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Development Of A Coping Mechanism Seminar For Single Parents Within A Seventh-Day Adventist Context

Elliott Claude Osborne
Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENT OF A COPING MECHANISM SEMINAR FOR SINGLE PARENTS WITHIN A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CONTEXT

by

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Title: DEVELOPMENT OF A COPING MECHANISM SEMINAR FOR SINGLE PARENTS

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Date Completed: May, 1988

Problem

One of the fastest growing groups in American society is the single-parent household. There are four areas of concern that single parents have identified repeatedly at the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church. It is the purpose of this study to address these concerns through the development and field testing of a seminar with suggested coping skills to aide single parents in rearing their children within a Christian environment.
Method

A questionnaire was developed to secure pertinent information to aide the researcher to ascertain the specific content to be included in the coping-skills seminar for single-parents. A syllabus was developed outlining four lectures with suggested coping skills in the areas of finance, dating and sex, personal space, and discipline. The seminar was conducted in a small group setting of fifteen participants with one facilitator.

Results

The single-parent population of the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church has benefitted in specific and tangible ways after actually applying many of the coping skills presented in the coping-skills seminar for single parents. The local church was affected positively as the church witnessed healing in its congregation. The pastor, as facilitator, matured as he participated in a significant aspect of ministry that addressed major problems with practical solutions. The greatest benefit went to the children of these single parents. Savings accounts have been opened for children, more time is given to meal preparation, some fathers are being held financially accountable, and discipline is not as harsh in most households.
Conclusions

Careful study into the difficulties facing single parents with the purpose of finding practical solutions to problems is reaping a rich harvest. The coping skills seminar for single parents is a tool leading to more positive relationships between single-parent and child. The church community is a participant in the mission of the church as it relieves the suffering of the oppressed. The Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church has enhanced its ability to recognize and relieve pain through the implementation of the coping-skills seminar for single-parents.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DEVELOPMENT OF A COPING MECHANISM
SEMINAR FOR SINGLE PARENTS
WITHIN A SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CONTEXT

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Elliott Osborne
May 1989
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A project report presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Ministry

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Elliott C. Osborne

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................... v

**Chapter**

1. **INTRODUCTION** ............................................ 1
   - Statement of Project ..................................... 1
   - Importance of Project .................................. 1
   - Description of Project ................................ 3
   - Definition of Terms ..................................... 5

2. **BIBLICAL OVERVIEW AND REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE** .......... 7
   - Statement of Problem .................................... 7
   - God's Ideal for Parents and Parenthood ............... 22
   - Human Limitations ...................................... 31
   - Restoration .............................................. 34

3. **DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEMINAR** ................................ 37
   - Questionnaire ........................................... 37
   - Seminar Outline ........................................ 38

4. **IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE AND THE SEMINAR** .......... 57
   - Questionnaire ........................................... 57
   - Seminar .................................................. 57
     - Child Care ............................................ 58
     - The Setting .......................................... 58
     - The Length of Seminar ................................ 58
     - The Syllabus .......................................... 59

5. **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS** .................................. 67
   - Evaluation of Questionnaire .............................. 67
   - Evaluation of Seminar .................................. 79
   - Results and Discussion ................................ 89
   - Summary .................................................. 96
6. REFLECTIONS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH .......................... 98
    Insights, Personal Reflections and Benefits
to my ministry ........................................... 98
    Conclusions with Recommendations ..................... 104

APPENDIXES

Appendix A ................................................. 107
Appendix B ................................................. 112
Appendix C ................................................. 113

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................... 114
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completed project would have been impossible without the willingness of my wife, Sonia Marie, to put up with more than her fair share of discomfort. Also her ability to hold the household together while her husband spent too many hours in other households has made the impossible a reality.

Norman Miles encouraged me from start to finish. He believed when others dared not to even consider the possibility. As my professor and my friend he will always be valued very highly.

My greatest single desire was to finish this project while my Dad was still with the living. A Black man born in Mississippi who retired as a waiter after forty years deserves the chance to see his son complete a major academic task. He gave his all for me. This report is my thank you.

Finally, five children deserve honorable mention. Meshach, Keziah, Fawn, Acacia, and Berniece, you now have my full attention. Be the best you can be by God's grace.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Project

This project was to design and field test a seminar with suggested coping mechanisms to aide single parents in rearing their children in a Seventh-day Adventist environment.

Importance of Project

We of the late 1980s are witness to the greatest disintegration of the traditional American Family since the end of slavery in the United States of America.1 The Census of 1980 reports 101,487 households in the San Bernardino County of California with their own children present. But one-third of these homes (30,446) have no husband present.

Also not reflected in the 1980 census are single male parents, single grandparents raising grandchildren, and single parents raising children that are not their

---

own. Clearly single parents are a significant target group for ministry.

Females consistently average less than half the income of males, given the same age categories. Generally, female-headed households are poor or low middle class economically. For a Seventh-day Adventist, being poor is further complicated by the tithe and offering obligations, the emphasis upon Christian education, and by Sabbath keeping. Female single parents are in need of counseling and ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

There is almost no end to the current literature on the family, divorce, and single parenthood. The problems and difficulties are well defined. One purpose of this project is to provide solutions in the specific area of single parenthood and coping strategies within the Seventh-day Adventist context.

The practical relevance of this project is demonstrated within the context of the church community which can supply specific answers and coping mechanisms to members of the body who are suffering. One work of the church is to relieve suffering. This project is designed to affect the work of the church in a positive way as the community of believers witnesses healing in its midst.

The single-parent population is high in the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church in Fontana,
California. Almost half of the homes are single-parent households as compared to one-third of the homes in the county being single-parent households according to the 1980 Census report. A strategy that aids my ministry as I attempt to nurture this significant community in my church is certainly a furtherance of my ministerial competence. Such a seminar would sharpen my ministerial skills for addressing significant, socially related spiritual problems which are sure to increase in the cities of our nation.

Description of Project

A. Resources used were:
   1. The local single-parent population of the Juniper Church
   2. Biblical counsel and the writings of Ellen G. White
   3. Current available literature
   4. Statistical information pertinent to this study.

B. Procedures followed in gathering information and/or experience were:
   1. Distribution of a questionnaire to determine the needs of all of the single parents associated with the Juniper Church
2. Personal visits to each single parent to ascertain further the needs of single parents and to explain what I hoped to accomplish.

3. Collection of all the questionnaires for the purpose of analyzing the information contained therein.

4. Development of a seminar for the purpose of providing coping skills for single parents as a result of information gathered from the current literature, the Bible, personal experience as a single parent, the results from the questionnaire, and the visits mentioned above.

5. Implementation of this seminar in the local church. The current single-parents made up the targeted population; however, all members who wished to attend the seminar were welcome.

6. Evaluation at the completion of the seminar, both by the participants and myself.

C. Development of the coping-mechanism seminar on the basis of the information obtained from the questionnaire, current literature, the Bible, and personal experience working with single parents.

D. The population involved were the members and perpetual visitors of the Juniper Church who were willing to participate in the seminar outlined. While focusing
upon single parents, this seminar was not limited to singles only.

E. The initial field testing was with the Juniper Church population.

F. Evaluation of the Seminar

1. Upon the completion of the seminar, each participant was asked to evaluate the cognitive value of their experience in the seminar.

2. Four weeks after the seminar each person was to evaluate the practical aspects of the training during the seminar (were any of the coping skills actually applied to one's life).

3. I evaluated what I gained and learned through the whole process.

G. The estimated time of completion, including the writing of the questionnaire, assembling of the seminar, and the presentation of the seminar with proper written evaluation was eighteen months beginning August 1, 1987.

Definition of Terms

**Single parent.** Any individual who is rearing a child or children alone.

**Census.** The statistical information taken from the 1980 Census of the United States, unless otherwise specifically indicated.
Juniper Church population. Those persons who regularly attend the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church whether or not they are baptized. The single parents who participated in the project were members and regular visitors or close friends of members who are familiar with the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Coping mechanism seminar. A seminar focusing on practical coping skills for single parents.

Seventh-day Adventist Context. A seminar created with the understanding that there is a moral God who created the Universe. The Bible is the revealed will of God for the human family both female and male; therefore, there are "rights" and "wrongs."
CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW AND REVIEW
OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Statement of Problem

The literature available on the subject of single parents appears to have no authors who are recognized authorities in the field of single parenting. By contrast psychology professionals look to Freud, Jung, Erickson, Skinner, and Rogers as authoritative persons in the field of psychology. Single parents still await an authority to arise from the ranks of so many voices and opinions.

This problem lead me to read many different authors and evaluate the relative worth of their advice, findings, and conclusions. Regretfully the advice and instructions given in these materials are almost devoid of positive ethical or moral consideration. "Right and wrong" are devalued. Relativism is the underlying principle.

An appeal to relativism has far too little value for a project like this. I was looking specifically for material to aid in my quest for coping skills in the Seventh-day Adventist context.
I was able to uncover much information about the problems and difficulties of single parenting and I was greatly disappointed with the suggested solutions of that literature which was available. With reluctance I selected the literature which reflected the ideas set forth in the greater body of literature available. I quoted from materials which had been borrowed most frequently from the various libraries I made use of in my search for information. The books with limited use I quoted from sparingly. Several books listed in the bibliography have no specific references in the notes or direct quotes of this chapter.

Most of the literature was of value by contrast. The secular mind reflects its understanding of truth and values most often in contradistinction to the biblical truth and righteousness. I admit my particular bias at this point. I have made no attempt to harmonize secular wisdom with theological conclusions.

Part of the problem single parents face is contradictory information coming from the experts who write on the subject about singles who have children to rear. Many solutions suggested by contemporary secular writers serve to add to the difficulties of rearing children without a partner. Advice is only as good as its source. Unfortunately, the selected literature under
review in this chapter is questionable as to its value for aiding single parents to cope effectively.

Simply stated "single parenting is the toughest job in the world."¹ Not only is the job tough, but "Since 1970, there has been a one-hundred eighty-one percent (181%) rise in the number of families headed by divorced women."² The numbers are growing beyond imagination of only a few years ago.

To compound matters, "God, the flag, and motherhood, had been squashed out of any possible resemblance to its old stiff shape."³ The single mother who is neither divorced nor widowed is no longer unique nor extremely rare.

The pool from whence to draw persons who find "single parenthood can be, all too often, synonymous with depletion, exhaustion, and depression"⁴ is deep and wide.

The problems confronting single parents are enormous. They need help from all available resources in order to cope effectively. This project is one more available tool to aid in the coping process.

²Ibid., 5.
⁴McCoy, Solo Parenting, xii.
Most of literature on library shelves written to and about single parents is absent of moral fiber. Mary Ann Singleton is one of many authors who advise and counsel from the premise of social relativism, "Like the prohibition against women's trousers, many sexual taboos are outdated and beginning to crumble as people question the relevance they bear to their own lives."\(^1\) With this kind of reasoning for support, she insists "monogamy, like religion, should not be forced on people."\(^2\) Thus singles are instructed, "moreover, when you are single you are free to experiment, to enjoy men you know you could never marry."\(^3\) Even basic honesty is no longer sacred. "In general it seems better to stick to the truth unless there is a good reason not to."\(^4\) This kind of reasoning and directives only contributes to "depression."\(^5\)

Carole Klein is no less direct. "The 'right' way has been replaced by a variety of ways."\(^6\) For her, attitude and behavior changes are directly (concerning


\(^2\)Ibid., 135.

\(^3\)Ibid., 144.

\(^4\)Ibid., 148.


sex) related to "the birth control pill."¹ Now that sex is divorced from procreation, it is no longer to be avoided or feared outside of marriage.

One might believe that Klein and Singleton are secure in their own teachings. Do your own thing. However, when focusing on children, there is an abrupt about-face, no less than a contradiction.

Let us compare the following statements. James Dobson, a conservative Christian psychologist, writes concerning children,

They will occasionally disobey parental instructions for the precise purpose of testing the determination of those in charge.

The ultimate paradox of childhood is that boys and girls want to be led by their parents, but insist that their mothers and fathers earn the right to lead them.²

Klein writes about children.

Most professionals agree that people really like to have boundaries for their behavior. Some sense of what the limits are. Otherwise, they can become terribly confused.

Children straddling the social codes of a marginal time are often confused.³

Singleton recognizes the value of husbands and wives raising their children, but,

¹Ibid., 10.


³Klein, Single Parent, 75, 82.
If husband and wife felt free to have affairs with others, they could remain together to raise their children but satisfy their sexual needs elsewhere.¹

One of the many obvious problems confronting single parents is the lack of consistency among professionals in the field of counseling and advice giving. They disagree with each other frequently. Often times they even contradict themselves within the same article or book. This factor can be bewildering to a single parent searching for guidance.

Richard Gardner tries another approach. He wrote his book for the children who find themselves living through a divorce and becoming children in a single-parent home. He tells children to "Speak up and say what's on your mind."² Children are asked to be extremely mature and well adjusted.

Gardner tells children they "should try not to copy"³ parents when their parents are not behaving themselves properly. At the same time he explains to the children that mommy (or daddy) "may even like to sleep together in the same bed all night"⁴ with her friend who is not her husband or their father.

¹ Singleton, Life After, 135.
³ Ibid., 70.
⁴ Ibid., 117.
After telling children to speak their mind and not copy parents who are not acting properly, this same author says, "I agree with such mothers that they should have the man sleep over and not stop doing so because their children may not like it." \(^1\) Gardner is telling the children not to copy improper behavior by parents while condoning in the same book immoral behavior by the child's mother. Gardner is a child psychologist. Who is going to help our children's helper?

He goes deeper into this fuzzy reasoning. He makes heroines out of women who choose to have babies without husbands. "Women who do not have husbands and then decide they want to have babies anyway are often very brave." \(^2\) Is this supposed to make children without fathers feel better?

We are told by Joann Rodgers that "since 1970 a three hundred sixty-seven percent (367%) increase in unwed single mothers as head of household" \(^3\) is recorded, a statistic worth noting. No, Mr. Gardner, we do not have an increase of 367 percent in heroines. We have an inflated rise in the number of baby girls and baby boys who will not know their daddy's face. You wrote truth,

\(^1\)Ibid., 119.
\(^2\)Ibid., 178.
Mr. Gardner, when you stated "some children whose mothers are not married to their fathers do see their fathers. Most do not."¹

The hope, wish, and desire that our children will save us from our own sinful lusts is a hope beyond hope. Children do not raise their parents. Babies do not instill right principles into mommy and daddy. Infants do not possess the capacity to teach adults morals, values, and ethical behavior.

Even Jesus, the Christ, began his public ministry at age thirty, not three. He was perfect. Can we really expect our children to surpass our own capacity to model appropriate behavior?

For while increasing numbers of single parents are adopting new sexual values, few of us are certain enough of the validity of our beliefs to want our children to behave as we do.²

It does not take a great deal of wisdom to raise a child to be what we are uncomfortable being ourselves.

There has developed in America an "order of acceptance"³ for the single mother with children:

1. Widowed
2. Divorced
3. Separated
4. Unmarried.

The widow has the sympathy of most persons she meets. How she handles the death of her spouse determines her respectability.

The separated woman is at "non-status,"¹ she is not with her man, but she is not free from the man. Far too many male suitors see such a woman as safe. She can make no demands for marriage nor for a wholesome, monogamous relationship. For her to date at all is to violate a trust, however fragile such a trust might be considered.

"The unmarried mother of a one parent family suffers some rejection by society."² There was a time "everyone liked to believe that single girls did without sex--at least "nice ones did."³ So the single woman with a child carries the label of 'bad' woman. At best, she is considered unwholesome.

The single parents who participated in the single-parent seminar from the Juniper Avenue Church add further categories to the order of acceptance discussed by Mr. Schlesinger. No widows were among our group. Five were divorced; three were separated, four had never married, and one mother, who had adopted her child as a single woman, was an additional category unto herself. Finally, we had two women who were divorced and also had children.

¹Ibid., 6.
²Ibid., 4.
³Singleton, Life After, 115.
out of wedlock after their divorces. This is a category outside of the acceptance order of Schlesinger.

The mother who adopted her child while she was still single was working as a social worker for an adoption agency. Her choice to adopt was not a reaction to aging or an inability to have children biologically. She was a young woman in her twenties when she made her decision. She took a very liberal posture, for as a White person, she chose to adopt a Black female child.

No major studies or statistics are available to compare this woman with others because she is quite rare. She is White, well-educated, and a single female professional who is not lesbian in sexual preference. She does not dislike White children nor does she dislike White adults. Her choice was her own to make, and she made it without indication of any neurotic need to fulfill or cause to champion.

She charts new waters, and we cannot predict the outcome. We can only observe and record this special event as it unfolds. I have known this two-unit family for ten years. They have been together for thirteen. Their ability to adjust, adapt, and advance in the face of difficulties is remarkable. We can all learn valuable lessons from their courage.

The two women who had birthed children after a divorce were also very interesting persons. They
experienced very difficult marriages. Both involved themselves with married men after their marriages ended. In effect, they became the women that they hated so much when their husbands were having affairs. Both of these women expressed contempt for men. It appears self-pity has become part of their negative reaction to the circumstances surrounding their divorces. Both lost concern and compassion for others who might feel the way they felt when other women violated their marital space. They became women to be feared by other married females. Both admitted they had become solely concerned with their own gratification at any cost, that they lost respect for humanity, and lost respect for themselves. They even lost the ability to consider the feelings of their own children. These two women desperately need to put their lives back together again. They came to the seminar seeking answers.

The order of society's acceptance of single parents excludes men. Men who keep their children alone are heroes. It does not matter if they are widowers, separated, divorced, or never married. It is noble and extra manly to take upon oneself the role of father and mother. We still live in the shadows of the idea that it is the woman's place to be in the home and care for the children. It is the woman's duty to care for the children, but men are bread winners. It is their duty to
work and support the wife and children. The man's peers do not expect him to bring home the bacon and give the baby a bottle. The man who cares for children alone lives above and beyond expectations. This may not be fair for the single woman who gets very little respect for her efforts to rear children and work, but this is life as we currently live it.

Coupled with the fact that in 1988 "current estimates are that ninety percent (90%) of single parent homes are headed by women, and mothers continue to be granted custody of their children in close to ninety percent (90%) of divorces";¹ nowhere in the near future will men have full custody of American children as single parents. Often times what is novel is noble. If men kept 90 percent of the children, surely men would not be considered super fellows. Men would then be doing what was expected of them. Heroes in America do the extraordinary.

However, it must be noted that "children clearly bond with both parents."² Fathers, "you are a parent so act like one, your kids need you."³ Most single fathers are out of the picture. But, this fact can prove

²Ibid., 25.
damaging. Rodgers reminds us, "... boys reared by single women do face increased pressures."¹

These pressures come several ways. If Dad is out of the scene, usually money is a problem. Basic needs far too often go unattended when dollars are short. More significant than money can be Mom's new lover. Young boys may interpret another man besides Dad as a rival or an intruder. Gatley, Gardner, and Adams write about the difficulties boys have in the adjustment to new males who enter their lives after a daddy moves away. Young children are usually kept away from the hard facts of a divorce. They know Mommy and Daddy do not live together anymore. But, deep within, they harbor the belief that all will be well again. Young boys interpret a male lover as an additional wedge between Mommy and Daddy. The new male can very easily become the focal object of rage rather than venting rage toward Mommy or the real Daddy.

It is also typical of young boys to view themselves as the man of the house when Daddy is gone. I tell my son to "take care of Mommy until I get back" when I leave the house. I have never told my girls to "take care of Mommy until I get back."

New males threaten a little boy's territory while Daddy is gone. This type of interruption is usually resisted. The resolution of conflict is seldom smooth.

¹Rodgers, Raising Sons, 15.
Yes, "being a parent is a hard job. But that probably isn't a valid reason to avoid it."¹

The Black community is hit especially hard by the realities of single-parent family lifestyle. A rather dated study by Zelnik and Kantner (1974) is revealing. A summary of the study which targeted teenage girls, both Black and White, is shown in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Teen Girls</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual active</td>
<td>540/1000</td>
<td>279/1000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant</td>
<td>248 of 540</td>
<td>62 of 279</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried/remain</td>
<td>226 of 248</td>
<td>30 of 62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live birth</td>
<td>162 of 248</td>
<td>12 of 62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives with teen</td>
<td>149 of 162</td>
<td>9 of 12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of this study are disturbing. Black teenagers appear to be more sexually active than white teenagers (2 to 1). Of those studied 45 percent of the Black teenagers who were sexually active actually became pregnant. For the White teenagers 23 percent of the sexually active conceived.

¹Gatley and Koulack, Single Father's, 33.
A full 91 percent of the pregnant Black teenagers remain unmarried compared to 48 percent of their White counterparts. These figures indicate an extremely bleak future as to marriage prospects and growth of the two-parent family in the Black community.

More Black teenagers also prefer to keep their children after they are born. If there is a bright spot in this picture, most Black mothers do not abort or adopt out the children they conceive and birth.

Though this study is relatively old, current indicators do little to suggest any reversals in the single-parent trend of Black households. I have four daughters. I have great concern over the present trend of unwed pregnancies in the Black community.

Pete Hamill wrote in *Esquire Magazine*:

The grim numbers go on and on. In the late 1950's thirty percent (30%) of poor black families were headed by women; today it is more than seventy percent (70%). In 1959 fifteen percent (15%) of black births were out of wedlock; by 1982 it was fifty-seven percent (57%) (five times the white rate). In 1960, forty-two percent (42%) of babies born to black teenagers were illegitimate, by 1983 it was eighty-nine percent (89%). From 1970 to 1984 the number of black families headed by women increased one hundred eight percent (108%) (it was sixty-three percent (63%) for whites). Of the 27,178 families with children living in projects run by the Chicago Housing Authority, only eight percent (8%) are headed by a husband and wife.¹

Mr. D. P. Moynihan's summary of the Negro family in the year 1965 has proven itself to be prophetic. "At the heart of the deterioration of the Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family. . . ."¹

Statistics and reports only begin to approximate the actual pain that attends the vicious reality of the poor, black, and female-headed family. The problems are multiple. The coping-skills seminar I developed is by necessity practical and confrontive. To be otherwise is not to be useful.

God's Ideal for Parents and Parenthood

The Bible sets forth a very clear and purposeful design for parents and parenthood. From the very beginning men and women were joined together as a blessing to each other. The ideal is for God to be part of the plan. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."² One in purpose, one in pursuit of goals, and one harmonious unit is God's desire for us.

"And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bare Cain, and said I have gotten a man from the Lord."³

²Gen 2:24.
³Gen 4:1.
Children and sexual intercourse come after two people are husband and wife.

"For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."\(^1\)

The Bible is not 'gray' in this particular area. "Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whore mongers and adulterers God will judge."\(^2\) The Scriptures never change in this matter (Exod 20:15; Lev 20:10; Matt 5:28; etc.).

God reveals a specific way man and woman are to come together in order to be in harmony with his will. All other intimate encounters that result in sexual expression between a man and a woman or beast or another man is sin (Lev 20).

The Scriptures condone no other kind of alternative sexual orientation or living situation than a male and a female who are married. No exceptions are recorded.

There are many situations that are not within God's revealed will on the subject. We discuss this later when we consider human limitations. The Scriptures do not cover up sin. The Bible reveals the solution to the sin problem. It never justifies immoral behavior.

\(^1\) 1 Thess 4: 2-3.

\(^2\) Heb 13:4.
The Word of God teaches that a family begins with marriage. The Lord is very particular about marriage. His children, believers, are instructed not to marry pagans, non-believers.

Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.

For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods.

The Lord does not want our love for another human being to be the cause for us to turn our love away from him. It is a matter of loyalty with God. Solomon is recorded as "wiser than all men." And with all his wisdom his divided love (for women who knew not the living God) led his "heart after other gods."

Therefore, we must not be fooled. Our intelligence, wisdom, education, or self-confidence is no match for the pull of evil in the world. We overcome through the power of God. To divest ourselves of God's will and way is to lose the battle with Satan.

God knows this. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" applies to the marriage as well as evil associations in business or pleasure. Covenants

1Deut 7: 3-4.
21 Kgs 4:31.
31 Kgs 11:4.
42 Cor 6:14.
are commitments. Two cannot walk together unless they are in agreement. Partial adherence too often becomes whole defiance. God wants us to understand this. After we have married a believer we are to willingly submit ourselves to our spouse.

Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence; and likewise also the wife unto the husband.

The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband; and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.\(^1\)

This is a lofty standard. This way of relating to one another is not natural. It is supernatural.

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself for it.\(^2\)

The Biblical way is permanent. "Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."\(^3\) The seriousness of the commitment is unmistakable with the Lord. Once we make our choice, we must honor it. God does.

\(^1\) 1 Cor 7: 3-4.
\(^2\) Eph 5: 24-25.
\(^3\) Matt 19: 6.
The wife is bound by the Law as long as her husband liveth, but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to who she will, only in the Lord.

When children come to a family, the Bible expectation is for fathers and mothers to participate together in the rearing process.

And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.²

The father is a proactive force for good in the life of his children. The wife and mother to be praised is ideally set forth in Prov 31. She is attentive to the physical and emotional needs of her household. Her place is indispensable. The Bible does not teach inferiority of women.

Both parents are admonished to "train up a child in the way he should go."³ It is the duty of parents to guide and protect the issue they bring into the world. When it is necessary to apply the "rod of correction,"⁴ the parents are the ones to perform the task. The written word depicts the family as a unit working harmoniously together for the good of the whole family.

¹ Cor 7:39.
² Eph 6:4.
⁴ Prov 22:15.
Children have a responsibility also. They are not by-standers. The Old Testament is again crystal clear. "Honor thy father and thy mother as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."1 "Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding."2

The New Testament echoes the Law and the Prophets. The Bible remains on course.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; which is the First Commandment with promise;

That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.3

In summary, the Bible teaches a personal God who involves himself in the relationships of the people He created. Men and women are to marry with like believers in God. Fathers and mothers are to participate in the rearing of their children. Their children are to be actively respectful and responsive to their parents in the Lord. The Scriptures are consistent throughout as to God's ideal for the family.

Ellen G. White writes extensively about parenthood. It is well to review the highlights of God's revealed will

1Deut 5:16.
2Prov 4:1.
3Eph 6:1-3.
on the subject as understood by a messenger who lived seventy-four years ago. Has God changed?

Primarily Ellen G. White believed "it is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed." This is the bottom line for all human beings who marry. Ellen G. White never deviates from this underlying principle. This is where proper marriage begins. But, marriage does not end with exchanged vows. "The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the after years."

Ellen G. White has very specific roles designated for husband and wife in the ideal household. "The home is an institution of God. God designed that the family circle, father, mother, and children, should exist in this world as a firm." The nuclear family is a given in her mind.

The husband and father is the head of the household. The wife looks to him for love and sympathy and for aid in the training of the children, and this is right. The children look to the father for support and guidance.

The father as head does not mean the mother is the tail.

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2Ibid., 98.


4Ibid., 211.
Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband's equal.

The mother is the queen of the home, and the children are her subjects. . . . Her influence in the home is to be paramount; her word, law.

White teaches the team concept: "Parents are to work together as a unit." This is the correct way to orchestrate a household. This is God's plan. We need to follow it.

"If fathers and mothers are at variance, one working against the other . . . the family will be in a demoralized condition. . . ." The consequences of not following the Divine directive are portrayed in foreboding language.

Children have their place in the family. "Children should feel that they are indebted to their parents, who have watched over them in infancy and nursed them in sickness." To this Mrs. White adds, "There is no period in life when children are excused from honoring their parents."

Most of the comments, suggestions, and counsels given to family are directed to husbands, wives, and their 

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1Ibid., 231-232.  
2Ibid., 312.  
3Ibid., 312.  
4Ibid., 292.  
5Ibid., 292.
children. Children who have lost one or both of their parents are viewed as a pitiful lot by Ellen White. "Many of them have inherited evil traits of character. . . . These unpromising children need to be placed in a position favorable for formation of a right character, that they may become children of God."¹

Appealing for Christ she says of the fatherless and motherless children cast into the arms of the Church, "Take these destitute children, bring them up for Me, and ye shall receive your wages."² The idea of an unwed mother, a widower, or a widow raising a normal, healthy child without rescue seems never to have entered her mind. At least, such a thought is not recorded in any written form that I could find in the Ellen G. White Index.

A real family is the traditional one. "Together the father and mother should consider their responsibilities. Together they should work for the highest good for their children."³ White does not directly address the current situation of the United States where 30 percent of all households are governed by a single parent. Single parenthood was a situation that needed fixing. Both orphans and children with one parent were seen as greatly


²White, Testimonies for the Church, 2:33.

³White, Guidelines to Mental Health, 99.
distressed. The children needed to be placed back in
traditional households as soon as possible. "Let those
who have the love of God open their hearts and homes to
take in these children. . . ."¹

The children of divorced parents, unwed parents,
and a dead parent are far too numerous for those who have
the love of God to take them all into their homes.
Evidence is in favor of developing a coping-skills seminar
for this overwhelming population with no end of growth in
sight.

Human Limitations

The Edenic ideal of family life is notable and
noble. However, as clearly as the biblical writ portrays
God's perfect will for the family, the Holy Scrolls record
the limitations of mankind. There is no question that God
understands his creatures.

And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened
to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the
tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat
of it,' cursed is the ground because of you.'²

As the years continued the sin problem only grew
more odious.

Why will you still be smitten that you continue
to rebel?

¹White, Adventist Home, 167.
²Gen 3:17 RSV (Revised Standard Version).
The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.\footnote{Isa 1:15 RSV.}

The New Testament is in full agreement. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.\footnote{Rom 3:23 RSV.}

Thus the Lord of the Universe recognizes the fact of human limitations. Not withstanding our sinfulness, He died for us. The Lord avails power to the weak.

One example of God working with persons who fall short of the ideal Jesus has for us is recorded in the book of Genesis. This story is about single parenthood. In the situation of Hagar and Ishmael, we see the worst and the best of life as a single parent.

I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.\footnote{Gen 16:2.}

At its worst Hagar has an affair with a married man. The motive behind the event is the insecurity of a barren woman, Sarai. She convinces Abram to sire a child for her through another woman. Surrogate parenthood began long before our modern court battles over custody of such children ever began. The process was no smoother then than now.
Today, as then, single parenthood which comes from a triangle affair is fraught with difficulties. "Persons who need children to fulfill a neurotic need for self-worthiness should avoid parenthood until they work through their neurosis."1 Sarai should have waited.

Hagar became proud and despised Sarah after she conceived. She thought she now had the upperhand (Gen 16:4). She was wrong. The wife is always in the strongest position when an outside affair occurs. "The problem, quite frankly, is that many singles want so desperately to be married that they violate the law of freedom and respect in romantic relationships."2 Hagar's desire to move into the position of preference with Abram failed.

So "Sarai dealt hardly with her, and she fled from her face."3 How does God handle such confusion?

And the Angel of the Lord said unto her, return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. . . . I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.4

The Lord takes the side of the oppressed. He seeks out Hagar and consoles her. Then He blesses her. This does not happen because Hagar is virtuous. It happens

3Gen 16:6.
4Gen 16: 9-10.
because of her great need. The Savior does not let his ideal for human relationships, marriage, and family prevent him from loving and blessing a person who is out of harmony with those ideals.

God generates an atmosphere of loving kindness in order to solicit from the person loved a like response. God is confrontive without being combative. The best thing for pregnant Hagar at the time is to submit to Sarai, knowing she is loved and blessed of God.

This is an example of a perfect God working with persons in imperfect situations. We are limited; God is not.

Restoration

In the literature about single parenting there is much advice. A few practical 'tips' tell how to get on with one's life. The information follows the personal learnings and feelings of the authors who have chosen to write on the subject of single-parent life.

The one glaringly obvious missing link in the current literature is specific reference to moral values and ethics. Other than addressing personal comfort zones with whatever practices the single parent chooses to engage, we are left with very little of substantive value. There seems to be a general lack of direction.
The Bible is not so. "God created man in his own image . . . male and female created He them."\(^1\) The image was marred through disobedience. The Creator is in the restoration business. According to Titus, this is accomplished "by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."\(^2\) We are admonished to press toward the mark of the high calling of God. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."\(^3\) The Lord has a plan. He is moving us in the direction through the Holy Ghost.

The end of all things as we know them is the beginning of eternity as God knows it. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . . And God shall wipe away all tears. . . . For the former things are passed away."\(^4\) Our first parents lost their Edenic home. Genesis, in its primary chapters, tells how they fell from grace. The rest of Scripture tells us what God did about the sin problem, and concludes with a prophetic discourse of hope. We are moving along a Spiritual continuum. Jesus is in complete control.

The Bible is God's revealed will for humankind. The standard is perfect. The rule is no less exacting than the immutable character and will of God. "Be ye

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\(^1\) Gen 1:27. \\
\(^2\) Titus 3:5. \\
\(^3\) Phil 3:15. \\
\(^4\) Rev 21: 1,3.
therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."¹

Because the standard is absolutely pure and undefiled, we must be restored. Any person who says he/she is without sin is a liar. This is the great value of the Scripture. God has not only revealed His clear and faultless will; His command for perfection is followed by his unspeakable gift of perfection.

"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."² What the Father requires He also provides.

The good news for single parents is that the Lord is quite capable of supplying all of our needs through Jesus. The ideal family is father, mother, brother, and sister. We have all of these relationships intact with Christ. "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."³ Who could ask for a more abundant life?

The "essence of gospel is restoration."⁴ We do not improve upon the gospel; the gospel improves us.

¹Matt 5:48.
²John 3:16.
³Matt 12:50.
CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SEMINAR

Questionnaire

The questionnaire¹ was based upon the following resources:

1. Personally familiarizing myself with the single-parent population of the Juniper Avenue Church through visitation and one-on-one communication by verbal dialogue.

2. Reading biblical counsel and the writings of Ellen G. White on parenthood.

3. Reading current available literature on the subject of single parenthood.

4. Consulting the 1980 U.S. Census report for statistical information pertinent to this study.

5. My academic training in the area of research and designing of questionnaires while a graduate student at CSUH.

¹A copy of the questionnaire as presented to the single-parent population of the Juniper Avenue Church is found in the appendix.
Seminar Outline

The outline for this seminar was developed for the purpose of providing coping skills for single parents from the current literature, the Bible, personal experience as a single parent, the results from the questionnaire, and visits with single parents. It was implemented after the approval of my project committee chair.

A copy of the coping-skills seminar as presented to fifteen single parents in a one-time setting lasting four hours follows.
A SINGLE PARENTS' SEMINAR

PRESENTED

BY

Elliott C. Osborne

1988

RIALTO, CALIFORNIA
PROCEDURE

Opening Introductions

Handouts

1. Envelopes
2. Note pads
3. Pens
4. Seminar Notebooks
5. Gifts

Suggested Books

Lectures Begin

Lunch

Lectures Conclude

Evaluations

General Observations

Closing
Times Do Change

A. Past Times

1. Jesus' Jerusalem
   a. Women were at marriageable age at thirteen years.
   b. Mary was probably an earliteen when she gave birth.
   c. Mary's pre-marriage pregnancy was unacceptable.

2. The Nineteenth Century, 1844
   a. Ellen G. White was married at seventeen years.
   b. The average person could expect to live fifty years.
   c. Men outlived women in the nineteenth century.

3. The Twentieth Century, 1944
   a. Persons could expect to live sixty years.
   b. A child born in 1944 was expected to graduate from high school.
c. Over 90% of marriages were performed by ministers.

4. The Year 1954
   a. Fewer than 9% of first marriages ended in divorce.
   b. Marriage by age twenty was normal and common.
   c. An unemployed male who was not in school was uncommon.
   d. Most babies were raised by both natural parents.
   e. Mothers with small children usually remained at home.
   f. Most babies were expected to be born in a hospital.

B. Present Times
   1. The year 1970
      a. Life expectancy is beyond retirement (65).
      b. One fourth of mothers with small children work outside home.
      c. Farm life is no longer the norm for most Americans.
      d. Unwed mothers are a growing group in spite of the "pill."
e. Teenage marriage is considered relatively young.

2. The year 1975
   a. Computer technology has invaded the workplace.
   b. Unemployment is a tragic reality for White America.
   c. Credit card buying catches up to Americans.
   d. Divorce is at an all time high (almost 25%).

3. The year 1980
   a. Unemployment is in double digit figures.
   b. High School diploma is needed to get in the armed services.
   c. Automobile industry is in trouble with Chrysler facing bankruptcy. Ford closes several plants. Ford no longer has a better idea.

4. The year 1987
   a. In California a marriage has a fifty-fifty chance of survival.
   b. Minimum wage is frozen at $3.45 for four years.
c. At least 2,000,000 homosexuals, bisexuals, and lesbians live in California alone.

d. The $90,000 dollar home is no mansion in California.

e. About 40% of all marriages in California are civil contracts.

Summary

A. Times have changed.

a. Socially

b. Politically

c. Economically

B. For the single parent most changes add to their hardship.
COPING SKILLS

Introduction

A. Who is Elliott C. Osborne?

1. Background
2. Education
3. Personal experience as a single parent

B. Why have a single-parent seminar?

1. Pastoral perspective
   a. Broken relationships are the number one concerns of my pastorate
   b. Visitation hours
   c. Telephone hours
   d. Sermon preparation
   e. Morality crises
2. Requests
   a. From single parents
   b. From pastors
   c. From parents of unwed mothers
3. A personal challenge

C. What do we hope to accomplish here today?

1. An effective approach for ministering to an ever-growing population
2. To add to our abilities to recognize, analyze, and resolve (at least in part) some of the difficult life situations of suffering humanity

3. To teach coping skills within the scope of SDA mission

4. To suggest further inquiry into the subject of single parenting

I. Single Parenthood

A. Finances

1. Questionnaire results
   a. 67% desire a seminar on finances
   b. 93% are struggling financially
   c. 40% receive welfare
   d. 13% receive child support from the other parent regularly
   e. 13% receive child support from the other parent irregularly
   f. 40% have an income under $14,000 per year
   g. 40% buy quick meals out more than cooking at home
   h. 53% do not cook meals regularly
   i. 73% have no savings for each child

2. Coping suggestions for finances
   a. File for child support if you have not
b. Contact the D.A.'s office if support is delinquent
c. Apply for all benefits for which you qualify
d. Pursue a career or a skill
e. Make a personal budget (income, savings, & expenses)
f. Save before you spend
g. Prepare more home-cooked meals rather than buying fast-food meals
h. Start a savings for each child
i. Shop with a shopping list according to need
j. Do not loan money you cannot afford to throw away
k. Avoid amusement parks
   (1) False sense of enjoyment
   (2) Too expensive
l. Make ample use of city, state, and national parks, beaches, and museums.

B. Dating and Sex

1. Questionnaire results
   a. 53% have close male friends who visit
   b. 60% have close female friends
   c. 67% would consider marriage before children grow up
d. 0% plan never to marry

e. 40% have their emotions under control

f. 53% were married before having children

g. 33% have never married

h. 13% have regular visits with other parent

i. 80% are religious (100% at least somewhat religious)

j. 80% attend church regularly

k. 13% are dissatisfied with personal appearance

l. 20% keep an active adult social life

m. 20% have a special partner of the opposite sex

n. 60% need help to raise their children

o. 93% at some time talk to other adults about their feelings

p. 67% would consider marrying outside of their faith

q. 73% are at least somewhat lonely for adult love

r. 0% are desperate for adult love

s. 13% are pleased with their lifestyle

t. 20% would be proud if their children became exactly what they are
u. 33% live by the same rules they expect of their children
v. 13% are hostile toward the opposite sex
w. 73% teach positive attitudes toward men

2. Coping suggestions
   a. Consult your personal spiritual adviser (female or couple)
   b. Come to an understanding of religious ethics
      (1) Morals
      (2) Values
   c. Adjust your lifestyle to your beliefs
   d. Discuss your beliefs with potential dates before you date
   e. Get to know a potential suitor before you involve yourself emotionally
   f. Respect yourself at all times
   g. Respect your significant other at all times
   h. Plan your activities (avoid destructive set-ups)
   i. Remember you are a parent role model for your children
   j. Time and place (sex)

C. Personal Space
   1. Questionnaire results
a. 40% take personal time daily
b. 30% take personal time weekly
c. 40% have their emotions under control
d. 46% are extremely or somewhat moody
e. 53% are inconsistent with discipline when angry
f. 53% chose to be single
g. 46% take vacations yearly with kids
h. 6% take vacations alone (away from children)
i. 27% exercise regularly
j. 73% are satisfied with personal appearance
k. 20% keep an active social life
l. 53% worry very much about their child's safety
m. 73% express some loneliness
n. 87% are not pleased with their lifestyle
o. 20% talk about personal lives to an outside professional
p. 80% attend church regularly

2. Coping skills

a. Set aside specific time periods for self
   (1) Hobbies
   (2) Exercise
   (3) Sports
(a) Spectator
(b) Participant

(4) Spiritual Activities
(a) Visiting the sick
(b) Aiding the disabled
(c) Ministering to the elderly
(d) Holding an office in church

b Know your limits (self-understanding)
(1) What angers me?
(2) What relaxes me?
(3) What irritates me?
(4) Who angers me?
(5) Who relaxes me?
(6) Who irritates me?

c. Knowing why I am a single parent
(1) My part
(2) My partner's part

D. Discipline
1. Questionnaire results
   a. 93% are struggling financially
   b. 40% make less than $14,000 per year
   c. 100% plan to marry
   d. 33% have never married
   e. 13% receive regular child support from other parent
   f. 40% receive state welfare
g. 30% feel their emotions are under control  

h. 80% spank their children  
i. 60% scream at their children  
j. 53% are not as consistent with discipline when angry as calm  
k. 83% have single custody  
l. 100% are religious  
m. 80% do not have an active, adult social life  
n. 60% need help to raise their children  
o. 87% are not pleased with their lifestyles  
p. 20% would be proud if their children become what they are  
q. 33% live by the rules they teach their own children  
r. 80% work outside of their home  

2. Coping skills (cautions for discipline)  
a. Spanking when tired  
b. Spanking when angry  
c. Spanking when frustrated  
d. Spanking when afraid  
e. Using heavy objects to inflict pain  
f. Using whips of cord or metal  
g. Using fists for discipline
h. Using foul words or damaging language
i. Ignoring specific difficulties
   (1) Stammering tongue
   (2) Emotional problems
   (3) Low self-esteem

3. Coping skills for discipline (Precautions)
   a. Devise punishments that are appropriate to the infractions
      (1) Mop the floor for tracking mud carelessly—appropriate
      (2) Stomping on a child's foot for tracking mud—inappropriate
      (3) A swat for running in the street without looking—appropriate
      (4) Cat of nine tails for running into the street—inappropriate
      (5) Confronting a child with his lie—appropriate
      (6) Saying, "You are a liar just like your Daddy"—inappropriate
   b. Child abuse is a crime no matter what the child has done
      (1) Common sense
      (2) It is the law

4. Coping skills for discipline (administration and follow through)
a. Do not make idle threats ("I will kill you if . . . .)
b. If a child deserves a punishment give it
c. Administer a punishment and leave it in the past
d. Punish in the present not in the future
e. Communicate to a child in specific terms exactly what he/she is being punished for
f. Let the child know how he/she can avoid such a punishment again
g. Try to give the same punishment for similar infractions
h. Do not reward and punish for the same behavior
i. Treat your children equally under the same house rules
j. Discipline without love and concern for the child is "wrong" (Remember two wrongs do not make a "right")

5. Coping skills, a definition for discipline
a. The purpose of discipline is to instruct and to disciple.

To discipline does not mean to "beat." A timely word may caution better than the pain of prison.
EVALUATION

Has this seminar for single parents been helpful to you?

What specific things have you learned?

What would you add?

What would you change?

Would you recommend a seminar like this one to a single parent you know?

Please fill out this sheet now and leave it here. Thank you for participating.
EVALUATION
FOUR WEEK FOLLOW-UP

Dear Participant,

Please fill this evaluation sheet out completely. This is the final segment of the single parent seminar you participated in four weeks ago. Thank you for being so gracious.

Did you apply any of the coping skills that we discussed during the seminar to your own home life?

If so, which ones did you try? And did they work for you?

If not, why did you choose not to try any of the coping skills shared at our seminar?

Do you have further observations or comments to share?

Please return to 770 W. Virginia St., Rialto, CA 92376 (Elliott C. Osborne)
CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE
AND THE SEMINAR

The Questionnaire

The completed questionnaire was personally delivered to the participants. Only those who filled out a questionnaire were allowed to join the first group of single parents at the seminar. The return of the questionnaire was considered a ticket to enter the seminar.

All information from the questionnaires was scored by myself. The results of the scoring was shared with the group on the day of the seminar.

All names of participants are held in confidence. The sharing of the information gathered is with permission from the parents involved in the actual seminar.

The Seminar

We chose a Sunday at noon for the time and day of the single parent seminar. Sunday was the day the largest number of single parents had time off from regular commitments. The noon hour was the time chosen by the single parents. The reason sighted most often was, "It fits
into the day of cooking, cleaning, washing, shopping, and fussing after the kids about then."

Child Care

My wife and I provided free child care at the Juniper Avenue church for the duration of the seminar. My wife cared for fourteen children. As we consider the events of that Sunday, it was the availability of child care that allowed for the success of the seminar. Possibly ten of the fifteen persons attending the seminar would have found it difficult to attend if free child care had not been available that Sunday afternoon.

The Setting

The seminar was held at a local Chinese restaurant close to the Juniper Avenue Church. We reserved a back room which allowed us a private, comfortable area for open discussion and dialogue.

After two hours of discussion, we had one short lunch break. We lectured and talked through the meal.

Length of Seminar

The seminar was scheduled for four hours. The amount of material to cover was enormous but we proceeded in this manner because of the unanimous decision of the group to have a one-session seminar. My greatest fear was that the participants would become tired and restless and leave before the seminar was finished.
Not one person left early. The flow of the seminar was so lively that the parents present voted to continue past the allotted four hours. I chose not to extend the meeting, but it certainly was refreshing after all the hours of preparation to know these single parents appreciated the product.

The Syllabus

Each participant was given a seminar booklet which contained a full and complete outline of the material to be presented during the seminar.

We opened with introductions of each person present. This soft opening helped put everybody at ease. This was followed by a short invocation. This violated no person's conscience. All fifteen present acknowledged their belief in God though not all were baptized members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

All materials were handed out at the same time. Envelopes were distributed so each single parent could fill out a self-addressed envelope to be used later. Note pads and pens were available for each person to use as they desired. Seminar notebooks were for seminar use only. All notebooks were collected at the conclusion of this initial seminar. The gifts included a financial planner, a poster, and a book on discipline. These were planned as practical objects during the various segments of the seminar.
Lectures

The introductory remarks were titled "Times Do Change." This brief historical perspective highlighted some of the realities for women during different ages and was used as my transition into the meatier topics of the seminar. I wanted the parents attending this coping-skills seminar to know I was prepared to discuss the subject of women and single parenthood intelligently.

Finances

The first main topic was finances. The overwhelming majority (93%) of the single parents in association with the Juniper Avenue Church have a struggle financially. The statistics gathered from their questionnaires looked very bleak.

The rapport between myself as facilitator and the single parents was excellent. We moved from point to point on the outline without difficulty. The financial situation was clear. The suggested coping skills were fully comprehensible. Not one parent expressed herself negatively.

While discussing coping skills for finances we demonstrated some of the coping mechanisms. We put together a simple budget, created a shopping list, made available the District Attorney's office telephone number, and encouraged the sharing of personal experiences with financial management.
Dating and Sex

The next subject, dating and sex, was approached cautiously. Dating and sex are very uncomfortable subjects among single-parent females who, ideally, are committed to the principles of God as revealed in the Bible. Living out those ideals is the problem and much guilt was evident.

The results of the questionnaire gave their answers. The unpleasing picture presented was the actual reality they were living. These single parents need help.

Although 80 percent go to church and 100 percent admit to being at least somewhat religious, only 13 percent were pleased with their own lifestyle.

We discussed each coping suggestion about dating and sex at length. This provided a forum in which much tension was released. The seminar gave fifteen people who usually are silent about their dating and sexual habits an opportunity to express their deepest of suppressed feelings. These single parents came to realize they were not as isolated and odd as each personally had thought.

The coping suggestions were simple, direct, and useful. They were presented with an underlying presupposition—there is a moral God, and there are right and wrong ways of doing things.

No judgments or negative criticisms were cast toward any one person. We tried to present a positive, supportive
program with the purpose of helping and lifting at the center of each coping skill presented.

The segment on dating and sex took one hour and ten minutes. I finally had to terminate it in order to have time for the two areas of concentration that followed—personal space and discipline.

Lost in Space

I next planned a fun exercise to test the wisdom of the group against the wisdom of one individual. This tool had two purposes. First, it would lessen tension if we should get into a heated or spirited debate. I felt the lively exchanges during the dating and sex topic created a ripe atmosphere for a change of pace.

Second, I wanted to group together several single parents that had no social contact with anyone outside the church setting or at a mutual job site.

I made two groups of four, two groups of two, and the rest sat individually. Each group and the individuals worked on the problem set forth in "Lost in Space." The persons in a group of four or two could consult with the other members in their group. The individuals had to work alone.

When everybody was finished, we compared answers which were scored from a master sheet. In theory, the groups should score better than the individuals.
With this group, the opposite was true. They were so resistant to the ideas of others that the individuals actually scored higher than the groups. Maybe this says something about the way single parents process information. These parents all admitted they were so used to making all the decisions concerning their lives that they found it difficult to work in a group. While in the group they were very resistant to change an answer, feeling that "My answer is just as good as the group's."

Fourteen of the persons present and participating in the 'Lost in Space' activity visibly enjoyed themselves. One person was annoyed by the process, and verbalized her opinions. No one sided with her and we continued our activities.

**Lunch and Sharing**

During a fifteen-minute break, lunch was served; the meeting continued.

While we ate, one of the single parents who took an active role as a participant also made a twenty-minute presentation. She shared her experience as a single parent by choice through adoption. She is in the smallest of minorities--a White, well-educated professional woman with a Black daughter. Her story, which enriched the group, also switched the tone of the seminar from male-orchestrated to full participation.
We had more assertive interaction and feedback after her contribution to the group process. The balance at this point helped keep the group dynamics functioning throughout the rest of the seminar.

**Personal Space**

The section on personal space moved very quickly. Unfortunately, so did our time. By the time we reached 'discipline,' our time had almost run out. We covered each subheading of 'personal space.' Discussion was lively but not as lengthy as the group desired. At this point, the idea was suggested that we either hold a second seminar or add an hour to this one. One participant resisted the idea.

**Discipline**

The 'discipline' quadrant of the seminar, which was the longest section for discussion in the planning of the material, became the shortest in presentation.

Sixty percent of the single parents indicated they needed help to raise their children. Eighty-three percent have single custody of their children. While they may need help, help is not forthcoming.

The 'discipline' administered by these women varies with their mood swings. The majority of those present realized they fall woefully short in consistent discipline. We tried to outline tangible steps to aid in the design and structure of discipline, but time ran out as we approached part three of discipline--precautions.
Evaluation

Immediate-evaluation sheets were handed out and the participants completed them at the conclusion of the seminar. When completed, they were collected and the four-hour session was over.

The final evaluation was mailed to each participant four weeks later. Seven of these were returned. The first single-parent seminar for sharing coping skills officially ended seven weeks after it began. This is when the last take-home evaluation was returned.

The actual lectures followed the syllabus outline. The exchanges between myself as facilitator and the parents were electric and exciting. The seminar proved to be dynamic and flowing probably because of a technical difficulty. I planned to tape record the whole session, however, no plugs were available in the meeting room we reserved. I believe this may be the reason nobody was inhibited from free expression of personal information. Also I made a verbal commitment to keep in full confidence all information shared in our session. I explained I would write an evaluation of the results, but I would not place on paper or rehearse verbally any information which could be associated with a specific person without that individual's permission.

Not one participant has given me permission to include any further details about her life or the
information exchanged. Each has requested a full copy of this manuscript in its final form. They expect me to keep my word, and I respect these women and God enough to keep my word with no regret.

The implementation of this seminar of coping skills for single parents is a key factor for significant results. The questionnaire and the seminar are for the benefit of those participating. My prayer is that when future use is made of this seminar, the information gathered will remain with the facilitator and single parents who attend. The experiences of these persons must never become sermon material, gossip items, or illustrations for magazine articles. Irresponsible use of sensitive information at a local church could ruin lives and reputations.
Evaluation of Questionnaire

The intent of the questionnaire for single parents was to draw from the participants information pertinent to the specific life experience of being single parents with children. The Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church is composed predominately of persons who are Black. The questionnaire does not seek ethnic identity along color lines. We accept the obvious reality that all of the women answering the questions on this questionnaire were culturally bound if not homogeneous in color.

The general information requested is biographical in nature. All fifteen questionnaires returned were completed by females. Their ages ranged from twenty to fifty-eight years. One person was in her fifties, three in their forties, eight in their thirties, and three in their twenties.

Six single parents have one child, four have two children, three mothers each have three children, and finally, two parents have five children.
Thirteen women have no male adults living with them. One female lives with a man who is her live-in lover, and one lives in the same house with a male who is a separate roomer, but with no sexual contact. Thus, only one of these fifteen women has a father figure living in the home in relationship to the children. Two have a male physically in the home. The two mothers with a male in their home on a full-time basis have one child each. Thus, fifteen mothers are raising thirty-three children in various numerical combinations. Thirty-one of the children are being raised without the benefit of their father's presence on a regular basis.

Four persons indicated they live with at least one female roommate. Of the fifteen women involved, six (40%) have roommates.

One single parent adopted her child into her one-parent home. All other children are biological, birthed of the mother who is raising them.

The questionnaire contained two sentences of instructions as to how it should be answered. The five-point continuum was used. The person needed only to place an 'X' in the appropriate box marked 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. One either strongly agrees or strongly disagrees with the first seventy-seven questions. Question 78 allows the respondent to indicate possible subjects she or he would like to have covered in a seminar. Four possible considerations were
listed, and a space was provided for topics suggested by the participant.

An open-end statement soliciting any personal experiences that the participant might want to share about single parenting—concluded the questionnaire.

Statistical Evaluation of Continuum Questions (1-77)

The questionnaire was designed to gather information in four broad areas from the single parents at Juniper Avenue. These were:

1. Finances
2. Dating and Sex
3. Personal Space
4. Discipline

**Finances.** Table 2 reveals the responses to the financial section of the questionnaire. As was suspected, 93 percent are struggling financially. Six women make less than $14,000 per year, six are on welfare, and twelve of the fifteen participants work outside the home for income. Obviously some of the welfare mothers also work to make ends meet.

Only two women receive child support regularly. Two others receive irregular financial support from the father of their children. The rest of the women receive no money at all from the second parent. The future, if left to itself, promises more of the same.
TABLE 2

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS PERTAINING TO FINANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire a seminar</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling financially</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare recipients</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular child support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irregular child support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income under $14,000 annually</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy quick meals regularly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not cook meals regularly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings for each child</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work outside of home</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most expensive meals in American society are fast foods, when we take into consideration the quality of the product. For the price of two large orders of fries at MacDonald's, a person can buy ten pounds of potatoes which would supply five or six meals.

The people at the Juniper Avenue Seventh-Day Adventist Church least able to afford fast-food meals are single parents. Yet, 40 percent of them admit to buying more quick meals out than cooking at home. Fifty-three percent do not cook meals regularly.

Single parents are subject to many financial difficulties: Males do not support their children, women make less money than men on the average, and women usually receive custodial custody of the children. The list goes on as we consider insurance, medical coverage, and the cost of housing in Southern California.

Single parents need a radical reorientation toward effective use of finances available, as meager as they may be. This questionnaire revealed a significant problem. This situation was addressed in the seminar.

Dating and sex. The statistical reality as unveiled is a nightmare. (See table 3.) All information relating to relationships and attitudes toward other persons and self were placed in the dating and sex segment of the outline. This is because dating and sex have so much to do in this present world in a person's perception of others and self.
Virtually every single parent responded affirmatively as to the possible consideration of marriage. What they have to offer a marriage is dubious at this point in their collective group response.

Thirteen are not pleased with their lifestyle, and only three would be proud if their children became exactly what they are.

Nine do not feel they have self-control over their emotions. Added to this scenario are seven who had children before they married the first time. One-third of the group have never married. Morality is not a virtue highly esteemed by this group as taught scripturally.

Though twelve attend church regularly and all fifteen are religious, ten indicated they would consider marrying outside of their faith. This seems inconsistent, especially when only one-third live by the same rules they expect of their children. How is one to make sense of it all?

The answers to the questions give a clue. Much educating, nurturing, and directing is needed. Obviously, theology and professed beliefs do not inform practice in the lives of these women to a large extent.

They are struggling. They are uncomfortable in their struggle. The single parents at the Juniper Avenue Church are faced with the hard reality that what they are
## TABLE 3

**QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS ABOUT DATING AND SEX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male friends</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female friends</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider marriage presently</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan never to marry</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions under control</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married before children</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular visits/other parent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious/somewhat</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular church attendance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied/appearance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active social life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special male partner</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help to raise children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk about feelings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would marry outside faith</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely for adult love</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desperate for adult love</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased with lifestyle</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased if children copy them</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No double standard with child</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostile toward males</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach positive toward males</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
they do not want to be; also, they do not want their children to end up as they are.

The questions relating to personal relationships with others and self only point out further the need for specific and realistic coping skills for single parents. The Bible commands us to love our neighbor as ourself. If we do not love ourselves, how can we love others?

Personal space. The good news is that twelve of the fifteen single parents attend church regularly. Eleven are satisfied with their personal appearance. Basically we have church goers who look nice. Statistically, this is a good sign.

However, when every other category contributing to personal space is too high or too low in the negative direction, there is great cause to wonder. Six people are in control while seven are out of control emotionally. Only four exercise regularly and three keep up an active social life. No wonder eleven express some loneliness. (See table 4.)

Thirteen are not pleased with their own lifestyle, but only three talk about their lives to an outside professional. This could be very serious to the pastoral ministry as the single parent population continues to grow. Unless pastors seek out the single parents of their congregations and listen to their concerns, counseling will not happen. Outside professionals are not necessarily high
TABLE 4

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS CONCERNING PERSONAL SPACE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly time</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions under control</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline varies/angry</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chose to be single</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation with kids</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation without kids</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise regularly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied with appearance</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active social life</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear for child's safety</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express loneliness</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not pleased/lifestyle</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk with professional counsel</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend church regularly</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
on the list of priorities for a population that is hurting privately.

Less than half (40%) take vacations either with the children or alone (6%). Thus, apparently, there is no release valve for the pressures of life. Here is a group that exercises seldom, talks to no outside professionals, is lonely, takes few vacations, fears for the safety of their children, and is not pleased with the personal lifestyle they have chosen.

This group is a significant force at the Juniper Avenue Church. Now that they have been given an opportunity to express themselves openly—through our questionnaire—we have become keenly aware of potentially explosive situation. Fifteen parents and thirty-three children are at risk.

The revelation resulting from the questionnaire is an indictment on the Juniper Avenue Church. Twelve of the single parents who participated in the seminar attend church regularly. Most of them attend Juniper Avenue specifically. Yet, apparently, they receive no seeming personal benefit as it affects their personal space. As a group they are lonely, fearful, and unexpressive.

It is time for something to be done. Mature religion is correct theology acted upon by believers in behalf of persons in need. Obviously, there is a need among the single-parent population, as they have so indicated by their answers to this questionnaire designed for singles with children.
Discipline. Again we have a red flag. There is a high degree perceived financial frustration; 40% make less than $14,000 per year in Southern California. Twelve mothers work outside the home, even though some of these twelve are on welfare. They actually break the law in order to make ends meet because child support is not forthcoming from the male involved in the procreation of the child.

When adults who work have little control over their emotions due to unfulfilled desires (all plan to marry someday), their tendency is to discipline inconsistently, as 53% indicated. Practically every parent in this group spanks her child. This leaves the possibility of going too far, greatly enhanced by emotionally worn parents who have no relief in sight. (See table 5.)

Most of these parents state they need help to raise their children, but there is none. Hence, they scream at their children, knowing that they as adults do no apply the same rules to themselves.

This presents a very tense situation. We have parents who do not want their children to be like them, yet they are raising them by rules the adults do not keep. The parents are not pleased with their lifestyles, but they are living them in front of their children. At the same time, they teach their children to respect all authority figures, they, themselves, disobey the ultimate authority figure, God.
TABLE 5

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS ON DISCIPLINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Struggling financially</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than $14,000 annually</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to marry</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular child support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare recipient</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions under control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spank children</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scream at children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger affects discipline</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single custody</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not active social life</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need help to raise children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleased if children copy them</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No double standard with child</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work outside home</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach respect for authority</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The answers to these questions were given freely by the single parents. They answered the questions in the privacy of their own homes, and no names were on the answer sheets.

The answers, I believe, are truthful and represent an accurate composite picture of the single-parent population at Juniper Avenue Church. If I am correct, the need for the development of a coping-skills seminar for this group is long past due. The evaluation of data from the questionnaire only shines a brighter light on a very dim reality. Single parents are a significant group of neglected persons among the fellowship of believers. At stake is no less than the quality of spiritual life for the members of Juniper Avenue Church.

**Evaluation of the Seminar**

The participants and I all agree the whole event was a valuable educational experience. We, as participants, witnessed the same event. The difference in evaluation results from perspective. I am a married man with five children and a caring wife. I have a great concern for single parents, considering the time in which we live. The single parents who participated in this seminar are in the eye of the storm. Each coping skill adapted may mean the difference between dragging through life or taking charge of her destiny.
I give here a review of each section of the seminar following a brief background.

Background

The final week of preparation was hectic. On Monday, I went to the restaurant to confirm my reservation. (They had cancelled my reservation once by mistake, and I was uncomfortable for the rest of the week.)

Tuesday, I worked diligently on my Sabbath sermon concerning the subject of single parenthood from a biblical understanding. The problem this week was not what to say, but what not to say. I had spent so much time reading and studying and preparing for the seminar that I was filled up.

Wednesday, I called several single parents to make sure they were still planning to come. They were positive, and I was momentarily relieved.

Prayer meeting was a discussion on single parenting. Everything I said ended somewhere in the "camp" of single parents.

Thursday, I finished my sermon for Sabbath. The balance of the day was spent collating seminar notebooks, buying pads and pencils, and checking equipment.

Friday, I looked over my seminar notes. I did not spend much time looking over my Sabbath sermon. I kept focusing on what might go wrong on Sunday.

Sabbath was a very good day. Most of the Juniper Avenue Church single parents were present. The topic fit
their experience. They were uplifted and encouraged to honor their verbal commitment to attend the single-parent coping-skills seminar.

Although all was ready, the material typed, and I prepared, I felt the night went very slowly.

Sunday morning, at last, I went to the church about 8:30 a.m. and helped to set up for the children's session which would begin at 11:30 a.m. I checked my overhead projector again and it malfunctioned. What was I going to do? Almost in tears, I prayed for direction.

I gathered all my materials into my car. My wife came to the church prepared with learning materials, snacks, and a Christian video for the children. She was ready.

The children started to arrive about 11:35 a.m. I knew it was time for me to go to the seminar meeting room at 11:45 a.m. Two people were there before me.

By 12:00 noon, nobody else showed up besides the same two that were early.

At 12:05 I walked into the reserved meeting room and announced to the two single parents present that we would carry on as planned. When the two women present went to their seats, the third and fourth persons entered. I thanked God for them, for now at least, we had a genuine group.

As supplies were distributed, three more participants came. I thanked each person for coming and
asked if they would join me in prayer. Another two persons arrived in time for prayer. 

At the end of a very brief prayer, twelve people were present. Although this procedure seemed like eternity, it only took fifteen minutes. We began with introductions, and by the time each person introduced herself, we had a full compliment of fifteen persons. Each person that entered had filled out a questionnaire.

Preface

The preface presented a global glance from the time of Jesus. By placing the mother of Jesus in the spotlight as a young single parent, the participants knew I was not presenting this seminar to condemn them or cast stones. By the time we reached the summary outline, they knew I was aware of their struggle, at least intellectually.

Introduction

I never speak about my educational background or experience in the days of my youth as a single parent. Even though these single parents were familiar with me, they were surprised that we actually had so much in common.

I told them exactly what I hoped we would accomplish, how I would evaluate the activities of the day, and reassured them that their names would never be published.
Finances

Most of the single parents were surprised at the results of the questionnaire about finances. The picture was clear; it was real. The results were their results, not a national study from "somewhere," U.S.A. They indicated a major financial problem. Even the women with good incomes were in financial trouble; everything they made was spent.

Eleven of these women had no savings for their children, not even a piggy bank. None found it easy to save anything. Only one had a systematic savings plan.

The coping skills we suggested were so practical and possible, that no one negatively criticized the coping mechanisms. Conversely, I received a verbal commitment from each person that she would attempt to implement at least one of the coping skills without delay.

I shared the experience of saving one dollar per child per month. My wife and I were the poorest of poor students while at Andrews University with four small children, but we saved first. When it was time to return to California, we had air fare for the whole family without borrowing anything.

As rapport grew, questions were asked about specific difficulties. We were able to lay the good, the bad, and the ugly right out on the table. Living within means is possible, and most of the participants left the seminar accepting the concept of reduced debt living. Only time
will tell if these coping-skill ideals have merit. The 
seminar participants believe there is some help for them in 
the near future, that new possibilities are open to them.

Instilling this kind of optimism was the idea of the 
whole project. I wanted to open avenues to success to a 
group of people who suffer because they are women in a Black 
experience who choose to raise their own children with 
little or no support from outside sources.

Coping skills for finances has far-reaching positive 
benefits. This section alone makes the coping-skills 
seminar a significant tool for change in the hands of an 
enlightened and assertive single parent.

Dating and Sex

The emphasis on dating and sex was used to enable 
the single female parent getting in touch with herself as a 
valuable creature fashioned by the hand of God. The 
questionnaire brought out the fact these women were not 
comfortable with the way they lived. I pointed out that if 
each woman present would adjust her lifestyle to be in 
harmony with her beliefs, positive changes would occur.

The dating and sex section of the session is really 
a mini course in self-esteem. Learning to respect oneself 
is the key to keeping male/female relationships respectable. 
Once self-respect is in place, we can venture into a very 
hostile and immoral world.
The single parents appreciated the "high-road" approach. We never entered the arena of how much sex is acceptable for a single Christian with children. The time and place for sex is in marriage in your spouse's arms.

The younger and more sexually active singles were not ready to receive the abstinence call until after marriage. Their difficulty is the fact most will never marry again, and an unwed Black mother stands a greater chance of never marrying than she does of marrying the first time. Statistics stand sharply against the Black female for marriage, remarriage, and divorce—if she should marry. The conversations in our circle were very lively as we concluded this section of the seminar.

Sharing and Lunch

One of our single parents shared her experience while lunch was being served. She is white, but she chose to adopt a Black female child. She raises her daughter in full contact with the Black world.

This was a good transition speech as we moved from dating and sex to personal space.

Personal Space

Time and energy are at a premium for singles with children. Because this is true, single parents must schedule time in for themselves. All agreed, but, "How?" they asked.
The direction is self-activation. The coping skills for personal space are for regeneration. It is impossible to think away stress and problems by focusing on problems and stress. The value of a hobby is immeasurable.

When I asked this group of single parents, "What do you do for a hobby?" no one could think of a hobby they enjoyed doing. They had no hobbies. I was surprised that in a group of fifteen people, I was the only one in the room with a specific hobby.

According to the responses of the questionnaire, only four people exercise. When I asked, "What do you do to get your mind off your troubles?" there was a chuckle in the room. One parent answered, "Nothing." She just went to work and came home to over-demanding children. She did not have time or energy to "enjoy" herself.

Most agreed that the energy level just was not there. I tried to show them that exercise and hobbies do not SAP energy, they give "pep" back to the step. Two single parents quickly shared experiences of new vigor by trying to add to an already over-taxing day or week by prearranged exercise. One mother told of rising at 5:30 a.m. to get in a game of tennis. Another said she was a spa person. These two women shared a truth: if all we do is get exhausted and go to bed day after day, we will stay tired and bed rest will do nothing for us. After awhile the
body and mind are tired of being tired. A healthy body is meant to be active.

Coping skills for personal space are difficult to put into action. It means a person must completely change the way she or he approaches life. Folks who exercise regularly and maintain an active hobby cannot do without these things. People who do no exercise and have no hobbies do not see the value of the effort.

I also pointed out that spiritual activities have renewing power. There was much more support among the group for this train of thought.

If there was any headway at all with taking time for personal space, it was not overtly visible in spite of the general acceptance of the concepts. A general unwillingness to own personal time as an essential ingredient to coping with single parenthood was evident. Perhaps the remark of one mother speaks for some, "I feel so guilty when I think of myself."

I reminded her the Scriptures say "Love thy neighbor as thy self."

Discipline

Discipline, especially as it pertains to children, is my expertise. I was trained as a counselor with special emphasis in child psychology.
Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we were unable to do justice to this area of the seminar. The parents were very pleased they had the information on paper.

This section of the seminar completely spells out an approach to child discipline. I think this section is my best work.

I had more questions and problems for resolution presented to me in this segment of the seminar than I could handle, especially since we had only fifteen minutes to approach this subject. Each parent knows how inappropriate he/she can be with discipline. This is so because most people have not thought through discipline before trying to administer it.

In the case of single parents, far too often they punish the spouse or lover who jilted them through the children. The only way to avoid such emotional traps is to design a plan that works for the particular individuals involved.

These parents wanted to extend the time when we closed the seminar. They actually expressed disappointment for such a "short" seminar.

I was greatly pleased by the response of these single parents to my suggested coping skills. They were not bored. Their only serious complaint all day was the length of the seminar--it was too short.
Results and Discussion

The seminar came to a close with each participant submitting a written evaluation before leaving the meeting room. It was very helpful to me to obtain immediate feedback from everybody.

Every single parent responded favorable to the seminar and agreed the session was helpful to some. Two thought the seminar was very helpful. It was a relief that these women felt this experiment was helpful because I had become so involved with these women that I did not want to disappoint them.

The answers for 'specific things learned' were very encouraging to me, as I wanted this event to be as practical as possible. The following list gives specific items these women say they had learned:

1. Believe in myself
2. See myself as moral
3. View myself as highly valued and that I count
4. How to put God and Jesus into a family setting
5. Single parents need to trust community decisions
6. Most single women with children have the same problems I have
7. To open up and talk with other women in my same circumstances
8. Learned to accept singleness and be creative
9. To save before you spend is good financial advice
10. The reality of coping mechanisms is helpful
11. As a woman I unconsciously respect others before myself
12. Some financial tips
13. A lot
14. I've learned that I like myself
15. How to budget for saving for family
16. How to budget for savings for children
17. To be more sensitive to my 16-year-old son's feelings
18. To praise more and complain less
19. Exactly how to discipline my child in the right way
20. Through God all things are possible

These women were looking for effective coping skills. They found specific areas helpful and learned many things they had not thought of before.

What would you add?

This seminar was designed as a four-hour session. The one addition requested most often was more time. The group felt they were cut 'short'. In response to the open-
ended question, "What would you add?" the following suggestions were made.

1. Have a two-part seminar
2. Specifics on personal growth and respect
3. Specific on relating to children
4. More talking about the dating aspect
5. A list of more effective ways of communicating between parents and child
6. Nothing
7. How to develop classes for single parents
8. Allow more time for comments from participants
9. Allow information on how to take personal time without feeling guilty.

What would you change?

The second open-ended question prompted six respondents to suggest changes. The list of suggested changes is as follows:

1. More time for varied seminar activities
2. More discussion
3. More illustrations to show how singles disagree or agree on things
4. Not as much emphasis on statistical information as to personal input
5. More audience participation
6. Condense the topics so more information can be shared.

Again the frustration of time limitations surfaced. Each topic discussed was of personal interest and concern to a majority of the single parents. They were a very verbal group, and when our time ran out, they complained that I had cut them short. As a group they requested a second seminar. There was no request for change in subject matter or content; what they wanted was more time to "work the vineyard for the fruit it offered."

Would you recommend a seminar like this one to a single parent you know?

Every participant answered the third open-ended question in the affirmative. All were favorably impressed enough to recommend a single-parent coping-skills seminar like this one to someone they knew.

The evaluation revealed a positive critique overall. The single parents participating in this seminar were very glad they had come. They expressed appreciation for information that spoke to their needs.

The evaluations were concise reports of the participants' immediate reactions to the events of the day. The responses were anonymous and (I believe) honest. No pressure was provided to solicit a particular response either positive or negative.
I know for a certainty that the need for coping-skill seminars for single parents are needed and desired. The great challenge is how to equip lay persons and clergy to be group facilitators. This endeavor is far too grand in scope for one person to ever hope to make a significant difference among the steadily growing single-parent population.

The four-week follow-up evaluation responses from the seminar participants gives a significant indication of positive results. One-third of the single parents (5) returned a written response. Each evaluation sheet was positive. All five attempted to apply specific coping skills which addressed personal needs.

A list of the coping skills the single parents tried--as they wrote them down--are:

1. I pursued the District Attorney's office to enforce child-support payment. After becoming a constant person visiting their office and calling on the telephone, I see some progress from them.

2. I think about what I'm going to say before I say anything.

3. I have tried to take more personal time for myself.

4. I'm also trying to budget my expenditures.

5. Tried to budget my money.
6. Tried to cook all meals.

7. I have been making a shopping list before going to the store.

8. I have been setting aside a little money from my checks before spending.

9. I have been more cognizant of my spending patterns, for me that's progress.

10. My plans are to save a little each month for my daughter.

11. Openness to understanding group thought.

12. Financial planning.

13. Personal time out.

I assume the other ten persons involved have at least considered a few of the coping skills for their home. The responses from these five women are so positive, I know the time and effort was worthwhile to them.

The results I anticipated are realized. I desired to develop a coping-skills seminar for single parents raising children in a Seventh-day Adventist environment. I believe it is now a reality. Both in writing and verbally the single parents who were involved with this seminar have expressed their thankfulness for a useful and practical tool to aid them with a very difficult job—the job of raising children alone is not easy.

These single parents have attempted some of the coping skills and have found them workable. This is my
reward. If the seminar had been enjoyable and forgotten immediately, the whole endeavor would have been in vain. The single parents are themselves living evidence that the task of bringing some relief to a difficult problem is still possible by the grace of God.

Parents of children without fathers are awaiting seminars with a practical orientation. Three other churches have contacted me to bring my seminar to them. I believe an area of need has been found and that a partial solution allows us to participate in a social healing ministry with a spiritual foundation.

The potential for good is staggering. Single parents who apply the coping skills outlined in the single-parent seminar become proactive contributors to the family and society. The defeated victim syndrome attending so many single parents in the 1980s seem to be abating as we press toward the 1990s. The thought of self-reliant, proactive females who happen to be single with children is exciting. Woman who relate to this man's world from a position of strength are sorely needed.

The immediate healthy fruitage from this seminar is an answer to prayer and hard work. The special-emphasis ministry focusing on single parents has been three years in the making. Many officers in the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church are single parents--the treasurer, Cradle Roll teacher, Kindergarten teacher, junior class teacher,
under treasurer, Sabbath School superintendent, Primary teacher, AY sponsor, Sabbath School secretary, a deaconess, and a Community Service volunteer are all single parents. All of these single parents and others find the Juniper Avenue Church a place wholly supportive of single parents; they are not an embarrassment and are respected. In turn, they give of themselves freely for the cause of God.

Summary

Preparation of the questionnaire was time consuming, but the product was sound. The questions were understandable and answerable. Not one single parent omitted a question. Each turned in a completed questionnaire with no negative criticism.

The questionnaire gave clear statistical evidence of problem areas for the single-parent population addressed. It reinforced the reliability of the seminar and was also the spark which excited the curiosity of those who completed the task of answering the questions.

The seminar was a success. I hoped for no less than five single parents to actually go through the seminar; we had fifteen people. I desired deeply to be relevant; the evaluations from the participants was sound evidence of relevancy. I wanted the single parents to learn coping skills which they would try to apply for themselves; they did. Several are currently enacting these coping skills in their everyday home life. I prayed there would be no
hitches or snags in the presentation of the seminar; no road blocks to hinder us. At the conclusion of the meeting, the single parents wanted to extend the seminar for another hour or set a date for part two. No road blocks hindered us.

The results were positive. I learned how to address a serious problem with direct, effective solutions. Through the process, the participants and I became friends. Now my closest parishioners of my pastoral experience are the single parents at Juniper Avenue.

This seminar with all of the preparation and final application left me exhausted. It was not easy. However, I believe myself to be the better person for it. I only hope that when I try this seminar again, it will not be so taxing.
CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

Insights, Personal Reflections, and Benefits to My Ministry

I approached the single-parent coping-skills seminar project with three expectations. First, I expected to learn an effective approach to ministering to an ever-growing population in my church, single parents. This expectation was reached beyond my own vision. The approach of diligent study, mixing with those I seek to 'help,' and preparation of an instrument to be used by them to help themselves was invaluable. All serious ministry is at once time consuming, tiring, and rewarding.

Second, I expected that the direct approach to a difficult situation to add to my abilities to recognize, analyze, and resolve, at least in part, some of the unfortunate life situations of suffering humanity in a less-than-ideal world. It happened. My abilities to recognize, analyze, and find partial solutions to difficult life issues is enhanced. The rigors of academic discipline prepare the disciple for further rigors with a quickened pace.

Lastly, I fully expected the church members to rise in the direction of their mission by helping to provide
relief to the poor, the widow, the oppressed, and the single parent. The theology of the incarnate God takes upon itself flesh at these times of active participation.

This expectation is slow in its fulfillment. I worked so hard for the underclass and was surprised how few wanted to get involved. The stately saints are pleased with what they see, but involvement at this level of ministry is not exciting to most. The single parents are excited. They are involved. How to broaden the net to include more "fish" is a possible consideration for another project. (Quite outside the scope of this project).

Added to my expectations were those things which evolved which I did not expect. I did not expect my wife to get as upset with me as she did. I spent so much time with this project and the people involved that my wife began to feel neglected.

One of the coping skills is "Consult your personal adviser, either a female or a couple," under the section for dating and sex. I learned from my wife that it is not wise for a male pastor with a wife and family to do close contact advising or counselling alone with females in trying circumstances. It can cause personal problems for all parties concerned. (Thank you Mrs. Osborne.)

On a purely personal note, I did not expect my typist to move out of town with a floppy disk full of information I needed for the completion of the project.
This traumatic experience not only forced me to find a new typist, but I had to start again from scratch.

The benefits to my ministry are many, as I have pointed out throughout this paper. At this point it may suffice merely to list them as follows:

1. My abilities to recognize, analyze, and resolve, at least in part, difficult life situations is enhanced.

2. My preaching is more focused.

3. I have deeper spiritual relationships with a hurting class of church members.

4. I am more careful about visiting single females.

5. I recognize the hard work of effective ministry as never before in my pastorate.

6. I learned the value of a deeply committed, loving wife.

7. I have learned the physical and mental limits of my body and mind due to fatigue.

8. I know I can run with the foot soldier.

9. I have matured.

10. My peers consider me a capable thinker.

11. I have the satisfaction of knowing I can pastor full time and complete a second major task simultaneously.

12. My congregation has a broadened respect for my abilities.
The following suggestions might prove helpful should another pastor or church worker desire to reduplicate this project. First, the facilitator needs to understand I created the single-parent coping-skills seminar specifically for small groups. The questionnaire is most effective when personally delivered to potential participants. The intent is to become familiar with each person who might decide to attend a single-parent seminar. This approach allows the facilitator to get a feel for the kinds of fears or concerns the single parent may have about sharing personal information about her or his home life and intimate relationships with other people.

Small groups have a better chance of working harmoniously if no persons in the group are strangers to everyone else. Not one person came to the Juniper Avenue church-sponsored seminar for single parents without knowing at least one other person in the group. We were not a crowd of strangers meeting for the first time. This was deliberate.

I recommend that the number of participants not exceed fifteen nor be fewer than five people. I cut the registration off at fifteen and prepared a waiting list of five more who would attend if room became available. Exactly fifteen came, and so none had to be turned away.

Second, a potential facilitator needs to be in control, decisive. He/she should set a date to begin the
seminar and stay with it. Single parents must go through many personal changes to add another item to their over¬
crowded agendas. Most single parents work outside of the home, so every free hour is even the more precious. Respect their time.

Third, provide child care. A week-end seminar for most single parents mean there is no baby sitter readily available at affordable prices. Only two parents who came to my seminar said that child care was not a problem. My wife provided care for fourteen children for the entire four hours of the seminar. A pastor or church worker who is unable to provide child care probably will face an extremely small turnout to the seminar.

Fourth, a facilitator should do her or his homework before attempting to teach. The information presented should be factual. The seminar is to suggest coping skills to people who have major problems to cope with every day. They do not have time to sort through abstract or theoretical possibilities. The direct and practical method of applying coping skills to actual difficulties and problems is valuable to the single parent. Esoteric approaches to world problems do little to help parents without partners cope with everyday life and the problem of child rearing.

Fifth, allow time for open discussion. The facilitator who lectures for four hours with no time for
questions or audience participation is doomed. Coping skills are not so much good advice as they are tools which are to aid the single parent in her or his everyday existence. Coping skills are burden lifters and resources. Coping skills are buffers to help keep single parents sane when all around them seems to make no sense.

Coping skills are not "sacred cows." They can be modified, rejected altogether, or applied as presented. There must be dialogue, however, so the facilitator can judge if she or he is on target with the coping skills she or he is trying to teach or suggest.

Sixth, the syllabus material must be updated as new information and statistics develop. This seminar syllabus was developed only as a model and a guide. The information gathered from the questionnaire should influence the direction any lectures presented should take. If the single parents questioned are White wealthy widows, then it is imperative to suggest coping skills which will aid White wealthy widows deal with their own circumstances more effectively.

Seventh, be aware of the monetary costs involved. Expenses included typing, photocopying, binders, pens, note pads, child care, and a lunch for each participant. The total expense for my seminar was $230.00 or $15.00 per person. One needs to consider the cost factor involved in
undertaking a quality seminar for coping skills for single parents if the model of this project is to be followed.\footnote{Appendix B}

Finally, the ministerial worker must be willing to keep trusts sacred in order to reduplicate this seminar. The worker who suffers integrity loss soon will find her or his single-parent ministry coming to a decisive halt. Mistrust is very near the surface among single parents, so it is very easy to alienate them, especially if they are single because of the trust violation of a spouse or lover who left them in their circumstances.

God will certainly bless any and all workers who venture into specific ministry of facilitating single-parent coping-skills seminars. The number of parents who are single is growing, and they will always be with us. Facilitators must proceed with caution, but, by all means they must proceed, single parents and their children need willing, well-equipped facilitators.

Conclusions with Recommendations

The single-parent population of the Juniper Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church is a significant body of believers. They vary in age and style, the reasons for their single-parent status are different, but the common thread that links them together is their singleness. This condition spawns a whole host of difficulties and problems.

Money is difficult to come by and manage. Male role models as fathers and supporters are absent. Women must find the energy to keep the household going with little or no help or it will fall apart. Emotions, most of the time, are stretched to the limit.

These women need intervention, support, nurture, and respect. The purpose of the coping-skills seminar was to help build up the single parent. The coping skills were offered in four spheres: financial, personal space, dating and sex, and discipline. All were woven together to make a strong support program capable of carrying life's stress and pain with less effort.

The questionnaire and the seminar outline are two parts of one whole. The questionnaire assures the facilitator and the participants that the information drawn upon is relevant because it came from the people who make use of the seminar.

This seminar was well attended. The coping skills were considered helpful by all persons who benefited from the presentation of these skills. Several of the original participants have reported the actual incorporation of several coping skills into their households.

My ministry has been enhanced in many ways, and I look forward to facilitating a second seminar.

Recommendations for further study are overtly implied. Single parents represent a growing population in
the church. Therefore the church must invest money, more support structures, and research into its single-parent population. The children of these parents are an important resource. Single parents need resources not pity. Further study is needed to find ways to equip the single parents with the tools necessary to cope emotionally, economically, and spiritually so these saints and their children can remain within the ranks of the church.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SINGLE PARENTS

General Information

I am female_________male_____________
Age________Number of children_________
Ages of children______________________
Number of male adults living with me_____
Number of female adults living with me____
I have the following number of:
   Foster children________
   Biological children_____
   Adopted children_______
   Legal guardianship______
   Without legal status_____
   Other__________________

Please answer each question with an "X" under the appropriate number 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5. For 'yes or no' or 'true - false' answers use '1' or '5' respectively.

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Somewhat agree
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree

01. I have close male friends who visit me.

02. I have close female friends who visit me.

03. I take personal time for myself daily.

04. I take some personal time for myself each week.

05. I plan to marry (or would consider it) before my children become adults.

06. I never plan to marry.

07. I was married before I had my children.
08. I have never married.

09. I work outside my home for a living.

10. My income is less than $14,000 per year.

11. I receive child support from the other parent.

12. I receive money from the State Welfare system.

13. I am struggling financially.

14. My emotions are under control.

15. I regularly become extremely moody.


17. I scream at my children.

18. I am consistent with discipline whether angry or not.

19. My children have regular visits with their other parent.

20. I chose to be a single parent.

21. I have single custody of my children.

22. Every year I take my children on vacation away from home.

23. I take vacations alone (away from children).

24. I have not taken a vacation since single parenthood.

25. I am religious.

26. I attend church at least once a month.
27. I exercise regularly.
28. I go for walks with my children.
29. I cook meals regularly.
30. I buy more quick meals out than I cook for myself.
31. I am dissatisfied with my personal appearance.
32. My children are overweight.
33. I leave my child at home alone.
34. I feel my children are more than I can handle.
35. I read regularly.
36. I read to my small children regularly.
37. My home is usually neat.
38. I am very organized.
39. I keep an active adult social life.
40. I have a special partner of the opposite sex.
41. I worry very much about my children's safety.
42. I need help to raise my children.
43. My children are very active in after-school activities.
44. I use a child-care agency.
45. I use babysitters.
46. I talk with adults regularly about my feelings.
47. I would consider marriage to a person not of my faith.
48. I am lonely for adult love.
49. I am desperate for adult love.
50. I am very pleased with my lifestyle.
51. I would be very proud of my children if they become exactly what I am.
52. I live by the same rules I expect of my children.
53. I would favor giving the other parent more custody.
54. I would favor the other parent taking more time with the children.
55. I have a savings account for each child.
56. I make all the decisions for my household.
57. I feel sorry for my children.
58. I feel sorry for myself.
59. I am hostile toward the opposite sex.
60. I teach my children to have a positive attitude toward men.
61. I teach my children to have a positive attitude toward women.
62. I teach my children to respect all authority figures.
63. I keep my children in close contact with close relatives.
64. I avoid all relatives.
65. I avoid relatives of the other parent.
66. I avoid my relatives.

67. I give my children material objects to win their love.

68. I give my children material objects to show my love.

69. I often tell my children I love them.

70. I hug my children regularly.

71. I talk about my personal life to an outside professional.

72. I am interested in a seminar to help me cope more effectively.

73. I tithe faithfully.

74. I send my children to public school.

75. My parents accept my children as their grandchildren.

76. I regularly send my children to other persons' houses to play.

77. My children often ask their friends to come to our house.

78. I would like to see the following subjects covered in a seminar.

   a. Finances
   b. Dating & Sex
   c. Child Abuse
   d. Legal Problems
   e. Other _______________________________________

I would like to share the following information about my experience as a single parent.
APPENDIX B

Itemized Expenses

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<th>Item</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Unit Price</th>
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<tr>
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**TOTAL**  $230.00
APPENDIX C

LOST IN SPACE

You have landed on the moon. Your moon party must decide what equipment it will keep and carry. It is the dark side of the moon. You are LOST! Rank the following in order of importance, 1 through 10.

1. Matches
2. Rope
3. Life raft
4. Candles
5. Stellar map
6. Water
7. Food
8. Command Base Receiver
9. Change of Clothes
10. Flares
11. First Aid Kit
12. Extra Oxygen Tanks
13. Needle and thread
14. Moon survival manual
15. Skillet, pot & cup
16. Knife

113
BIBLIOGRAPHY


