessing on our children and their families, and which enhances the family of God in every way.

The role of grandparents

For busy parents, the idea of one day being a grandparent is an attractive prospect—the joys of little ones without the responsibility. But, as Geoff and Ray Walker (Norwich, UK) show, there are important spiritual responsibilities involved.

THERE CAN BE no thought of retirement in the Truth's service. Circumstances may change, requirements may vary, but there is always work to be done. As we grow older, it is not so easy for us to cope with changing situations. Parents who have worked faithfully and hard to nurture their children in God's ways may find that their children's children may not so eas-

ily respond to their ways of working. Nevertheless, the very fact that they are now relieved of the endless day-to-day responsibility for the children's welfare means that more thought and love can be expended on the next generation's spiritual growth.

There is often a natural affection between a grandchild and a grandparent, whether in the Truth or without. But the love shown by grandparents in the Lord must surpass natural affection, for it must be a love which has in its sights the child's everlasting salvation in God's Kingdom. We grandparents love to please our grandchildren and give them what they want, but