

# EMBASSY

## COLLEGE



## TEXTBOOK (ACADEMIC VERSION)

## YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY

COURSE: YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY (CC401)

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# YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY

Dr. Morris Sheats and Janet Sheats

## TIME-TESTED, PROVEN EFFECTIVE WAYS OF CREATING OR RESTORING TOTAL HARMONY IN ONE OF GOD'S BASIC UNITS OF FELLOWSHIP

*You Can Have a Happy Family* has a quality of personal counseling to it. It is written by a man who has seen hundreds of families in need of Godly counsel. Morris Sheats has helped them through their crisis and given them the courage that God has an answer for their mundane, frustrating, everyday kinds of problems.

He talks about problems that confront families everyday—"getting out of debt"—"helping men and women to get their priorities straight."

Mixed up relationships are a major cause of family problems today. Couples today either think of marriage as a partnership with no head or as a dictatorship in which authority takes precedence over Jesus' law of love. Morris gives the balance.

When you are in trouble you seek a counselor who is gentle but not afraid to speak the truth in love, who is specific, but not dogmatic; one seeks a book with the same qualities.

*You Can Have a Happy Family* is just that kind of book.

# YOU CAN HAVE A HAPPY FAMILY

by Dr. Morris Sheats and Janet Sheats

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This book is lovingly dedicated to our children:

Shanda and William, Mo and Trish

Two by birth and two by marriage

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# CHAPTER ONE

## FIRST THING FIRST

“But Morris, we’re just not happy, anymore!” The faces, clothes, and years change, but the heartache mirrored in the eyes remain the same. Couples who began a life together with high hopes for a bright and happy future, often find that their lives have become a disappointment.

Let me tell you what I have told them. You can have a happy family. There is no mystery involved. It is not a secret. There is a simple and proven pattern to follow as sure and true as the laws of nature. You can find the same happiness millions of others have found by deciding to start today.

If your family is going to succeed, you must first establish priorities for your interpersonal relationships. I believe most God-given relationships fall into four categories:

1. A relationship with God
2. A relationship with your companion and children
3. A relationship with “significant others”
4. A relationship to the world

When you get these priorities in order, then your family will begin to be happy. YOU will begin to be happy, and



that happiness will spill over to your entire family! Strong relationships require time!

## **I. A Relationship with God**

First, let us consider the need to develop your personal relationship with God.

*I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name—the name you gave me—so that they may be one as we are one....My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

John 17:9-11, 20-21 (NIV)

Jesus says “The Father and I are one.” In other words, Christ spent time with the Father developing a personal relationship with Him. How did Jesus maintain His relationship to the Father even in the midst of ministering to the masses?

Time and again, He would draw aside and seek communion with God, the Father. If we do not follow the example of Christ, we make a gross error in our lives. We need that personal individual time to commune with the Father, God.

Nothing grieves the Father more than our going through the motions of a relationship that is not real in our heart. One of the saddest things we see on our trips to Israel are the churches and shrines which have been built over places that are considered sacred to Christians. They are the trappings of religion without the true significance.

The same is true in Greece. The government states that 92% of the people are Christian, but what they really mean is that only 8% of the people have dared to state that they are not members of the state religion in Greece. Many of the people in the state religion have no knowledge of a personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ, and yet they go through the motions of religion.

We met a young man in Greece, however, who does have a personal relationship to God. As he shared his story, we realized that few of us experience walking with our Lord as his own father had. His father was imprisoned nine times for preaching the gospel in Greece. Then during World War II, he was in a German concentration camp when the Lord spoke to his heart and said, "I am going to set you free." He did not understand how God could do this, but one day he awoke with the song, "Onward Christian Soldiers" on his mind. As he walked through the camp, he began whistling the hymn. After he had gone 100 yards, he realized instead of detaining him or shooting him, the guards were saluting. God had indeed set him free! He just continued to walk away from that camp and today, there are more churches in Greece teaching a personal relationship to Jesus Christ as a result of that amazing miracle.

We must decide that whatever it takes for us to have a strong relationship with the Father, we will pay the price. The quality of every other relationship is affected by our relationship to the Father.

## II. A Relationship with Your Companion and Children

Next in importance is your relationship to your companion and your children. In my opinion, Jesus experienced this relationship in a dual way. First, there is no indication that he ever lost respect or understanding for his own family. One of the last things he said from the cross to John, the beloved disciple, was “be sure you take care of Mary, my mother.” There was a strong relationship in his home. There is every indication that Jesus assumed the responsibility as head of his family for several years after Joseph’s death and prior to Jesus’ public ministry.

The second family Jesus had were the twelve disciples who constituted his household for three years. Notice verse nine again. *“I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.”* That is a prayer which should be prayed for our households. “Father, I care for the world, but I cannot develop a relationship to this huge world that I can have with my companion and our children, so I pray first for them.”

Your personal commitment to your family must be strong before you can relate to the world. Jesus was not praying for the world, at this time, but for those God had given Him. You will never be effective in ministering to others until first you are strong in your own relationship with God and secondly, in your relationship with your family.

It took me years to learn this second principle. I used to think the church and my work were more important than my family and I acted accordingly. When my wife came home from the hospital with our first baby, a church member telephoned with what he felt was an emergency. I left my wife, on her first night home, just when she

needed me most only to discover that there really was not an emergency after all. It took my wife a long time from the hurtful situation to heal. I have learned that my relationship to my family is second only to God, not to the ministry.

Within this context there is still another priority. When J. Alan Peterson who edited “The Marriage Affair” was in our church he taught us a very important principle. He said, “Your husband-wife commitment always precedes the commitment to your children. One day your children will leave the home to establish a home of their own, and if you do not have a good relationship with your spouse already, you will be left with a stranger.” This is really worth considering as we have such a tendency to put our children first in the home.

If you are a single person, it is important that you develop a family relationship as Jesus did with his disciples. You really need to be in some kind of a family structure even if it is not as a husband or wife. A small support group is very helpful.

### **III. A Relationship with “Significant Others”**

Then you must develop a relationship with “significant others.” The passage in the seventeenth chapter of John does not stress this particular relationship, but we see it over and over in the life of Jesus. Who were the “significant others” to Jesus? Yes, they were the twelve disciples but there was even a smaller circle of three, Peter, James and John, with a deeper relationship. Who was always with Him when something important came along?

For instance, on the day of the transfiguration on Mount

Tabor Jesus took Peter, James and John with him. Now don't you know that Matthew felt left out? But somehow, Jesus must have felt that his experience was not for all twelve, only the "significant others." We see this relationship portrayed several times in the Gospels.

I believe every family should have this significant type relationship with two or three other families so that they could sustain each other in times of trial or need. We do not know what lies ahead for us in America, but we need the security of Christian families who would be so closely knit, not cliquish or snobbish, but would have an inner tie between them so that no matter what we might face, we would be able to draw strength from one another.

At Hillcrest Church, where I have the joy of pastoring a great people, we are highly committed to Growth Groups (cells). Almost 50% of our people actively participate. These families experience a much higher level of care and love than the people who choose not to be in a Growth Group (cell).

I have, frankly speaking, found it next to impossible to keep a family positively moving together without other families assisting. The "extended family" of 40 years ago is non-existent in most cases today. The small group can be an effective substitute for the aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc. of past days.

Ideally, in the Body of Christ, if one family has a need, the other families also have a need. Or, if one has plenty, all have plenty. Paul says when one suffers we must all suffer. Likewise, when one rejoices, we all rejoice. We will not experience this in the Body of Christ until we come into meaningful relationships beyond our home with those God seems to be placing in our life.

## IV. A Relationship to the World

Now you can develop a personal relationship to the world. How can you develop a personal relationship to the whole world? Through the ministry God has given you. It may surprise you that a God-given ministry is this far down on the list of priorities. But I believe that it is far more important for you to have a personal relationship to God, for your household to have a deep relationship to each other, and then to have a few other intimate relationships, than to have a shallow relationship to thirty, sixty, or one-hundred persons.

Now let's look again at John.

*Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*

John 17:17-20 (NIV)

For whom did Jesus sanctify himself? For other's sakes. "Sanctify" means to be set apart, ordained, dedicated unto God. Jesus said, "I dedicate, sanctify, ordain myself unto you Father for their sake.

If you try to minister to others and you have not said prayerfully, "Lord, I love you, I sanctify myself to you first, then with my family and finally with others" you will be ineffectual in your ministry.

Do you see the pattern? "Father, I pray for the "signifi-



cant others” but also for them which shall believe on me through their word.” And then He says:

*That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me .*

John 17:21-23 (NIV)

What is the purpose of this whole pattern? Oneness. What was the secret of success of the early church? Oneness. Right! Acts, chapter two tells us what happens to relationships when the priorities are in order? Oneness. If you would have a successful family, you must build your relationships in the proper order. Then your unity with God will flow into your family to bring about oneness that will draw other families and individuals into significant relationships that will in turn reach through your ministry to a cold and dying world.