



Joseph and Moses. David, Hosea and Esther. What did these spiritual pillars all have in common? The answer is surprising!

All were powerful and effective servants of God while their marital partners were unbelieving (Hos. 1:2-3), outside the congregation of Israel (Gen. 41:50, Esther 2:10, 16-17) or just plain hostile (Ex. 4:26, II Sam. 6:20-23).

What eloquent testimony to the opportunities available today for those in the Church of God with nonmember mates!

God specifically promises special blessings for those with husbands and wives outside His Church. What are these blessings? Let's study God's Word to see. Expect some surprises.

A special service

God carefully spells out that members with unbaptized mates are called to special service in His Work. Notice: "If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him" (I Cor. 7:12-13).

How clear and precise. As long



Special Blessings for Those With Unbelieving Mates

Do you sometimes feel you're fighting a losing battle with your unconverted husband or wife? Read this encouraging instruction from God's Word.

By Neil Earle

as the nonbeliever sincerely and seriously desires to maintain a normal family relationship, the marriage should continue.

Why? Why doesn't God imme-

diately call both husband and wife into the Church? Paul says: "But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk.



Setting a good example, planning wholesome recreation, scheduling special evenings, teaching children about biblical principles — these are a few of the challenges and opportunities open to those with unbelieving husbands and wives. God promises special blessings to those who apply wisdom, humility, tact and selfless concern.



And so ordain I in all churches" (verse 17).

Why is God so emphatic here? Why did Paul rule that, all other things being equal, members married to nonmembers should stay together? Notice verse 16: "For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

The potential payoff in a non-member-mate situation is the possibility that an unbelieving husband or wife will someday respond to God's calling. Notice I said "someday." But we are "now" people, forgetting that one of our God's names is "the Eternal." As Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong says, the Eternal has plenty of time. Patiently persevere.

Why does God choose to work this way sometimes? Remember when Jesus came to His hometown of Nazareth? The Bible records that "he did not many mighty works there because of

their unbelief" (Matt. 13:58). Why? Prejudice and preconceived opinions can block the flow of God's Spirit (Acts 7:51).

Consider your mate. Wrong examples, disillusioning childhood experiences, misplaced hopes, blinding materialistic pursuits, sheer hardness of heart — these can make it difficult for people to respond to a direct call from God (Heb. 3:7-8). So God sometimes uses the indirect approach. No one is more clever, subtle and skillful than the Master Designer of the universe (Dan. 2:20).

Outstanding Christian character has impact (Matt. 5:14). Many with mates outside God's Church have so transformed themselves by the molding and

fashioning influence of God's Spirit (Rom. 12:2) that they are beacons of God's way. Their mates have come up against the most irresistible force in this universe, the power of God's Spirit flowing out in kindness, gentleness and patience (II Tim. 1:7, Gal. 5:22).

Hundreds reading this article have seen God's hand at work in this complex situation. God would love to do the same for all of us (Eph. 3:20). On one condition. Here is the great caution God's ministers offer to those with unbelieving mates: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5).

God must do the calling

Don't take matters into your own hands (Prov. 21:30). Forget trying to engineer your mate's conversion. Mr. Armstrong has for years emphasized John 6:44: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

Realize the deep implications of that verse. Leave the calling in God's hands. No human has the eloquence, the skill, the prowess to accomplish what God hasn't yet accomplished.

Oh, how tempting it is for wives or husbands to "accidentally" leave certain *Good News* or *Plain Truth* articles displayed on the coffee table in the hope that their mates will happen to see them and — presto! — "join the Church."

How clever it seems to go along with a husband's or wife's social pursuits in the hope that he or she might feel somehow obligated to attend the next Church activity!

How many men and women try to subtly steer conversations their way so they can end by offering a foolproof (they think) list of arguments for the Church!

Avoid these carnal gambits! "This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying

and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (Jas. 3:15-16). Such strategies usually boomerang miserably.

Remember, giving to get something in return is not God's kind of giving (Acts 20:35). That is mere merchandising. Respect your mate's position. God does. He forces no one to go His way. Man can choose not to obey.

Yet God does, however, look for opportunities to attract others to the truth through the sincere, selfless, submissive examples of His people (John 1:40-41).

I Corinthians 7:16 is God's statement of intent in such cases.

Not a few of those once overtly hostile to God's truth are now deeply committed members.

Miracles happen. There are always the bitter, incorrigible cases, the Nabals who do not learn (I Sam. 25:25), who threaten the physical and spiritual survival of God's begotten children. Such cases need to be brought to the ministry.

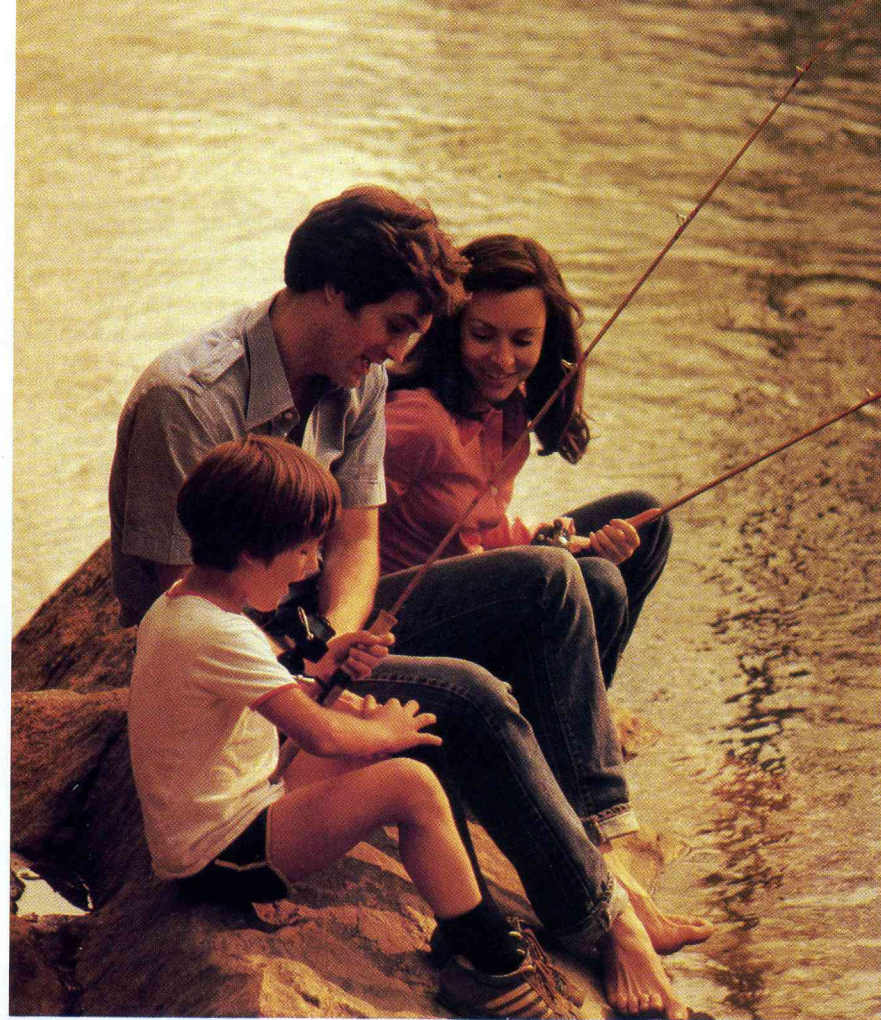
Yet, still, our primary job is to change ourselves, not our mates (Matt. 7:5). Never forget that through the workings of God's Spirit in our minds, God can reach people otherwise impervious to His call. Place the onus upon yourself to set the example of optimism, stability, discretion and efficiency. God will help (Jas. 1:5).

God may use your mate

There is still more. Members with nonbelieving mates are already serving God in ways they perhaps don't realize. Consider this: How many people who would not listen to a *World Tomorrow* broadcast or subscribe to *The Plain Truth* receive a personal witness because they are friends or associates of your husband or wife?

"You know John's wife? Well, she belongs to that Worldwide Church of God — you know, the group that keeps Saturday and other Jewish festivals."

"Now keep this to yourselves, girls, but I hear that Mildred's husband has joined some religious



group that believes Europe will attack the United States. Can you believe it?"

"I don't agree with your wife's religion, Hank, but it certainly seems to have changed her for the better!"

Get the picture? God may often use your mate's unconverted status to spread more of His truth into more lives and can further the Gospel in ways you might not know (Ezek. 33:30).

Nonmember mates have numerous business and social contacts they might not have as baptized members. Unwittingly, they are often used to advertise God's Work in many more lives simply because they aren't members.

Don't be surprised if the talk about your "strange religion" (at which your husband or wife might even take potshots behind your back) sows seeds that will eventually sprout (Eccl. 11:6).

Don't limit yourself. God can use your mate's nonmember status to shine His light into nooks

and crannies of this world that a broadcast or magazine might not penetrate.

Open your eyes to God's hand in your life. Catch the vision (Prov. 29:18). Set a good example for your husband or wife's friends and associates. Quit wasting time idealizing out of all proportion the marriages where both mates are members. We all have our problems (Eccl. 7:20).

God knows your situation. If He hasn't changed it yet, trust Him to know what He is doing (I Cor. 1:25). One day we will learn that the great, magnificent God was far ahead of us all along (Job 42:2-3). Is that really so hard to believe?

What about children?

What about the blessings God extends to the children of members with unbelieving mates?

It should be encouraging to note that the scripture explaining how the children in God's Church are "holy" applies to those in this

situation: "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (I Cor. 7:14).

How does God bless entire families if only one mate is baptized? Through financial stability, employment opportunities, healings and special protection (Prov. 11:11). Many case histories in God's Church testify to this solid truth.

Yet God often works a special work in the offspring of those with nonbelieving mates (Prov. 11:21). Many are the young people inspired by parents battling for their beliefs in uphill struggles against antagonistic mates. Sometimes it prods them to think more deeply about God's Church at an earlier age than they would if both parents attended.

They learn to "count the cost" (Luke 14:28). Early. The ratio of children departing from the Church of God is not unusually high in the cases of those with only one parent converted. Ask your minister!

This should be inspiring. Was John Mark's father ever a member? Probably not. Only his mother is mentioned in scripture. Yet she was a vital part of the early Church (Acts 12:12). What did righteous, capable Kings Azariah, Hezekiah and Josiah have in common? All three were the products of righteous mothers who steeled their sons in God's ways even while their fathers were weak, wicked or both (II Kings 15:1-3, 18:1-3, 22:1-2). No easy task in a time when the wrong word or look from a king spelled instant death!

These noble mothers remind us there is sometimes more intensity and sincerity in training children the right way when only one mate is a believer. There is a strong prod to make the most of every day.

Fathers: Lead the family

Fathers, if your wife resents your family Bible studies, compensate for it by setting a vibrant,

enthusiastic example at the supper table (Prov. 15:7). Does your mealtime conversation sparkle? Are you a lift to everyone's day (Prov. 12:18)?

Do your children look forward to your coming home? Are you the one they're going to remember as the real fireball of the family, the one who planned the fun activities, the one they could count on for a friendly word or a pep talk when necessary (Matt. 5:13)?

Or do you selfishly bemoan your life situation and miss the daily opportunities to show your offspring that God's way of life is truly the abundant life (John 10:10)? Remember, enthusiasm is contagious. Our children will remember how we live.

Ask God to help you shed false pride and worldly concepts of masculinity. Humbly beseech God to help you guide your children. Learn to express love and warmth.

Serve your family. Plan the right balance of wholesome recreational activities. Utilize sports, athletics and family outings to shrewdly drive home basic lessons: Nothing good comes without effort. Lose gracefully. Persevere. Plan wisely. This is more effective than preaching or lecturing.

Surround your children with a warm, hearty, masculine exuberance for life and its challenges and, when bedtime comes, occasionally kneel down and lead them in thanksgiving to their spiritual Father who blesses, protects and teaches us. Few women will resent this!

Many men with wives hostile to the Church outflank the problem by just such a strategy (Prov. 24:5). They are richly blessed. Their children know who the happy parent is in their family. Do yours?

Mothers: Instill biblical principles

Women with nonmember mates can work with their children on simple areas of godly conduct such as basic table manners, politeness, respect for elders, punctuality, orderly

schoolwork and successful performance of chores. These are biblical principles.

Wisely schedule the time for Bible lessons you want to cover. Appreciate your husband's sensitivities and sore spots. Pick a time when your mate will not feel like the Church is competing with him in his involvement with the family. What to do on Friday night is usually a puzzler here.

Why not make some Friday nights theme nights? Take music, for example. Plan a relaxing hour listening to the more lasting, uplifting, inspirational masterpieces that add tone and dignity to the Sabbath. Do some homework. Brush up on the subject. Serve snacks afterward. This might lead to a discussion about some profitable area of life that your husband would enjoy sharing.

Or what about family photograph albums? What better way to count your blessings some Friday night than to reminisce about your trips, travels, life opportunities or even your family tree? This can lead to wholesome, godly discussions on thankfulness, looking on the bright side, changing times, customs, morality. But stay on top of the situation by first seeking wisdom from God (Jas. 1:5).

Your special calling

Refuse to be pushed around by life's circumstances (Prov. 24:10). God called you alone and you can make it on your own, with His help, if you have to.

Look upon your mate's nonmember status as your extra incentive to develop tact, wisdom, resourcefulness. Refuse to indulge in self-pity. Wake up to your opportunities.

God, by placing you in the special category of bearing His way of life before your family's scrutiny and daily observation, has given you a terrific vote of confidence.

How? Because, calling you in that way, He knew you could handle it, with His help (I Cor. 7:24). What a special calling you have. Make the most of it! □