

Protecting Your Marriage When Your Child Is Abusing

by Kim and Lynda Hodge with their son Evan Hodge

Kim: We all know the old saying that “opposites attract.” What is not said is if those opposites marry one another, then the attraction is overshadowed by conflict. When a crisis comes into the marriage and your family, such as the shock of discovering your son or your daughter is using drugs, the opposite views of life and the different ways we respond to challenges as a couple can actually push a marriage relationship into overload, and even to the point of collapse. How do we preserve in marriage? How do we work in the midst of the crisis while recognizing the distinct differences that God has given us as individuals? How do we handle the differing views of life? We do not want to suggest that we found all the answers, but we have discovered some things that have been a help and an encouragement to us.

We both grew up in fine Christian families. We both came to Christ at a very early age and each one of us recognized that we wanted to serve the Lord in some capacity. I don't think I had it nearly as well defined as Lynda did as a teen-ager, but we were sure that God had called us to some kind of service for Him. But in spite of our similarities, there were many things about our backgrounds and our temperaments that were very different, even pronounced. Lynda grew up in a home where work was life. Working all day was expected; accomplishing something before breakfast and after dinner was what really made the difference. She learned early that if she wanted to survive and thrive, she had to turn her work into fun.

Lynda: Kim grew up in a home where they respected work and they put in their eight hours so they could then have fun. They worked hard, but when the fish were biting, they would drop everything and off they would go to fish. This was very different from what I had experienced in my formative years.

Kim: Lynda learned early that discipline was necessary in everything and especially if she was going to accomplish everything that was put before her.

Lynda: Kim discovered that if he worked faster and even took shortcuts, he could get to the really good part of the day sooner and that was resting or recreation. We also discovered that our backgrounds were not only different, but our temperaments were as well.

Kim: Lynda is very gregarious. She loves to meet people, ask questions and is genuinely interested in everyone she encounters.

Lynda: The thing that I don't understand is that Kim is a pastor and yet, he is extremely shy. When he is off the platform, he really doesn't want to speak unless somebody speaks to him. He doesn't want to impose himself on anybody and he doesn't assume that any individual would be really interested in what he has to say.

Kim: Lynda is highly disciplined and driven. I think I might underline that word driven. She is driven to accomplish whatever needs to be done. She is determined to complete the task and to do it now.

Lynda: OK, if he is underlining words, Kim procrastinates. He hesitates a lot, but after mulling things over forever, he finally decides what he needs to do and works energetically while under pressure to get the job done.

Kim: Lynda is very discerning. She reads people quickly and at times because of that, she can be critical of them. But just as often she is compassionate toward them.

Lynda: Kim, however, is very, very trusting and he keeps giving people chance after chance after chance, which is okay in certain circumstances. But he also gets fooled a lot by people that he misjudges.

Kim: Now, Lynda rises early; may I emphasize, very early. I learned that in a striking way.

Lynda: You have heard that after the first night you were married, you realized that the person you married is totally different. You wonder, "Who is this man that I married?" Already, you find yourself bumping into situations that never occurred before you were married. When a person who is an early riser goes to bed later at night, that person will still get up early because his/her internal clock still says that at 5 in the morning, it is time to get up. It is a common occurrence.

Kim: Mine doesn't say that!

Lynda: So, even though we got to our motel at 1 o'clock in the morning on our honeymoon, I was awake at 5 AM only to discover that Kim was still sleeping. So I kept myself occupied thinking about all the neat things that went on the day before with our wedding, all of the guests who came, the presents, etc. Then it was 6 AM. When you get up early, you also eat early and I was getting very, very hungry. I started patting him on his back and said, "It's time to get up!" And he said, "Oh, no, just a little bit longer." I said, "Really, Kim, it is time to get up!" He responded, "Just a little bit longer." Now, at this time in our marriage I did want to be an obedient wife and not a nag. Finally, after about 15 more minutes, I said to Kim, "I am really getting sick to my stomach. I need to have something in it." And he answered, "Just five more minutes." With that response, I threw up all over the bed! He realized quickly in our marriage that I had needs that had to be met.

Kim: As you can guess, I have long remembered our honeymoon! What it was pointing out to us was how much more different we were than we had realized before we got married. I hope you see our point. Whether it is schedules, temperaments or philosophies of life, there are dozens of differences that both attract us to one another and yet at the same time constantly provide a source of potential conflict, even after 37 years of marriage. We share this with you to enable you to realize how these differences can go from being positive to negative. At least for us, it helped to understand how the crisis of a son's drug use could put us either in the position of being torn apart by these differences, or of being strengthened by them. This made it possible for us to discover more of our shared values to aid us in finding our way through an exceedingly difficult period of our lives. We are going to choose three areas where we found a great deal of conflict and then little by little, how we are learning to resolve those conflicts.

DISCIPLINE

Kim: The first one relates to discipline. As we stand here in front of our son, we recognized that from day one, we never agreed on how we should discipline him. So, this was a real challenge for us. Lynda has a very high expectation of obedience. If the requirements are fair, if we have made our desire clear to our son, then we should be able to expect obedience. Well, I am a little more laid back. I certainly want what is right, but the relationship is of so much higher value to me than exacting obedience. In our experience with Evan, this became a major source of contention for us. We both wanted the same bottom line, his obedience and his welfare, but how to get from here to there was not easy for us to agree upon. I thought Lynda was expecting too much. She thought I was too easy. I thought I was being patient with Evan. She thought that what I called "patience" was actually inaction. This ongoing source of irritation continued.

Lynda: We realized that we were pretty tense on this issue. We were both right, I am sure, at different times. But the point is we wanted to preserve our marriage. We didn't know what was going to happen with Evan, but we realized we had to deal with this issue, so this is what we decided. Kim told me not to do any of the discipline.

Kim: I am going to stop her for a second. I think the statement, "He told me," is a little too strong. Have you figured out our personalities now? It is not a "He told me thing." What I think I did was simply to suggest what I wanted her to do.

Lynda: He suggested that I just simply put my energies into having fun with Evan. "Evan, do you remember that we went to the beach with a loaded van of your friends and their surf boards almost every Saturday?" The guys would also come over to our home and we would have hair-cutting sessions. At the end of these hilarious times, there were large piles of hair on the floor. At their request, I cut their hair in all kinds of weird and different ways. This was so much fun and I love to have fun. Kim really did not want me to bear the weight of the responsibility of discipline for Evan. However, I would get very, very frustrated when I didn't feel Kim was going at this problem as energetically as I would have. In the Word of God, the Apostle Paul says that wives are to be submissive to their husbands. I remember talking with the Lord about this issue and said, "Lord, I don't know if this principle pertains to this situation. How can I be submissive to Kim when I don't agree with what he is saying?" Every fiber of my being was yelling out that Kim was not dealing with this issue correctly. But the Lord was so patient, gentle and loving. With the suggestions of the Spirit of God in my heart, I recognized that my responsibility was to be submissive to Kim, to do what he had asked me to do. Actually, after deciding this was the direction I would choose to go, I found a new freedom. This choice not only gave me a sense of freedom from the heaviness of it all; it also freed me from carrying the blame for what didn't work. However, I did continue to have a lot of frustration. It seemed that my emotions would wash over me in huge waves. Because we were in ministry, we didn't know who we could share with or trust with this deep of an issue. So we really had to learn to work with each other. Observing my frustration, Kim said to me, "If you are frustrated, I want you to come and talk to me about it." I remember we never did this in front of the kids because we did not want them to see that this situation was causing such a division between us. But when they were out of the house, we would go to our bedroom where I fussed eloquently, ridding myself of all the frustration, telling Kim about what was wrong with him, or the situation or whatever. Kim was so gracious to me because he knew I just simply needed to vent. I remember after my venting, I would open the bedroom door and walk out into the other part of my life. Looking back where he was sitting, I could see Kim's shoulders sagging because he, too, was at a loss as to how to really help Evan.

Kim: We look back now and understand that our struggles with discipline had more to do with our differences, than with Evan or with the actual circumstances. The more we understood this and agreed as to how we would work with these differences, the less divisive they became.

TRUST

Kim: The second area is the area of trust. Now this might seem strange because what we all believe in this room is that in the worst of circumstances we ought to trust the Lord. Ours was a situation of trusting the Lord differently. It was a difference as to how Lynda trusted the Lord and how I trusted the Lord and at times, what a tension that presented. Both of us love the Lord. Our trust toward Him has grown throughout circumstances like the one we are discussing; but our way of expressing that trust was different and at times, very stressful.

Lynda: To really keep on going through all of this, I needed to be with the Lord a lot. I spent a lot of time in His Word. Early on in our marriage, I had learned that Kim could not always be there for me. There is no human being that can always be there for you that can meet that gut-level, heart and soul-wrenching pain that is within you. Only the Lord can do that. This is why I spent a lot of time with the Lord because He was able to get down to where I was raw and bleeding. I came across 1 Thessalonians 5:16 and it says, "Always be joyful." Now I always love to laugh and have a great time. This directive was no problem for me. It also says, "Keep on praying." Well, I was on my knees all the time about Evan and the situation. But then the verse says, "Always be thankful for...." I had to stop there. I said, "Lord, how in the world can I be thankful for any of this? What is there to be thankful for?" Somehow, through the Spirit of God, the thought came back to me, "Well, why can't you be thankful?" I rose up to that thought and said, "Lord, I can't be thankful because I don't like what You are doing. You are sovereign. You could have stopped all of this. You could have prevented this. You could have turned Evan around and had him make more correct choices. How can I be thankful for Your allowing our son

to make these wrong choices? And another thing, Lord, I trusted You and You let me down!" I really vented to the Lord. Finally I said, "Lord, You are simply unworthy of my trust." I was being totally honest with God, but I was shocked when I said this.

You see, this situation brought out the deep issue of what was really going on in my life. It was during this whole "trust issue" time that I realized I was a fair-weather Christian. I could trust God when I was still able to control and fix things. But when I couldn't, when it was so totally out of my control, it was another matter. This whole situation was destroying the very core of my being, my world as I knew it. It was destroying our family and I hated it. I don't know how long I wrestled with this matter of trusting God, but I do remember that I was finally able to say to the Lord, "Okay, I trust You. You are worthy of my trust. And, also, Lord, I want to say 'thank You' for this situation because You showed me what really needed changing in my own heart." As soon as these words came out, God knew that I finally meant business.

In Philippians 4:6 Paul says, "Tell God what you need and thank Him for all He has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your heart and your mind as you live in Christ Jesus." At that point in time, God's peace was starting to really settle down into my heart. He was guarding me. I knew that He was taking control of the situation, although I had no idea where it was going or how it was going to end.

Kim: During that same period of time, I was struggling with the issue of trusting God. We both knew we ought and needed to trust Him for that is the thing that believers do. Once Lynda had made her peace with God and had that conviction firmly settled in her heart, then many of the dark days ahead were days where she could honestly say, "I believe that God is doing what He wants and I can trust Him." I didn't do that very well. I was constantly asking, "Why?" I was constantly saying, "What in the world is this all about, Lord?" I was regularly saying, "Lord, is this the end of our ministry? Are You telling me that maybe I'm not useful to You anymore? Is that why this is happening and why we can't help Evan to get control of his life or we can't change the direction of his life?"

By the way, many of my sermons during this season of our life grew out of this period of time when I was struggling to learn to trust the Lord more. I thought I did trust Him when we went into it. Sometimes I would frustrate Lynda with my struggle. She was saying, "Just trust the Lord," because she had come to that point. I wasn't there yet. So she would be frustrated and at times even irritated with me. I would be irritated with her because when she stated that she was trusting the Lord, it was just too matter-of-fact for me. I knew that wasn't what she was saying, for it wasn't just a statement with Lynda, it was the reality of her heart. I tried to look back and think about the benefit of that struggle. I think that it caused us to discuss; it got us talking about our faith. We prayed more together and we studied and struggled more together to reach some common understanding of what God was doing in this very uncertain time with our son.

By the way, it is my conviction that many couples at this point separate spiritually. They don't separate physically; they don't aim toward a divorce. They just separate by stopping their talking about spiritual things. They don't pray together because they don't think the other understands their confusion or pain. But I believe that God in this struggle used us in one another's life to deepen our faith. I benefited a lot from Lynda's confidence. Even if at times, it irritated me. Yet, I believe she benefited from my struggle to understand more of what God was doing and what He wanted us to learn.

UNITY

Kim: Another area became very difficult for us. That was staying together, being connected and unified.

Lynda: Our differences in temperaments and our outlooks on life really did provide opportunities for disagreement and disunity. We know that when you are in ministry or on a ministry team, you really strive to have your pastoral and your support staffs work in unity.

Ephesians 4:1-3 states "As a prisoner for the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

It dawned on us that we worked very hard in our ministry with our pastoral and support staff to establish and maintain this unity. But we were not doing it in our own marriage, which was absolutely essential. We realized we not only had differences in the way we wanted to discipline our son, but we also had differences of opinions and thoughts in other areas. So we decided that if we wanted to establish and maintain this unity, we had to look for common ground. We had to look for places where we had agreements rather than emphasize our differences. We found we had a shared faith, a mutual love for Evan and a desire to help him. We also realized that our spouse is not our enemy here. It was Satan who was trying to destroy us, thereby rendering us ineffective for ministry in which God had placed us.

Kim: In order for us to grow in this unity, we really learned that we needed to pray together regularly. I personally concluded that it is much easier to pray in church, in public, before hundreds of people than it is to pray on a one-to-one with your mate, especially when you are living in the midst of any kind of tension. The slightest difference of opinion seemed to push us away from prayer and especially prayer with one another. Yet, we knew if we didn't maintain prayer, if we didn't have that spiritual time together, then we weren't going to maintain unity or develop our mutual trust, not just our individual trust, but our mutual trust in the Lord. It was a hard thing for me at times when Lynda suggested we pray together. I should have suggested it because I was supposed to be the leader and the head of the house. Sometimes, it was difficult for me to set aside my pride and be thankful for the suggestion. At times, I would resist praying when she came up with the idea. Then I realized whether I led or followed in that area, prayer was so important that we just needed to pray together no matter who suggested it.

Another one of our unity builders was to discuss what we were learning from God. A person can't do that in every circumstance. In our lives, some days got pretty tough and tense with Evan and his drug use. But we found that there were times when Lynda could share with me what God was doing in her life, something He was teaching her that didn't relate to me or the situation with Evan. And what God was teaching Lynda would often bring encouragement to me at a time when I really needed it. Or, I would share something I was learning through God's Word or through our experience and hopefully this was an encouragement to her at the same time. God's Spirit really began to unify us in our relationship when we let go of our pride, humbled ourselves before the Lord and did that together on a regular basis.

Lynda: We definitely had to let go of our pride. We found often that our self-centeredness would hinder the Lord working in our lives. When we learned to let go and just trust the Lord for our day, for our reputation, and for the ministry in which He had placed us, we enabled the Lord to do so much more in our lives. At this time, the phrase, "Move over, Lynda, and get out of the way," became the theme of my life. I knew I needed to move over and get out of His way so that the Lord could either be working on Kim or on Evan. I found that when I let it go instead of hanging on and trying to fix it, God gave me a different perspective. He took me out of the middle of the fire and put me on the outside so to speak where I could have a broader view and was able to begin to see things more from His perspective. I was then able to see the Lord working in Evan's, Kim's and my life, which gave me more hope and joy in my life. Now, I didn't do this right away. It was a progressive thing. This is something that I just had to keep doing day after day. I realized that as hurt as I was or whether I was embittered, frustrated, angry or when feeling like this whole situation was beyond me, I still had to make the choice to trust the Lord even though I had not a clue as to what He was doing or where this situation was taking us. But I choose to trust Him and the moment I would make this choice, God would swoop down and give me a sense of His presence. He would give me a settledness in my stomach that all was well because He was in control and taking care of our lives.

Kim: We are sure that what we have discussed you may have encountered in your own lives, but I do want to make two other statements. Lynda and I had to keep short accounts with each other. We found that we had to discuss our frustrations, not always at the point of the frustration,

but we couldn't "let the sun go down on our anger." Every time we did that Satan got a foothold. As it is so clearly stated in Ephesians 4, this will happen again and again if you let it. We learned to be able to discuss things even during the tense times. That didn't come easy because usually I thought I was right and she was wrong, or she would feel just the opposite. The second thing is that we grew in our communication. It became very important. I know that you hear about how important this is and read about this in books on how to have successful marriages. But as much as we hurt, we realized that we needed to listen to each other. While we did that, we began to understand better the real feelings that we were each experiencing. Then we would be able to find a way to encourage each other. Oftentimes, when I was down, Lynda was up or the other way around. So, if we were willing to listen and communicate with each other, then rather than fighting each other, we could focus on what was possible to build each other up so that we could face our situation and not end up with disunity and even despair. Now we would like to invite our son, Evan, to come to share a little bit about himself and how God brought him to this place in his life.

Evan: The main thing I would like to tell you guys about is my experience, what happened to me, and the way I looked at things. Hopefully, it will be encouraging to you no matter where you are. As I was listening to my parents talk about what each was like, I realized I have a little bit of both of them because I am a driven-procrastinator. I went to Sunday School. I knew every fuzzy-felt flannel board story. I knew it all. One thing I must say is that I had loving, loving parents. I look back on that now and I know they were always there for me, period. They didn't always understand what I was going through, but that wasn't their fault. It was mine because of my lack of communication. The openness and the willingness from them were always there. I just didn't know about all these fights and struggles my parents went through behind closed doors. Listening to them today made me aware of that for the first time. I think that was wisdom that they chose to do that the way they did.

In fifth grade I was at a Christian School. There I went through D.A.R.E., the drug abuse program. They kept saying that drugs are bad and you should never do them. In 6th grade I was with my friends, especially my best friend, Brian, who I hung around with all the time. He came from a good family, had a great Mom and Dad, and was in a loving Christian family. Brian and I did everything together. One night (although there were many of these nights) we decided to sneak out just to meet some other kids. We ended up at one of the schools and some of the older kids in the 7th and 8th grades were smoking weed. I had never really been exposed to it before. It was pretty much my first time that I had ever seen it or heard of it apart from the D.A.R.E. program. At this time (a year later), the stuff I had heard in the D.A.R.E. program meant nothing to me. I would have never tried it if my friend had not done it first. I looked up to the other kids that were there; but if Brian had said, "NO," right there, I probably would have done the same. When I saw him go ahead and take that first hit, I felt compelled. "Shoot! He did it," I figured, "it can't be that bad!" The stuff they taught us in the D.A.R.E. program was that drugs would make your teeth fall out & horrible things will happen to you, etc. Yet, everyday at school, I would see my friends high, going to class, getting straight "A's," at least at the beginning, doing all the things they wanted to do. Many were excelling in sports, academics, etc. I just didn't see the consequences at that time. I could not relate what the D.A.R.E. program had taught me with what I saw happening around me. So 6th grade was when I started. I was with my friends. That was one of the key things, with my friends. I am not blaming it on my friends, not at all. It was completely my responsibility of choosing to do this.

Throughout the next few years I kept on doing it, doing my own thing. I did not realize what this was beginning to do to my family. However, I think it was about when I was in the 8th grade that my Dad told me he was seriously considering quitting the ministry. In the Bible it says that if you can't take care of your own household, how can you be a shepherd to a flock. It made me so angry; it ticked me off so bad because this was my life, my decision. It had nothing to do with him; but yet, it was affecting him. That he was going to be screwed over because of something I was doing just didn't make any sense to me. It just made me angrier. But I did not realize at any time the effect I had on them, ever. It was me getting high; it was me with my friends; it was my hanging out and playing. I had not a clue; I was just oblivious, mostly because I was selfish. That is the biggest thing about getting high, it is all about you, pure selfishness. I just had no clue. A lot of kids don't have a clue that they are being so selfish and hurting the family for

they do not understand this is about family. It is about just hanging out, just doing my thing, no different than playing soccer, football, etc. That was the level it was on. Let's just relax; let's just hang out because that is how it is in the school and everywhere you go. It is just another thing, something to do.

I basically went on doing a lot of other stuff. I just don't have time to share with you what I have been through. (It would take a few Jerry Springer episodes to explain all that I went through.) All the time I was doing this, I knew it was wrong. The desire in my heart to continue getting high was there, not the desire to do what God wanted. It wasn't until much later when I was around 21 years old that it basically hit me. I had been going through a lot of stuff. It was God who brought me back. As I said before, my parents were always there for me, always. Like my Mom said, she used to take me to the beach all the time. I was heavy into skateboarding and really loved it. Skateboarding was one of the key things that kept me from doing drugs. I realize that a lot of people look at it differently. But when I was so active and determined, my mind had to be clear. My body had to be in good shape and I didn't want to do drugs when I was skating. My parents were always accepting and loving. I would always get arrested for skating in the wrong spot. I remember when I got arrested where my Mom worked. The University had just built a multi-million-dollar complex. There were great skateboarding places and brand new cement everywhere. When the security guards called my home, Dad came down with his motorhome, picked up about ten of us, took care of us and took us to a place where it was legal to skate and he stuck with us. Those kinds of things are what I remember my folks going through. But it was the Lord that brought me back. I always had a knowledge of Him. I was raised as I should have been raised. I was loved; I was accepted; but it was the Lord who brought me back.

My parents were really naive, (or so I thought) since both were raised in good homes. Neither one had been exposed to the culture in which I was living. They had no idea that I could be high right in front of them for they didn't know what to look for. I was high in front of my parents all the time; but I covered it up with my eye drops, breath mints, etc. I had everything thing under control, or so I thought. I felt that they had no idea, until I knew that it was out of control and was clearly visible. I would encourage you to understand the culture and the lifestyle your child is in because that is what it is all about. Weed was my choice of drug, but I did all sorts of stuff. That is a whole culture; it is a lifestyle. Everybody that I ended up being friends with did it; all they did was get high. I liked people that didn't smoke; that wasn't an issue; it was just that I liked to be high and I would be with people who liked to be high, to share with me and I would share with them.

Again, this is a whole culture and lifestyle. There is such a huge haze over this generation. What kids see is that it is just a different way of living. They don't see the effects it is having on others because they are hanging out just with these kids. They don't see the consequences of choosing this lifestyle. They don't see these kids 10 to 15 years down the road. They don't see these kids at home every night fighting with their families, or flunking out of school, or losing their relationships with husbands and wives. They just don't see that. I never saw it either. If I could have just related the consequences, had they been more relevant to my life, —not "you are going to be on the streets and homeless"—but of the true effects my choices were having, it would have made me think a lot more about what I was doing.

Maybe it would have helped for my folks to explain on a flat level, eye-to-eye, how much I was hurting them, how much I was really destroying them on the inside as they were watching me go through this and being in this kind of trouble. Again, I don't know if this would have helped. I was so totally oblivious. These were my parents; parents are supposed to be strong, stable, there for me. I just don't know. There is no way to know what would have gotten through to me. When my Dad said that he was seriously thinking about giving up the ministry, it severely crushed me. Did I get high that night? Yes, I did; but did that stick in my mind forever? Yes, it did. It crushed my soul that the guy who loved me so much and who was always there for me, I was hurting so much, killing him with my own selfishness. I couldn't understand that; it took me a while to get to that point.

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It was the Lord who brought me back. It was an odd circumstance. I was raised in a Baptist Church where there is not much holy rolling & not much throwing your hands up in the air, but the

Word was still strong and the Spirit was strong. I was sitting in my chair watching TV, nothing special. It was actually TBN, which I don't usually watch. The story was about a guy who gave up his selfishness, was sick of living for himself, and was so convicted. God convicted him to quit being a bonehead, quit working so much and encouraged the man to meet with his friend to pray. Within three years this pastor's church was over 3,000 strong. God gave him a vision and because he was willing to get past himself and listen, God used him and amazing things happened. Somewhere during that time, I literally got thrown out of my chair. I had just been in a big car accident, and had been out of work for a month and a half, stiff and sore. But I found myself out of my seat and kneeling on the floor where I started to bawl, uncontrollably. I heard a voice saying, "Evan, it is time. It's time to stop running." It was God. I called my Dad and I know he remembers the day because he said, "You want me to come over there?" He couldn't understand me on the phone for it was such an emotional time for me that I couldn't communicate it, but he knew something had happened with me. I know that every circumstance is different. There may be times when you do have to cut off your child; it might come to that. But with the love and openness that was always in my home, I knew that at any time, I could come back. If I needed that comfort, if I needed a place to be, if I needed to come back, I had a home. I had a place.

Kim: Sometimes, we fear that our marriage and maybe our ministry will be destroyed by our child using drugs. There is no doubt that your life changes forever. And it may even be that your ministry changes; but I have a personal feeling that it is not the circumstances that close our ministry. Rather, it is our choices in the midst of those circumstances that close our ministry. Some of us who think that ministry is over, as I did for a while, may be thinking very incorrectly. God may, in fact, be opening up a new ministry for us and we have yet to understand what that might be. We now see our son on fire for reaching people who are in some of the kinds of experiences he has gone through. We have developed a compassion that we never had before. It is not the circumstance that determines whether your ministry comes to an end. It is the way you respond to the circumstance.

Another very important lesson Lynda and I learned through this whole thing was the importance of our relationship, not only with Evan and with one another, but with the Lord. I don't want to sound preachy, but the greatest danger in our time of crisis is that we take our eyes off the Lord and completely focus on the problem or the person or whatever it is that is going on. Over the years we have come to the conviction that our focus in the best of times and in the worst of times has got to be on Christ. I know that sounds like something a preacher would say. I really am convinced of it. The focus in the best of times as well as in the worst of times, must be that of Christ, to stay connected to Him. Our strength comes from Him. Our relationships with one another are extremely important. Our relationships are more important to us today as a family than they ever were. But it is our relationship with Him and where we focus that makes a difference. Colossians 3 says, "we are to set our mind on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Don't set your mind on things of the earth." Romans 8 says, "the mind set on the Spirit," and I think that is in the midst of any circumstance, "the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace." Philippians 4 also says that "whatever things are true and honorable and right and pure and lovely and of a good report, we are to let our minds focus on these things."