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GRACE: A Gift to the Family

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY



In the book, *Families Where Grace Is In Place*, author Jeff VanVonderen suggests the first step in learning how God's grace transforms relationships within a marriage and family is to recognize the difference between God's job and ours. God's task is to fix and change. Our responsibility is to depend on the Holy Spirit, serve our families, and help equip them to be all they can be.¹

It is not uncommon for committed, Christian parents or couples to try to gauge their spiritual success by outward performance standards. When individuals focus on "the letter of the law," they often lose those they hold most dear. Family members may also withdraw and become uncooperative and discouraged. When unsolved problems arise, they may be viewed as "proof" the leader of the family is failing as a Christian. Many believe they must work harder to overcome their problems. Trying harder or avoiding deeper issues causes Christian couples or families to wait too long to ask for help.

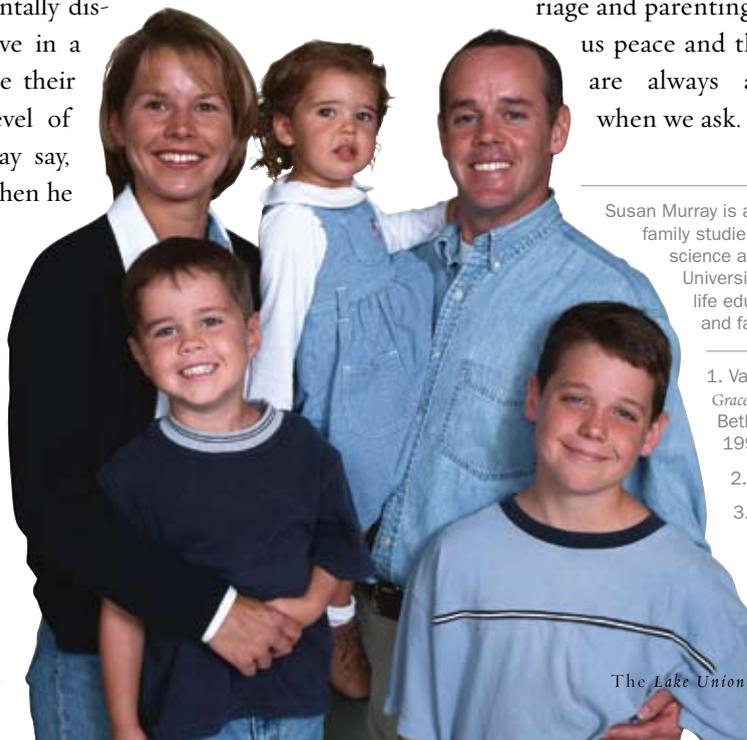
Families often avoid the shameful admission their self-efforts are inadequate to establish the peaceful, happy Christian home they desire. They deny the presence of a problem (which is fundamentally dishonest). They choose to live in a rut, working hard to restore their spouse or children to a level of "right" behavior. Others may say, "If I straighten myself out, then he or she will change."

Many were taught to go along with something outwardly, while inwardly strongly disagreeing. This is pretending—not compliance or submission. Women in particular struggle with what "submission"

means. Too often the outward behavior, believed to be submission, is not from the heart or the spirit; its from fear and the desire to keep peace at all costs.

The reason why "try-hard" solutions can't possibly work is because no man or woman is powerful enough to provide life and value to their spouse or other family members. Also, a relationship in which performance is demanded or expected is a no-win situation for all involved. I agree with the author that, "The Christian family's ultimate goals of harmony, obedience, and full potential can be arrived at without using legalistic and manipulative methods."²

"Healthy relationships between husband and wife, between parents and children, are possible only when the filter of God's grace is placed over the processes of marriage and parenting."³ God offers each of us peace and the gift of grace. They are always abundantly available when we ask.



Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.

1. VanVonderen, Jeff. *Families Where Grace Is In Place*. Grand Rapids: Bethany House Publishers, 1992.
2. *ibid.*
3. *ibid.*