

# Home Atmosphere - July 1976

*Bryn Jones*

Hi, George. What's up with you then?" "Oh, you know; same old thing. The old man's in one of 'is moods, and Mum's ranting and raving around the place. I can't do anything right, so I nipped out the back way. I'm fed up with it all," "Same with me, mate. It's murder to live in our 'ouse. You come 'ome and there he is, sitting watching telly. He even watches the kids' stuff — yer know, Paddington Bear and Dougal's Magic Roundabout, and all that sort of thing. Anything out of him if you need to plug an ariel in 'is ear and twist 'is nose for volume! His eyes are almost square already. And me Mum, she just sits there nagging all the time . . . yak, yak, yak. I'm moving in with a few of the lads next year when I leave school."

Maybe the above conversation reads like an extreme, isolated case; but scenes like this occur more frequently than we imagine. Certainly the unhappy factors that frustrated George and his friends — the moodiness, nagging, depression and lack of communication - hang like a November fog over far too many homes. We need to give careful consideration to the atmosphere of our homes every bit as seriously as learning the principles of adjustment in marriage and child training.

The family environment probably contributed more towards our development into adulthood and maturity of our personalities, our attitudes to life and our abilities (or inabilities) to handle difficult situations, than any other single factor in our upbringing. Atmosphere affects a child's emotional development far more deeply than the mere teaching of principles. Most of us can remember the atmosphere of our childhood home more than the Lessons we were meant to learn. Let us, then, give attention to the positive features that should mark the atmosphere of a healthy, happy family.

## Cultivate an Atmosphere of Joy

Which of us can experience happiness while living in a constantly pessimistic atmosphere, where every suggestion is met with a depressing response? Take the following for example. "Hey, Dad, can we all go for a picnic today? The weather looks like it's going to be great." "Picnic! Who ever heard of a picnic in February? Picnic time is July and August. Anyway, it might look OK now, but you just watch; as soon as you cut the sandwiches it'll start to rain.

Last time we went . . . "When was that?" "Was it last summer or the summer before? It doesn't matter anyway. Do you remember, the car broke down, and ants got in Billy's trousers and we had the screaming 'ab dabs' all the way 'ome? Look, why don't you just read for a bit or watch telly?" Every suggestion is received without any enthusiasm; in fact, it is very definitely discouraged. Before long the children themselves will turn into pessimists.

That heavy cloud of parental glumness will almost certainly induce depression in the kids. Why not, instead, do the hilariously unexpected? Inject into the home a Cheerful response. Plan the picnic in the snow (we've done it several times) or arrange something that involves all the family in a Jolly time together — Mum in a sack race, Gran in an egg and spoon race. Learn to laugh with your family. Turn your breakfast meal into a cheerful time of fun, for "a joyful heart is a good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones." (Prov. 17.22)

## ...of Faith

Most of us tend to think of faith only in terms of miraculous healing or answers to prayer for finance or conversions at the evangelistic crusade. In fact faith can be cultivated as a positive and very beneficial atmosphere in the home. By faith we encourage our family not only to believe in God 'up there' but to believe in themselves because God is 'in here'.

Thus they learn that not only God can do anything He wants to, but that they also 'can do all things through Him who strengthens' them. But all too often the story goes more like this: "Dad, our school is entering the County cross country race next month, and they want me in the team. What do you think?" "What, you in the cross country, Tom? You'd never make it, lad. You haven't got the stamina for that. And with your sense of direction you'd probably get lost somewhere on the way." So, Tom drops the idea and develops muscle trouble rather than tell the teacher, "I don't know if I can manage it" Or, Jane comes bounding home from school.

"Mum, where are you? . . . Guess what. They want me to sing the lead part in the concert at school." "Well I don't think I had better come. You know you sing flat when you're nervous. I wouldn't know where to put myself if all those parents started smiling at your mistakes. I'd feel right embarrassed." So Jane notices that a sore throat is coming on. After all, Mum may be right. "I might make a mess of it — forget the words or miss a note or something, and I'd never live it down." Do you see what is happening? Tom and Jane are learning to opt out of anything they feel might be a bit beyond them. As time goes on they will both be opting out of every challenge in life because they lack confidence in themselves.

God wants us to enjoy a home atmosphere which inspires every member to reach for goals that lie beyond our present achievements. Husband and wife need this atmosphere of encouragement as they plan new adventures for their family life. And the children need to sense our pride and thrill with their progress to date (after all, God congratulated Himself day by day in His work of creation: "That was good!"); and in every new venture suggested they must feel that we are instilling into them our faith that they can succeed, Much of life passes people by because they did not know how to take hold of its opportunities when they were young and therefore they cannot see life's possibilities now that they are older. So, cultivate an atmosphere of faith. Let the whole family reach out for new and better achievements all the time, not merely in the academic field but in every sphere of life. Parents can help to set attainable goals. In this way life will yield so much more of its richness to you, trust and respect for one another will grow, and a happily adjusted family will result.

## ...of Togetherness

Last year my wife and I spent an evening planning many things we wanted to carry out as a family unit to enrich our experience of togetherness. Some parts of the list make funny reading. Besides the many ordinary ideas like holidays, picnics, hikes, reading, playing, we had written down, "Getting up very early one morning and climbing the hill so that our children can see the dawn and hear creation awakening," One by one we have been exploring these various areas of life together and so far we have enjoyed a most wonderful six months of deepening closeness between ourselves and our children.

We are aiming not simply to enjoy our children's world or our grown up world, but rather our family world together. So much of present day society is geared to every man doing his own thing. With the predominance of TV even when all the members of the family are in the house at the same time they are not really communicating their togetherness. It is important that we rediscover that the purpose of God for the family calls for a corporate identity. E.W. Kenyon reckoned that Christianity is not a religion but a Father and His children. Here is a closeness that goes beyond the bounds of ceremony and theological correctness. It resounds with a living harmony — not six different songs sung simultaneously in half-a dozen keys but a symphony of varying sounds woven into one pleasant whole.

Fellowship implies the blending into 'one mind, one heart, one accord' a full assortment of colours and shades. The family that enjoys such fellowship and continually cultivates it offers a strong sense of security for each member; he knows he 'belongs' within a relationship of warmth and caring.

## ...of Love and Affection

In our relationships together many of us conservatively hide our feelings from one another.

The practised art of non-expression has robbed us of a real measure of true fellowship. But everybody needs to know he is loved. That is why little Johnny and Mary cry so profusely when they have a slight fall; they like to feel cared about and enjoy Mummy's attention when she cleans the graze and puts plaster on the cut or when Daddy rubs the bump on the head. And we are all the same.

When Dad has a touch of fever he lies in bed as though he needed the last rites, and his loving wife wisely responds to his every call for help, expressing her love by caring for him. And Dad feels good with it all. Then Mum perks up with a sparkle in her eyes when Dad comes home early one day and suggests an evening out with her, or brings home a surprise present. The home where such open affection is practised constantly, provides the children with the warmth that they require to attain healthy emotional attitudes in adult life.

The persons who have never felt deep love and caring find it so difficult to express love themselves. How much more desirable is T.L.C. (tender, loving care) than the more usual 'bold war' of critical attitudes that prevails in all too many homes. Never criticise your spouse or the children in front of others. Make appreciation your aim. Correction has its place and time, but that differs considerably from criticism. When a person knows he is being corrected for his own good by someone who cares for his well-being usually he will respond; when he feels that he is simply being criticised he will react.

## Communication

Learn to communicate through conversation. From time to time I have found myself in the role of referee rather than counsellor when caught in someone's family dispute. For instance: 'Jack, that paintwork outside needs doing.' "Uh huh, my dear. I'll do it next week." "Next week, I've heard that one before." "Well that kind of job has to be done properly and that needs the right weather and enough time at a stretch "You mean 'properly' like the bathroom tap repair?" "Whatever do you mean by that?" "Well, you took six months to reach the right 'next week' for that, and then when you did get round to it, it kept on dripping and I had to ask Fred next door to fix it. He "There was no need for that. I was only waiting for "Oh, I'll do it myself. Where are those paintbrushes,..?" 'There's no need to shout. I'm not down the road; I'm still here "Who's shouting? It's you that's shouting With a bit of simple questioning you discover that Jack has been feeling worn out lately.

His job has been tough and there has been a lot of overtime. So, coming home to face more work was too much of an effort. But he had never bothered to tell Audrey this, She was just left to surmise that he was lazy and leaving it all to her. Too often such misunderstanding and mistakes about each other have sprung out of the lack of sharing in words with one another, If we cultivate conversation together as a family — sharing our plans, our joys when we feel excited, our fears and frustrations when we feel jaded, our readiness to tackle a job or our times of feeling washed out — we learn to understand each other better and feel for each other more.

Let us continue to create the right atmosphere in our homes so that all other principles of God's kingdom can become effective in our family interactions.