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The
Jig-Saw Family

Broadcast Talks
(Home and Family Week)

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Monday

THIS week these early morning talks are about home-and-family—not so much about home-and-family in general, as about the Christian home-and-family. And I'm here to be as helpful as I can, on the basis of twenty years as a husband, rather less than twenty as a parent, but the whole twenty, and more besides, as a convinced Christian.

I don't profess to know everything about the Christian home-and-family, but I do know some things. You can learn an awful lot in twenty years. They say that outsiders see most of the game. I wonder. I think that outsiders may often be right in spotting where marriages go wrong, but I'm quite sure they cannot know about the why and the wherefore of marriages that go swingingly right. That depends on many things which only husbands and wives can know, and among them, a proper perspective and mutual understanding in sex things.

When you first get married, it's all very new and exciting, but the excitement doesn't last. It isn't good that it should. A plateau can be duller than a plain, even though it is on top of the mountains. For a happy marriage, everything depends on what you can put in the place of that first excitement, 'the love of thine espousals', as Jeremiah once called it. Sometimes there just isn't anything at all. Then, for those who take their ideas of sex from the farmyard,

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and let sex run away with them, it means adultery. For others who have more self-control and sense, married life *can* be deadly dull, and sometimes a burden hardly to be borne. But nothing of it need be like any of this. I reckon that the happiest year of married life ought always to be the most recent, and I'm pretty sure it can be, if you go the right way about it.

For me—I say 'me', but, of course, as you'll understand, it's really 'us'—for me, it all dates from the time when I found out for myself that religion was much more than fulfilling an ethical code, however splendid, and more even than saying your prayers, turning up at church, and so on. There came a time when I found out that religion really means trusting in God personally, being sure about Him, confident that He is a very present help. From that day, when I say my prayers, I have made a point of noticing the times and places where I could say that He has been near, giving me ideas, strength, courage, and so forth—all through thought and feeling and will, of course—that is how God does speak to men. The result of all this has been a growing certainty of His actual Presence, and with it a sort of knight-errant attitude to life, and I have found out that the more I know about God in this way, the more real He is, and the more I can trust Him, consciously rely upon Him.

Up to His care myself I yield;
He is my tower, my rock, my shield,
And for His help I tarry.

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I know exactly what Martin Luther meant by that, and I have discovered, too, that the foundation of a Christian home is precisely that same sort of confidence and trust. If husband and wife know what such trust in God can be, then the more they know of each other, the more they will know just when and how to trust each other, just when and where to strengthen each other. It's just like turning a corner and finding a whole new stretch of country that you never knew existed before. Your home comes to be built on a solid rock, a rock so fixed and sure that every storm serves only to show how fixed and solid it is.

I've known married couples who've made quite a good job of it, and they aren't the least religious; but I'm sure that if they had been religious, they could have made a heaps better job of it still. You may say that's a matter of personal opinion, and you can't measure happiness by the yard—but I stick to what I've said. I didn't always know that religion really meant this sort of confident trust; not till we'd been married ten years and more. So, you see, we've tried both ways, and that's why I know that, good as the first can be, the second, that is the Christian way, can be better still.

It is surprising how much money folks can spend on a house that is never a home. It isn't money that makes a home—it's knowing each other and trusting each other.

Tuesday

I'VE been in houses where either the husband or the wife has consistently let the other down in front of the company. When she's slipped up, and things haven't gone quite according to plan, he's made a remark about it, sometimes in a nasty way, sometimes in a joking sort of way. That's a fool thing to do. A marriage has got to be a very, very happy marriage indeed, before it can stand that sort of thing, even by way of a joke, and then it can't stand very much of it, especially in front of other folk. The man who does that sort of thing doesn't deserve to have a wife; and I've known husbands and wives who have deliberately corrected each other—corrected each other, mind you—in front of their guests. That is a sure form of matrimonial suicide, and everybody else has been most uncomfortable.

I've known wives carefully explain to visitors exactly what happened the last time she asked him to do anything in the house. That's another fool thing to do, and he'll be a fool if he does anything again. You didn't like it, you know, that other day when the Yorkshire pudding didn't rise, and he made a remark about it before Mr. What's-his-name. You were disappointed yourself, anyway, because you'd had an extra busy morning and you'd tried so very hard to have things extra nice. He ought to have stood

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by the firm, and you know, even if he can't put a picture up without knocking half the plaster down, or put in a window sash without putting the hammer through the window, there's no need to send the brass band all round the town about it. A window sash can be quite difficult, especially if it's the right-hand top one. He knows he isn't much good at that sort of thing, without your making a song about it. The poor man was doing his best. If you could have done it yourself, you'd never have asked him. The motto is—STAND BY THE FIRM, both in front of strangers, and especially in front of the children. You can't expect them to think well of you, if you don't both set them an example in respect of each other. You have been warned. The time will come when they will grow up a bit, and then they'll know well enough that you haven't played the game by each other. If you know anything about children in their early teens, you'll know that counts as much as any other one thing. Then they'll respect neither of you, and you can't have love without respect. You'll have taught them. SO STAND BY THE FIRM.

All this sort of thing arises out of loving yourself most. When your partner slips up, you actually care more about putting yourself right in front of other folk than you do about helping your partner out. That's *ratting*. Nothing destroys friendship and love so effectually as *ratting*. If you really love your husband, your wife, more than you love yourself, then you won't

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do it. The reason why you won't do it is because you really have become 'one flesh', as the Bible and the marriage service put it. The two of you are separate individuals far less than any other two folks on the face of the earth.

The happiest marriage is the one where husband and wife are both of them least selfish in their love for each other. Our trouble is—however much we keep on being in love with each other through the years—our trouble is that human love is always selfish *in part*. Please notice the **IN PART**. I'm not saying that men and women are not capable of the utmost self-sacrifice. They are. There are husbands and wives, lots of them, whose devotion to each other is superb. But the fact remains that in all human love there is a root of selfishness, and it's got to be watched. I've known the happiest marriages ruined in course of time, just because they didn't know that, or knowing, didn't watch it.

This is where Christianity comes in—because in Christ you find a love that is fully, completely, and utterly unselfish. Christian love is a love that 'hears all things, trusts in all things, hopes all things, endures all things'. So **STAND BY THE FIRM**.

Wednesday

THIS morning I'm starting with family jokes. We've got them in our family, lots of them, and jolly good ones they are, too. I'm not going to tell you what they are, because they are private, and if I did tell you, they'd be very, very public indeed, and as family jokes they'd definitely be on their backs for ever.

Family jokes are a great institution. My idea is that there are certain books which all the family ought to know by heart. They provide the basis of that fun which belongs to the whole family in common. There is nothing like a common set of jokes to bind a family together—at least, nearly nothing, for there is one thing better. I'll come to that later on. Two books are indispensable to any well-regulated family. One is *Alice in Wonderland*, including the 'Looking Glass', and the other is *Peter Pan*. Add to them *Pickwick Papers*, and I don't believe there is anything that can possibly happen in a family which cannot be capped. But to be quite safe, add Gilbert and Sullivan. For instance, just to let you in on a little bit, if anybody in our home should perchance say, 'Where do I begin?' then the whole family without delay and in unison, will *gravely* chant, 'Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end; then stop'. All of which, I reckon, helps to make

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a real family out of a few folks who have very definite opinions of their own about most things.

The problem in a family is to obtain the maximum of independence with the maximum of interdependence. You have to help everybody to be themselves, to have a mind of their own, lots of initiative, and yet, at the same time to realize that everybody depends upon everybody else. Every member of the family must be a real individual, as individualistic as possible, but at the self-same time every member must realize that there is no such thing as a *separate* individual.

How is this to be done? There's only one way, and that's by having something in common which belongs to each individual whatever his own particular line may be. You can't expect everybody to be equally keen about everything. 'When everyone is the same bodee, then no one's anybody', with apologies to Gilbert and Sullivan. It's a sound scheme for each member of the family to have his own line, astronomy, birds, buses, and so on. It isn't everyone, for instance, who knows what a cuckoo's egg is like, but it's quite useful to have someone in the family to whom you can turn straight away and ask.

Common jokes and common fun provide *one* common bond, and it can be very effective. But everybody has got to be fairly quick in the uptake, and if this particular brand of humour is to be the only common bond, then some one may easily be left out. If there is anyone left out,

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it will be the one who most needs to be in. So, whilst common fun is a reasonably effective bond in our home—father and mother follow on, faint yet pursuing, you know—we've got a common bond which covers all; and it's religion.

Now that is the common bond for every family, especially if you know what I know, that the essence of the whole business is a really vivid trusting in God. That, you see, doesn't depend upon everybody being more or less equally bright and quick in the up-take. It takes in the lame-dogs equally with the greyhounds. The tortoise and the hare are always level. No one is left at the post, and all come in together at the finish. They can all pray together, and should do. They can all go to church together, and should do. We all have one thing in common, and that is God's equal love for everyone of us. Family fun is a grand bond, but religion can be the best and closest bond of all.

Thursday

I'VE often wondered who it was that invented jig-saw puzzles. The man was a public benefactor of the first degree. Unless it was a woman, in which case she was . . . 'wizard'. You see, you do not know that, given time and patience, it will all fit in and make one picture, and YOU can do it. Then you can lean back, satisfied, 'Something-attempted-something-done' sort of feeling. The only weakness is that other folk will keep on trying to be helpful. If only somebody could invent a means of stopping the rest of the family from interfering, jig-saws, as a source of recreation, would be well-nigh perfect.

But everything will fit in—every piece. The inter-locking ones are best—they hold together better while you're doing them.

The point I'm after this morning is that in a good jig-saw every piece has its own shape, but it all fits in. In fact, it is just because it has its own shape that it fits in best, and helps to hold the rest together. Now the family is like that. We've all got to fit in, not like square blocks, all the same size and shape, but like a jig-saw where every piece has its own shape and size.

I think everybody will agree that this is what we want to happen everywhere, outside the home as well as inside, in business, amongst nations, everywhere. We want everybody to be them-

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selves, every nation to run itself in its own way, but at the same time we've all got to learn to live together, and to fit in. The family is where we learn.

The square block business would work very well if we were all small children. I don't mean like young Tommy there, who still crawls on the floor, or slides along on his front as some of them do. He isn't interested in making anything fit, anyway. What he likes best is for somebody else to build up his blocks for him, so that he can knock them down. But the time will come when he will want to make patterns, and those old-fashioned blocks we used to have when we were children were pretty good. All the same shape and size and six pictures to make. Do you remember what a great discovery it was when you found out that you could make the other pictures by turning whole rows and lines at once? That was really a great day.

The difference between the Nazis and the Democracies is that the Nazis believe in the block method. Make them all to the same pattern, and fit them in, in rows. The true democracy is the perfect jig-saw, every piece its own individuality, but all of it fitting in.

Aye—but how do you do it? We talk about brotherhood and goodwill. There's been far too much talk to my mind, and far too few attempts to get down to business. I know as well as everybody that you can have peace on earth only with men of goodwill. But I've long since got

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sick and tired, and sometimes indeed, thoroughly annoyed, by the glib way in which people talk about men of goodwill. It's a Bible phrase, you know—out of the Angels' Song above the fields of Bethlehem.

But so far as I can see, the people who use the phrase most glibly know least about its meaning. It doesn't mean being affable and well-meaning, and brotherly. It means men who are well-pleasing to God, and nothing less. It means Christians who love men with the same sort of love with which God first loved them. That word goodwill means God's goodwill, being right with God. It expresses more truly, I think, than any other one word, the whole aim and purpose of religion. It all centres round that Christian love which is wholly unselfish and Christian love which, as I said before, can best be realized in a Christian home.

The home is the place where first you can learn to fit in, and the Christian home is the home where you can learn not only to fit in, but to interlock. That's the sort of home to have—a jig-saw home—every piece its own shape, but they all interlock.

Friday

SUPPOSE all the family goes out for the day, and they all come back home about six o'clock, very thirsty and hungry *and tired*. Somebody has to get a meal ready. Whose job is it?

Or, it's supper time. Father has been out at work all day. Peter has been at the factory, Betty at the office. Perhaps all three have been out for the evening, and they come in for supper. Whose job is it to get the supper ready? Do they all sit around to wait for Mother to come in from her knitting circle?

Yes, the answer often is 'Mother'. She's the housekeeper. Yes, but why should Mother have to work longer hours than anybody else? She had to cook the breakfast, and she may have had to light the fire before that, which means cleaning up last night's mess for a start. She's been busy in the house all day, and she's walked a mile or two over that; and she's queued for the potatoes, and washed the smalls, and done the mending. If what I see is anything to go by, then she's got a full-time job if anybody has. It's true that the rest of the family has been out all day, and maybe they've all had a fair bit of travelling to do, but they've got a Trade Union more likely than not. There isn't any Trade Union for mothers.

So this morning I'm out for *Fair do's for Mothers*. But that's only part of it. It's my

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text, and like every proper text, properly expounded, it opens into a wider theme.

In a true home, everybody does his whack. It's the job of the first one in to put the kettle on. After a day out, it's all hands on deck so that everybody gets a meal as soon as possible. Everybody is as tired as everybody else, though I rather suspect that Mother is most tired, especially if there's been a lot of walking to do. She isn't really as young as she was once, though I know you have a hard job to distinguish her from her elder daughter. These things are little details. We can all see them when they're pointed out, but they often get missed, mostly I think, because we all of us just don't think.

Why I mention them now is because the family is the first group of which we are aware, and in this world we've all got to live together. The family is the place where we have to learn. This world will begin to be a fit place for everyone to live in, just at that time when we get sufficient families in it, in which all the members play their parts. I don't demand that all jobs should be done with exuberance and complete gaiety of heart. I can never really get up any *enthusiasm* over washing up the bacon plates after breakfast. Like Poo-Bah, 'It revolts me, but I do it', when it's necessary, though for my part, in the ordinary way I've finished my chores when I sit down to breakfast. But we've all got to do our share. No member of the family has to be imposed upon, however young or old they are,

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not even if they're unmarried daughters who have 'stayed at home', as the phrase is! Each member has her rights, and each has her duties; that goes for everybody. I reckon that even the little toddler should have a little job to do. It doesn't do the smallest member of the family any harm to learn early that there are obligations in life as well as privileges. Not that I'd have any child grow old before its time. We all grow old quickly enough. But I don't think much of this free education idea when it's worked out to mean that children please themselves what they do. Having let children grow up like that, it's futile when they are in their teens to grumble about them having no sense of responsibility.

The true family is to be found where every member plays his part honestly and truly. Only not even *that* is enough—it's where every member is always prepared to do more than his part. A really happy family and a really happy world can be built only on this; and this is a Christian virtue. If we want to live in a happy family, a happy country—a happy world—then we must *all* of us do *all* our duty—and then some.

Saturday

I'VE been talking all week about home and family, and most of what I've been saying could have been said by anybody who has any common sense. Probably folk who have more sense than I have, could have said it better. It's easy, you know, for anybody to say wise things about human conduct, if they've reached middle-age, and had a fairly wide experience of men and women, boys and girls, both inside and outside the home. We most of us know what ought to be done. If wise words could make a Christian family, or blue-prints a Christian world, then we'd have had both centuries ago. The real problem of human conduct is not what to do, but how to do it.

How are we going to get all the members of a family to keep on acting as they ought to act? Look what rows some families have. Do you remember those love-birds people used to have before budgies came into fashion? I've known families just like love-birds, all billing and cooing, and meaning it too, until they've had money left them—and then they've had fearful rows, a whole succession of them.

It's the old, old problem of human conduct. 'The good which I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.' I've often heard people say that if only a man knows what is

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right, he'll do it. Stuff and nonsense. We all of us slip up sometimes over things where we know better. Sometimes, it isn't a question of slipping up, we go in for a good long slide. We take a chance, or we say, 'Well, just this time', or we think we can get away with it for once. Normally, when things are going fairly well, and we're not in any sort of jam, we manage to behave ourselves reasonably well. We don't break out in any obvious sort of selfishness or wrong-doing. I'm thinking, of course, of people who really do try to live a decent sort of life, and to behave themselves—not, for instance, of men who imagine they're decent husbands and yet work in occasional flutters, but of people who really do aim to live properly and play fair. Most of us can manage to keep up a decent sort of standard under normal conditions, provided the temptation isn't too strong. The difficulty we all have is to keep on keeping on under temptation.

The ultimate problem of human conduct, so far as I can see, is one of love. If a man says he loves his wife, and then isn't faithful to her, then he's a liar, and the same is true of a wife who isn't faithful to her husband. True love will keep any man or woman straight, *provided*—provided it's true enough, and provided it's unselfish enough.

'Unselfish enough'—there's the snag all the time—this selfish element which is to be found in human love. I don't know that a little bit of self-love does anybody any harm, provided it remains

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a *little* bit. It encourages self-respect and a certain amount of initiative. But it certainly does have to be watched. It grows like weeds in the garden. If you don't watch 'em, you soon have nothing else.

You get this selfishness even in a mother's love for her child. No one is capable of greater sacrifice than a mother, and no one is capable of more complete selfishness and possessiveness. The number of men and women who say they owe everything to their mother, must run into millions, but there are a very great number of tragedies due to nothing else than the selfish love of a mother.

Christian love is the only one which has in it no element of selfishness. That's why we want more of it in homes and families. I'm all for homes and families that are based on Christian love. That kind of unselfish love is the mortar which will hold the bricks for our brave new world together.



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