

It was shocking to believe when one of Hollywood's most handsome and athletic stars, Christopher Reeve, suffered an accident that paralyzed him from the neck down. In one tragic moment he was left a quadriplegic. Ironically, during those years when he was living in a wheelchair, **most of us still associated him with his most famous role, that of SUPERMAN.** In an interview years after the accident, Christopher Reeve and his wife, Dana, talked about the ordeal and the love that kept them together with author, Liz Smith.

Smith asked Reeve a painful question, *"During those times in the night when you woke up and faced reality, did you go through a major depression? Did you ever want to die or pull the plug?"*

Christopher Reeve answered, *"No. Four days after the injury, I came to, and first realized my situation. Dana and I were alone in the hospital room. This was before the operation, and the doctors said I might not pull through. I remember saying to Dana that maybe it wasn't worth the trouble, maybe we should just let me go. If Dana had looked at the floor or taken a pause, it would have been difficult because I would have thought, she's just being noble. But without missing a beat, she looked me right in the eye and said, but you're still you and I love you.' And that saved my life right there. That put an end to any thought of giving up. Then my three kids came in---besides Will, I've got Alexandra, who's 12, and Matthew, 16. And I asked myself, how can I possibly leave them?' Of course, I've had moments of feeling sorry for myself. I look at pictures of our boat and at people who can walk upstairs, and I think I've been dealt a lousy hand. But through it all, I never had any thoughts of suicide—and My Faith has kept me going."*

Where did Superman draw his strength? From his wife, his children and from his Faith—**YES, FROM HIS FAMILY & HIS FAITH.**

The question of the day is...What does it take to make a FAMILY?

Mark helps us understand FAMILY better by telling us about a most unusual event in Jesus' life. Jesus was not very far into his ministry. Already crowds were starting to gather wherever he taught. He was in a house teaching one day when members of his family showed up. **They came to take him back home because, Mark tells us, they had concluded that he was out of his mind.** We know Jesus' devotion to his mother, Mary, and her devotion to him, *but it appeared that Jesus' new-found fame was taking a toll on his relationship with his brothers.*

Jesus' family was standing outside the house and someone told Jesus, *"Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."* *"Who is my mother and my brothers?"* Jesus replied. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him, **"Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."**

Doesn't that sound a bit COLD to you? We are accustomed to encountering family strife in the Old Testament. Cain and Able. Noah and his family. Jacob and Esau. But Jesus? **There were problems in Jesus' family?**

ALL FAMILIES HAVE PROBLEMS—ALL FAMILIES HAVE CHALLENGES. *That is the first thing that is obvious in our lesson.* If Jesus and his family experienced tensions, it ought to take the rest of us off the hook just a little bit. All families have their headaches and their heartaches. **Having a family is a challenge.**

A father, fearing an earthquake in the region of his home, sent his two boys to stay with a distant friend until the peril was past. A few weeks later, the father received this letter from his friend: *"Please take your boys home and send me the earthquake."*

Some of us can sympathize, for Children can be challenging, children of any age. Some of you may remember the comic strip, *"For Better or for Worse."* The first three segments show the mother tossing and turning in her bed, worrying about their son, Michael. She says, *"Are we too tough on Michael? Are we not tough enough? Do we give in too often? Too seldom? Do we listen? Do we understand? Maybe I nag too much. Am I a good parent? Where*

are the answers? How does one know what to do?" In the last box we see Michael lying awake in his bed saying, *"The trouble with grown-ups is they think they know everything."*

What a Surprise!! Parents don't know everything, especially about raising children. That's what makes it so difficult. **That is why so much of family life is trial-and error.** Most parents do the best they can and pray that it is enough.

It is particularly difficult being a family in today's world. The most challenging *social change* in our society ever was that of *"the working Mom."* This major change was predominately due to financial pressures on most families. However, it is also due to women who want to fulfill the need to succeed in their careers.

Having a family is not easy. All families have problems. If Jesus had problems in his family, I guess you and I can expect to have some problems in ours.

THE SECOND THING WE OBSERVE IN OUR TEXT IS THAT JESUS RE-STATED WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FAMILY. A family is not so much defined by its bloodlines but by the love and respect members have for one another. Mutual commitment is more important than shared genes. *"Who is my mother and brothers?"* Jesus asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, *"Here are my mother and my brothers!"* Jesus was expanding the concept of family beyond the concept of blood kin. **Biology is such a small part of parenting.**

One of the major worries in adoptive families today is, *"What happens when our child starts asking about his biological parents?"* Many adopted children spend years tracking down their so-called natural parents. Only someone who has been adopted can probably appreciate that strong urge.

Still, it must be said that biology is the least important part of a family relationship. Almost anyone can produce a child; **it takes a person of deep commitment to truly parent a child.**

YOUR FAMILY CONSISTS OF THOSE PERSONS WHO HAVE COMMITTED THEMSELVES TO BE THERE FOR YOU. Maybe these are persons who were responsible for bringing you into the world, maybe not. Adoptive parents can be your true parents in every sense of the word. For that matter, you can be living with your biological parents and find that they are not committed to you at all.

Comedian Bill Cosby's son Ennis, was murdered in 1997. In the prime of his life, Bill Cosby was highly admired as a father. **His most successful television program was a sitcom based on his own family.** Many of you grew up admiring the agonies and the ecstasies of TV's Huxtables. But Bill Cosby wasn't always committed to his true family. Like many young fathers he had to grow into his role as a family man. *He told TIME magazine that as recently as 1979 if somebody had made him choose between his career and his family, he probably would have let his family go.* But something happened--he doesn't say what, but that event caused him to shift his priorities. He rededicated himself to his wife and children. *"I just asked my wife and kids to forgive me,"* he says, *"and ever since then, they've been a part of everything I do."* There are many parents who should consider making that kind of rededication.

In a recent issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN, Elaine Milsark wrote about her father. *"When I was growing up,"* she says, *"my dad worked long hours and missed most of my school activities. But when I joined the high school band, he said he'd be there for every game. He was true to his word until one Friday night during my senior year. His flight home from a business trip was landing fifty miles away at game time. I knew my mom would be alone in the stands. Yet, as the band marched onto the muddy field in the pouring rain, I happened to look outside the fence and noticed a figure in a wet trench coat holding a dripping umbrella over his head. I knew at a glance it was my dad. He'd arrived at the stadium just before half-time. It was too late to buy a ticket, but that didn't prevent him from keeping his promise. He was there, just like he said he'd be. And it's still that way with my dad. He's always true to his word."*

Wow! Does anyone doubt that Elaine's Dad is committed to her? Do you think it would have mattered if he had been her biological father or not? He always kept his promises to her.

That brings us to a final observation from our text. IT CONCERNS THE ROLE OF CHARACTER IN THE FAMILY.

"Whoever does God's will," says Jesus, "is my brother and sister and mother." GOOD PEOPLE MAKE GOOD PARENTS. People of questionable character make questionable parents.

Kimberly E. Davis tells how her brother once snooped through their father's drawers. Instead of finding some dark secret like a friend had found in their Dad's drawer (pornography in a similar hunt), David found his father's prayer journal. On every page David was lifted up in Prayer. That was proof of their father's integrity, says Kimberly, that he is as he appeared—this affected her brother deeply.

I suspect that this is where many parents fail, at the level of their PERSONAL CHARACTER. Their implicit message to their children is: ***"Do what I say, not what I do."*** And that message never succeeds.

James Dobson tells of his great-grandfather, George McCluskey, who invested the hour from eleven to twelve o'clock each morning in prayer for his family. He asked God to bless not only his children but also the generations yet to be born. Dobson then describes the fascinating way God answered that prayer in the lives of McCluskey's children and grandchildren: ***"There have been times as I have sat on the platform of a large church, waiting to speak, says Dobson, that I have felt the presence of the old man . . . It staggers the mind to realize that the prayer of this one man, spoken more than fifty years ago, can reach across four generations of time and influence developments in my life today."***

HERE IS THE TRUTH...Good people make good parents. All families have problems, but if your family is built on commitment and character, your chances of success are strong indeed.

In his best-selling book **STRAIGHT TALK**, Lee Iacocca put it this way:

"My father told me that the best way to teach is by example. He certainly showed me what it took to be a good person and a good citizen. As the old joke has it, No one ever said on his deathbed, I should have spent more time on my business.' Throughout my life, the bottom line I've worried about most was that my kids turn out all right. The only rock I know that stays steady, the only institution I know that works, IS FAITH & FAMILY. I was brought up to believe in these--and I do."

Iacocca cont. by saying..." ***I believe a civilized world can't remain civilized for long if its foundation is built on anything but family. THE TRUTH IS...a city, state or country can't be any more than the sum of its vital parts--- millions of family units. You can't have a country or a city or a state that's worth [anything] unless you govern within yourself in your day-to-day life. "It all starts at home and it requires the love of Family and strong Faith."***

Well spoken. It all starts at home in the midst of those who love you, who support you and yes, it requires faith.

Even Superman will tell you that. Amen.