



# Be Strong and of Good Courage

## Avoiding Entropy in the Family

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A while back, our office was holding its weekly office meeting. As we worked our way through the normal agenda, our office manager made the request that we come up with a way to determine where any given job folder was located at any given time. No longer being a part of the day-to-day operations of the office and subsequently not knowing how the job folders were routed, I sat back and listened to the discussion between the office manager, the design foreman, and our two salesmen, hoping they could get it worked out without my input. After a few moments of discussion, a question caught my ear. "How am I supposed to know if an "approved" job still has yet-to-be-completed change orders?" the office manager asked. That's when I stepped in. "How can a job be approved yet still have incomplete change orders?" I asked. "By definition, an approved job is a job where the customer has approved everything - including the change orders!"

At that point I realized . . . entropy had once again invaded my business, and I was going to have to fix it.

What is entropy? According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary<sup>1</sup>, entropy is:

1. a measure of the unavailable energy in a closed thermodynamic system that is also usually considered to be a measure of the system's disorder, that is a property of the system's state, and that varies directly with any reversible change in heat in the system and inversely with the temperature of the system; broadly : the degree of disorder or uncertainty in a system
2. a. the degradation of the matter and energy in the universe to an ultimate state of inert uniformity  
b. a process of degradation or running down or a trend to disorder

This is somewhat technical sounding, so let's turn to a definition that you may have heard before but - like me - it went right over your head.

"This second law of thermodynamics, in laymen's terms, is a constant, daily display of the tendency of mass and matter to decay, corrupt and self-destruct."<sup>2</sup>

This is Brad Scott's definition, and combined with the Merriam-Webster definition it basically says that, unless there is an outside influence on it, a closed system will naturally become corrupt and self-destruct. A good example is that of an automobile. Left to itself - that is, without a shelter or without someone taking care of it, it will eventually turn into a pile of rust. A better example is of our own human bodies which are "closed systems". Assuming the availability of oxygen, we can survive for a certain period of time without any outside input - no food, no water, no sight, sound, or smell. But if we don't eventually insert food and water into that system, it will begin to decay.

With that, let's return to my story.

My company has a computerized system by which we track our jobs. It's a closed system where every job follows a path of steps to completion. Based on the type of job, some steps are omitted, but except in rare cases, none of the steps are bypassed. What had happened was that the salesmen had begun to list their jobs as "approved" in order to get them on the schedule earlier. In so doing, they bypassed a number of steps that would normally be taken. This caused problems for others in the office because they had assumed that all "approved" jobs were indeed "approved", but that was not necessarily the case.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entropy>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wildbranch.org/teachings/articles/08information.html>; paragraph 4

To make a long story short - the system was corrupted from inside., and to repair the corrupted system, I had to interject guidance back into the system to keep it from self-destructing. This is not the first time this has happened. In fact, it's quite common in business to have a working system that "morphs" over time. Staff members will at times ask for an exception to a certain step, then all of the sudden, that exception becomes the norm. In many cases, the corruption in the system is not discovered until a major mistake is uncovered that costs thousands of dollars to fix. We then have to at least go back and reinforce the importance of working within the system, or at worse, modify the system by adding checkpoints along the way.

I give this example because I want to talk about families, and being that today the women of our fellowship are at a retreat, I want to focus on a husbands responsibility to his family especially in regards to how he manages the "family" system and how he can avoid entropy within his family.

In this study, we're going to discuss:

- the family system
- who is charged with controlling the input
- types of input
- challenges we might face as we control the input

### Family Systems

The dictionary<sup>3</sup> defines a system as:

"a regularly interacting or interdependent group of items forming a unified whole"

A good example of a system is your car's air conditioning system. It has a number of interdependent parts that interact together to produce cool air on a hot day. Left to itself, it will eventually develop leaks and Freon or oil will leak out. If something is not done about it, the system will eventually stop cooling. Most air conditioning systems have a way to add Freon back into the system in order bring it back to its original condition.

Most families resemble a system because they have independent parts (a husband, his wife, and their children) who interact with each other and are usually interdependent on each other. Together, they become a recognizable whole, and thus we often identify all the members of one family as "the Jones family" or "the Bakers".

Studies by family councilors have led to the theory that families behave in much the same way as other systems in the universe<sup>4</sup> and thus behavior patterns of individuals in the family "system" can be explained by studying the family as a unit.

Like other systems, researchers have found that family systems have four primary characteristics: boundaries, roles, rules, and hierarchy. For the sake of time, we're only going to discuss boundaries and hierarchy and how they affect the family.

Boundaries are the sphere of influence upon the family. This includes both the determination of who is part of the family, and what other outside influences are allowed on the family. In regards to who is included in the family, in our western society the family is usually limited to the immediate family members, but in many eastern societies, especially the near-eastern culture of the Bible, the family often included in-laws, aunts, uncles, and even the family servants. Outside influences include anyone or anything that might influence the home. They include family friends, books, magazines, television, etc.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/system>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200601/ChristianBTJ.pdf>

They would also include organizations that the family is a part of, i.e. - church, political organizations, charities, etc.

Hierarchy determines who is in charge. Sometimes hierarchy and roles get confused, oftentimes because one family member abdicates his or her hierarchical responsibility but not his or her role. Along with rules and roles, the hierarchical leader determines the boundaries. Though that person will often determine how late the daughter may stay out on a date, he/she might also determine who she is allowed to date, what magazines the teenage son may bring into the home, and whether or not the family is going to watch NBC news or Fox news.

We'll further discuss both of these topics in a moment, but for now let's again return to my opening story.

Our "system" for keeping track of jobs had become corrupted from the inside, which is the natural order of systems when left un-attended. No real damage had occurred, but the likelihood of damage would increase with time as other breakdowns in the system were likely. To avoid self destruction, I had to perform maintenance on the system. That maintenance came in the form of input. I determined what had gone wrong and offered a way to keep it from happening again.

This is the same with the automobile air conditioner. If maintenance is not performed periodically, it will eventually stop cooling, but if Freon is add occasionally, it will cool for a long time. The same holds true for the car itself. If left unattended it will turn to rust, but if someone washes, waxes, changes the oil, and drives it around every few weeks, it will last a lot longer

Families are the same way. They need regular maintenance. This might include family vacations or nights out for mom and dad, but because humans are social creatures, the most common form of maintenance comes in the form of written or verbal input. But not all input is good. Knowing this, some families are highly restrictive in regards to input, while others are very open to it. Yet there are ways to allow an open flow of input while at the same time insuring that the input received is beneficial to the family. The key lies with the hierarchical leader - the one who controls the input.

### Who Controls the Input?

I've purposely been somewhat vague in regards to the one who is the hierarchical leader of the family, but for those who claim to follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, there is no question as to who is supposed to fill that spot. It is the husband and father. Since he is the hierarchical leader, he must therefore control the input, and we actually see that from the beginning.

Shortly after God created Adam, He gave Adam instructions in regards to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 2:16-17** <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; <sup>17</sup> "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Though that instruction was given before Eve was taken out of Adam, we see no record where she was told the same. Yet we know she was aware of the instruction -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 3:2-3, 6** <sup>2</sup> And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup> "but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " . . . <sup>6</sup> So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

So who told her? Since there is no record of God telling her, then we can assume Adam told her. In other words, God entrusted Adam with the responsibility of controlling the input.

The serpent - knowing that it was the husband's responsibility to control the input - went around the husband and spoke directly to Eve, giving her truthful, yet bad input. We must conclude that Adam allowed it since it's apparent that he was who was either next to her or in close proximity to her at the time the serpent spoke to his wife.

Afterwards when God went looking for the couple, He directed His questions to Adam. It was not until Adam failed to cover his wife<sup>5</sup> that God spoke directly to Eve. After that, we see only three times where God spoke directly to a woman. Two of them were when He spoke to Hagar<sup>6</sup>, the unmarried concubine of Abraham. The third was when He spoke to Rebecca<sup>7</sup>. In that case, she was suffering from the battle between the twins in her womb and she went to seek an answer from God, and He gave it to her via a prophecy.

In neither case did God give instructions pertaining to how the family should conduct itself. All instructions went through the husband/father. For example, when God was preparing to destroy Sodom, He first told Abraham what He was getting ready to do, and the reason He did so was because -

<sup>KJV</sup> **Genesis 18:19** For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

It was clearly Abraham's responsibility to instruct his family in the ways of God. We can safely assume that since Abraham was tasked with that responsibility, and that there was no written Torah at the time, God showed the way to Abraham Himself.

Another example where fathers are told to instruct their children is in the Psalms -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalms 78:5** For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children;

Paul understood it to be the responsibility of fathers to teach God's way to the children. In his letter to the Ephesians, he presents this dichotomy -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 6:4** And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.

Notice that Paul is stating that fathers are to rear (the actual Greek word means to "nourish") their children in the ways of God, and that the opposite of that is to provoke them to anger or wrath, possibly to Godly punishment. If you search out the roots of the primary words, you will see how that can be. Both words "provoke" and "wrath" come from the same Greek word "paragizo" (Strong's 3949). "Paragizo" is rooted in the word "orge" (Strong's 3709) where in Romans 2:6-8, it is translated in the sense of punishment -

<sup>ESV</sup> **Romans 2:6-8** <sup>6</sup> He will render to each one according to his works: <sup>7</sup> to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; <sup>8</sup> but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath (*orge*) and fury.

We might therefore conclude that what Paul was actually saying was that a father who failed to teach his children God's ways would be subjecting them punishment later in life.

Since it's apparent that the responsibility of teaching the family the ways of God, i.e. the input, lies with the husband-father, it is then necessary that fathers properly vet that input to make sure it is beneficial to the family. God shows us how to do that.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:12

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 16:11; 21:17

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 25:22

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 13:1-4** "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, <sup>2</sup> "and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods' -- which you have not known -- 'and let us serve them,' <sup>3</sup> "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. <sup>4</sup> "You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him.

This is a pretty good test for whether what we might hear from a “biblical” teacher is indeed telling us the truth. In fact, any input brought into the home could be checked against this standard and dealt with accordingly.

You might think of fathers as “watchmen”, standing on the city wall watching to make sure the enemy cannot invade the home.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Ezekiel 33:6** But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, so that the people are not warned, and the sword comes and takes any one of them, that person is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at the watchman's hand.

We often get wrapped up in watching current events to see where we currently fit in Bible prophecy, but do we “watch” the things - music, books, articles on the internet, video games and such - that are brought into our home? This is the role of leader of the family. A role we must take seriously.

Before leaving this topic, let me express the point that we can also solicit the help of our wives. When God took women out of men, He seems to have taken the intuition we were supposed to have and gave it to the woman. Thus they can oftentimes see things we can't. The “chayil” or “strong woman” of Proverbs 31 appears to be a godly woman who has that intuition -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Proverbs 31:27** She watches over the ways of her household, And does not eat the bread of idleness.

The word “watches” in this passage comes from the same Hebrew word as in Ezekiel 33:6 mentioned above. In other words, she's a watchman herself. What's more, the Hebrew word for “ways” is “haliyah” (הֲלִיָּהּ - Strong's 1979) which means “the walk”. In other words, she keeps a keen eye on what's going on in the family, and whether or not the family is walking in the ways of God.

### Types of Input

Since entropy happens when there is a lack of positive input, how can we as husbands and fathers bring that type of input into the boundaries of our homes and families? The most obvious way is to have family Bible studies. Simply reading out loud a chapter or two of God's word each day helps support the notion that God's word is an integral part of the family. Of course, teaching the ways of God is even better. We should never be slack on heading the words of the Shema -

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 6:6-7** <sup>6</sup> " And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. <sup>7</sup> "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

Children are like sponges, soaking up information all day long wherever they go. Teaching them about God, showing them God in the natural world, and posing real-life situations where the children are asked to make a judgment are good ways of instilling godly ways into them.

Another way of interjecting positive input is to involve them in wholesome activities outside the home. Obviously, regular Sabbath fellowship shows the family that congregating on the Sabbath is important to

you. This also gives the children the opportunity to build friendships with other children from like-minded families.

The key is to get them dedicated to God's way early in life.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 22:6** Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

In this passage, the Hebrew word for "train up" is "chanak" (חָנַךְ - Strong's 2596). "Chanak" is the root word from which we get "Chanukkah", the Feast of Dedication. If we dedicate them to the godly way early in life and they later stray from it, the little voice behind their ear will eventually bring them back to the way of God.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 30:20-21** <sup>20</sup> And *though* the Lord gives you The bread of adversity and the water of affliction, Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, But your eyes shall see your teachers. <sup>21</sup> Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This *is* the way, walk in it," Whenever you turn to the right hand Or whenever you turn to the left.

### Challenges

Directing the input of the family is a full-time task. It might seem easier to simply take you family, move to the mountains, and become hermits, but in doing so, we only invite entropy - degradation of the family. . Instead of isolating ourselves, we simply need to control the input that comes within our family boundaries. Though this may be somewhat easy while newly married or with young children, it can become more difficult as children turn into teens or wives return to the work force - opening them up to input you may not be able to control. But we must push forward in the face of challenges if we hope to keep the adversary out of our home.

When it became time for Joshua to take over the reins of the nation of Israel, God knew he would face many challenges. Though we might think those challenges would come from the Canaanite people, that is probably not the case. Joshua knew that God had, and would fight those battles for him. Instead, Joshua's greatest challenge would be governing the Israelites themselves. Moses had battled the Israelites for 40 years, and there was no reason to believe that things would change when Joshua took over. Therefore, God - sometimes through Moses and sometimes directly - admonished Joshua to

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Deuteronomy 31:7** . . . "Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.

Joshua was told to "be strong and of good courage" a total of 6 times<sup>8</sup> before Israel entered the promised land. He had to be strong in the face of the challenges from his own people, but he had no choice because it was up to him to see to it that Israel inherited the promised land.

As fathers, that will be our challenge as well, but the reward is a safe and comfortable home for those in our family.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Proverbs 14:26** In the fear of the LORD one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.

Shalom Alecheim

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<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 31:7, 23; Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18