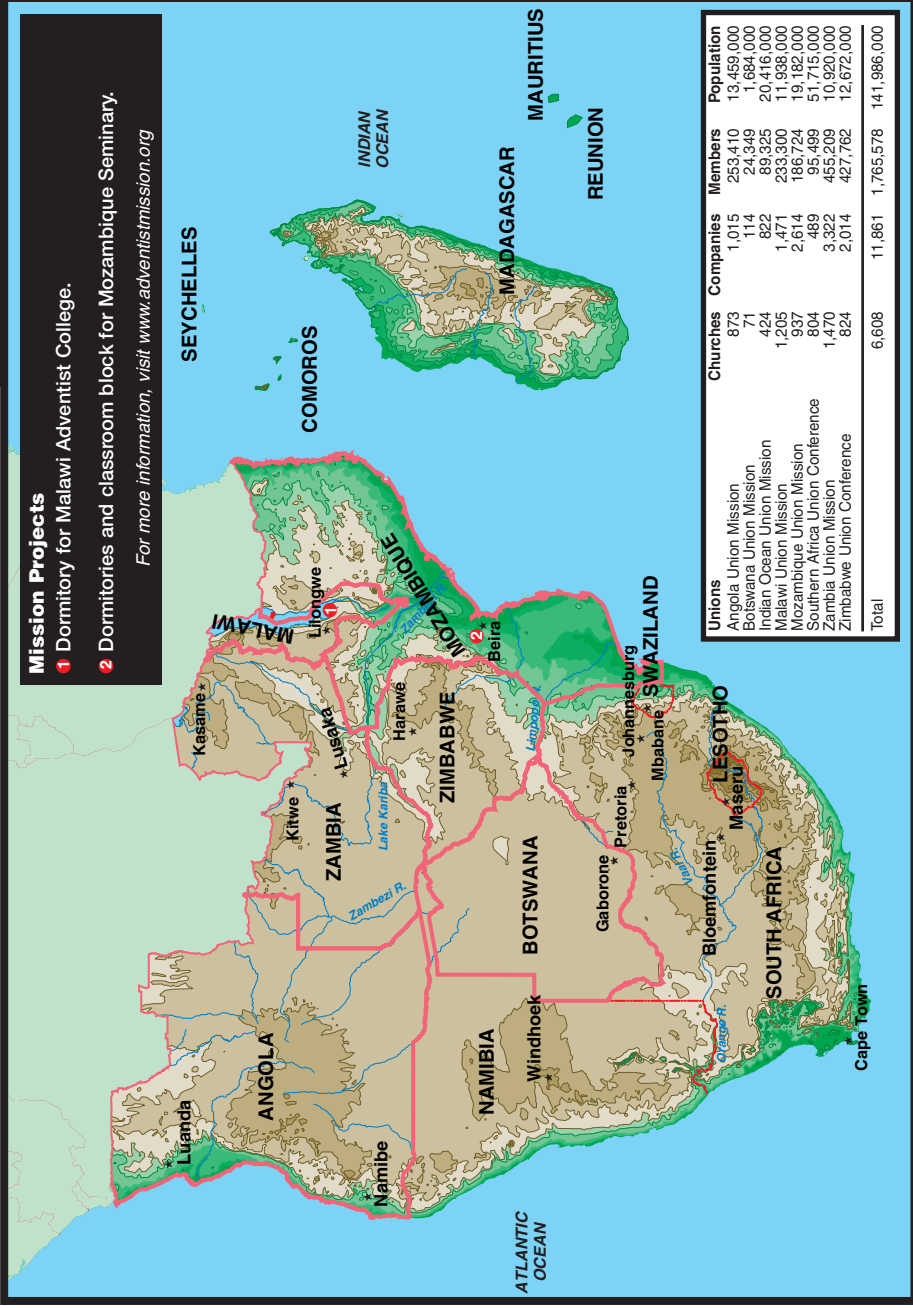


Southern Africa-Indian Ocean DIVISION

ADULT
SABBATH SCHOOL
BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
Jan • Feb • Mar 2006

Mission Projects
 1 Dormitory for Malawi Adventist College.
 2 Dormitories and classroom block for Mozambique Seminary.
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Unions	Churches	Companies	Members	Population
Angola Union Mission	873	1,015	253,410	13,459,000
Botswana Union Mission	421	494	54,339	1,684,000
Indian Ocean Union Mission	424	892	54,365	20,106,000
Malawi Union Mission	1,365	1,974	233,363	10,698,000
Mozambique Union Mission	837	2,614	198,700	19,198,000
Southern Africa Union Conference	1,974	3,489	195,469	51,713,000
Zambia Union Mission	1,470	3,822	455,269	10,920,000
Zimbabwe Union Conference	824	2,014	427,762	12,672,000
Total	6,608	11,861	1,765,578	141,986,000

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ADULT SABBATH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY GUIDE
 FAMILIES IN THE FAMILY OF GOD
 Jan • Feb • Mar 2006

Families in the Family of God



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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible study guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).

FAMILIES *in the*

***Love for God
cannot be
manifested
in any other
way than love
for others.***

In response to the lawyer's question about which was the greatest commandment, Jesus said: " ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" ' ' " (Matt. 22:37-39, NIV).

Obviously, God cares about our relationships; otherwise, He would not have named loving others as the most important command besides loving Him. It's no coincidence Jesus linked these two commands: Love for God cannot be manifested in any way other than love for others.

God created people as individuals with unique character traits that make them who they are. Yet, He created them also as social beings who enter into relationships with others. And nowhere is our relationship with others more important, more fraught with both temporal and eternal consequences, than in the family. Here so much of who we are, either for good or for ill, is determined.

Though living as a Christian at home is crucial, it can be challenging, even harder than in public, where it is easier to put on façades. At home, generally, the masks come off. It is a lot easier to fool others than to fool those with whom you share the same table, the same rooms, the same bed day after day, year after year. If you can be a Christian at home, you can be one anywhere.

Families fit into God's design as centers in which individuals experience intimate association with others and are prepared for the greatest intimacy of all—a relationship with God. In the family both children and adults may have a warm experience that reflects the Creator and that encourages them in loving discipleship. On the other hand, because of pseudolove or indifference, people may leave their home with emotional and spiritual problems that are often difficult to erase.

Just as our homes have the greatest potential to do the most good, they also can do the most harm. No wonder that the Bible says so much about family life. So much depends upon it.

FAMILY *of* GOD

Christian families face the challenge of seeking to live according to God's will for life and for relationships, even as each individual member finds himself or herself falling short of that will (*Rom. 3:23*). That's why, first and foremost, true Christians grasp by faith the sinless life of Christ and claim that life as their own, the foundation upon which they can build a relationship with God that will enhance their relationships with their own family (*Eph. 5:2*).

The wonder of our faith is the good news that God knows all about us. He sympathizes with our weaknesses and is full of compassion and longsuffering. Knowing this about Him, even experiencing for ourselves His love for us despite our faults, we do the same to others, especially those in our own family. Through family relationships God wants to show His love to the world. As families learn to live together according to the Word of God, His grace is diffused to all whose lives they touch, winsomely drawing others to Jesus.

Marriage and family, along with the Sabbath, are two institutions passed to humankind from Eden. Equally the work of the Creator's hand, they are indissolubly linked and meant to bring glory to God and blessings to humanity. As creationists raised up to give voice to Revelation's call to worship the One who made all things (*see Rev. 14:7*), Seventh-day Adventists have lifted up the Sabbath, reminding the world of the Creator's rest. Marriage and family, in their own way, also recall Creation, when a merciful Maker prepared a place for humanity to rest, a haven where the power of His love draws diversity into oneness, where a promise is a promise and commitment means commitment. This place of rest, this haven, is the home.

However, this quarter's study has been written in the sad recognition that for many, this haven doesn't exist as it should. Our goal, if nothing else, is through study of the Word to help homes and families be what God would have them to be: more loving, more secure in Christ.

Ron Flowers, author of this quarter's study guide, has worked in the department of Family Ministries at the General Conference since 1980. He has been teaching and writing on family issues for many years. He and his wife, Karen, have two adult children.

Got Questions

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things can get crowded

Malawi Adventist College is growing, expanding to offer degrees in business, English, and education. The college needs more classrooms, more dormitories to serve the growing number of students. Currently nine students crowd into what should be a small married-student apartment.

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help ease the growing pains at Malawi Adventist College and will make life-changing differences for these students today and for the church in Malawi in the years to come.

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A Family of Families



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:18-25; 27:1–28:5; Matt. 10:35-37; John 17:11, 21, 22; Acts 9:17; 21:8, 9; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:14, 15; Gal. 4:5; 1 John 4:8, 16.*

Memory Text: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (*Ephesians 2:19, 20, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Through our family, both in our households and in His church, God longs for us to experience His self-giving love.

Maurice and Sara, newly baptized Adventists who lived in a crime-ridden area, told the pastor they wanted to move to a safer place, one closer to the church, so their two daughters could attend church school. With their permission the pastor shared their hopes with the congregation. Before long a member spotted an empty apartment not far from the church. It was just what the family had been hoping for, but their hope fell at the news of the large security deposit. Telephones rang, and by the next day donations by church members helped Maurice and Sara make the deposit and the first month's rent. Church members cleaned both apartments and moved them across town. Exhausted but exhilarated, Maurice stood before the church the next Sabbath and beamed with gratitude. A man of few words, he said only, “I'm so glad I have a family!”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 7.*

Family Roots

When He brought together the first man and the first woman in marriage in the Garden of Eden, the Creator formed the first family.

Study the origin of the family (*Gen. 2:18-25*). What purpose for the family is evident in this account?

“ ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’ ” (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*). Companionship is one of the first purposes of families. Scripture uses *family* and *household* to describe social units made up of relatives and sometimes domestic helpers, all dwelling together in companionship. Together, families fend off loneliness and provide for the needs of each person (*compare Lev. 25:49; Ruth 2:20; Ps. 68:5, 6*).

A special companionship. With the marriage of the first couple, God supplied a very special kind of companionship. He intended husbands and wives to experience a unique union He called “one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24*). To the married couple He entrusted another of His purposes for families—the bearing and rearing of children (*Gen. 1:28*).

What deeper meaning of the family emerges from reflection on the nature and Personhood of God and the creation of humankind in His image? *Gen. 1:26-28. Compare John 17:11, 21, 22; 1 John 4:8, 16.*

What we can see in Christ’s words is the unity and the loving relationship within the Godhead Itself. Think of the meaning and purpose this gives to life in our individual households, which, in their own way, can reflect the self-giving love seen within the Trinity! No wonder family becomes a major metaphor in the New Testament for the church, the household of faith (*Gal. 6:10*).

Companionship, we see, is one of the fundamental components of family life. How much time do you spend being a companion to other family members? What things should you give up that would allow you to spend more time with your family?

Jesus' Affirmation of Families

What do the following texts tell us about Jesus' attitude toward family relationships?

Matt. 19:4-6

Mark 7:9-13

John 5:17, 18

John 19:26, 27

The divine plan for family living got a boost from the ministry of Jesus. He left no uncertainty about God's plan for marriage, especially when the Pharisees quizzed Him about divorce. The fifth commandment about honoring parents was in His mind as He rebuked the Pharisees who encouraged adult children to give as an offering the money that should have been spent upon their aging parents. Probably Jesus' greatest acknowledgment of the parent-child relationship came when He talked about God as His Father. On the cross He expressed love and care for His mother, Mary. During that terrible time He made sure the woman who had cradled Him, cherished Him, and, at times through the years, wondered at Him, got the best care He could give in the home of His trusted disciple.

Some statements of Jesus about families may need some clarification (*Matt. 10:35-37, Mark 3:32-35, Luke 9:59-62, 14:26*). **Why do you think Jesus said these things? How can they be reconciled with His approval elsewhere of family life?**

He who set people in families from the beginning did not change His mind about them during His earthly ministry. Just as He planned at Creation, the Son of God upheld them as sources of nurture, support, and strength. However important, families must be seen in the light of the higher loyalty to God.

Since God calls us to commitment to Him in both our church and family experience, how can energy, time, and resources be fairly distributed between these two? What dangers exist for those who, so busy in their work for God, neglect their family commitments?

A Variety of Families

Consider the various kinds of households in Bible times: Genesis 27:1–28:5; Ruth 1:22; 2:23; Jeremiah 16:2; Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:1-3. What others can you think of?

Isaac and Rebekah lived with their adult son, Jacob, and his married twin brother, Esau. The grieving widows Naomi and Ruth, bound together as mother and daughter-in-law, found refuge together. Jeremiah was single. Hosea parented his three children alone before he was reconciled to Gomer. Still other Bible families include the siblings Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, who had a home in Bethany where Jesus visited (*John 11:1-3, 20*); Aquila and Priscilla, married but apparently never had children (*Acts 18:2, 18; 1 Cor. 16:19*); and the family of grandmother Lois, her daughter Eunice, and grandson Timothy, in Lystra. Timothy's Greek father may have separated from the family as an unbeliever (*Acts 16:1, 2 Tim. 1:5; compare 1 Cor. 7:15*).

Acceptance of different family types. That God loved and cared about such diverse families is a source of abundant encouragement in our world today. It should also lead to appreciation of widely varied family types within His church.

What core values for family living are continually present in Scripture? *Gen. 2:24, 25; Exod. 20:14; Lev. 18:22; Prov. 5:18-20; Matt. 19:6; Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 7:3-5; Heb. 13:4.*

God's gracious dealings throughout salvation history bear witness to His mercy toward humankind in a world distorted by sin, where the divine blueprint for families is rarely replicated. There are, however, certain core values that frequently appear throughout Scripture, intended to preserve and, where necessary, restore and elevate God's gift of sexuality to the human family. These values hold that sexual intimacy is a mutual expression of love reserved for the monogamous marriage of a man and a woman only (the Bible knows nothing of same-sex *marriages*). Many types of families in which a commitment to these values exists can be accommodated; yet relationships in which sexuality is otherwise expressed, or exploited, ultimately undermine God's design for marriage and degrade humanity.

Is there anyone in your church who is living in a household different from your own? How can you show this person, or such people, appreciation and support?

One Is a Whole Number

When present households in the family of God are counted, those of single adults represent a large and growing segment. Whenever and wherever society or the church hold up marriage as the norm, often it is difficult for these individuals to feel normal and whole. Often they do not feel as though they truly belong.

Consider the circumstances of these single adults. In what ways did they contribute to the cause of God? **Elijah** (*1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 2:11*); **Anna** (*Luke 2:36–38*); **John the Baptist** (*Matt. 11:7–11*); **Philip’s daughters** (*Acts 21:8, 9*). **What other Bible characters remained single?**

The option to live singly. For many people, singleness is a season of life, either preceding or following marriage. For others, singleness is a positive lifetime choice. They recognize that although many people get married, God also gives His sons and daughters the option to live singly. For still others, singleness is not really a choice but an agonizing and reluctant consent to circumstances in which suitable partners are unavailable or marriage would be inappropriate.

Paul supported marriage in his teaching and writing, but he personally held that because of the work to be done for Christ in a short time, singleness was preferable. This was especially true if individuals had the gift for singleness; that is, if they felt led of God to make such a choice. The fellowship of the church must include both single and married people. In the choices they make and challenges they face, single people need to be understood and affirmed as persons rather than minimized, as often happens (even if unintentionally).

Personal value and completeness are ultimately related not to one’s single or married situation but to one’s response in faith to Christ. In Him who draws everyone to Himself, all are complete (*Col. 2:10*).

Who are the single people in your church? How can you relate to them in a positive manner, one that affirms them in their present circumstances?

Household of Households

Discover the family imagery in the following texts describing life in the church: John 20:17; Acts 9:17; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 4:14, 15; Galatians 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:2.

Just as the human family was to reflect the Creator's relational nature, so the church is to be an even more exquisite replica of the harmonious, giving, loving relationship known within the Godhead. Family terms—*birth, adoption, mother, father, sister, brother*—provide a new vocabulary, a whole new way of talking about the human relationship with God and of human beings with one another.

A template for the church. The Holy Spirit uses common family relationships to describe a community in which new births are embraced, diversity is accommodated, strengths are affirmed, and people are encouraged to grow. If the word *family* calls up warm feelings for us, we likely will embrace this view of the church. Sadly for some, family means painful memories. For these, other images of the church may have more appeal. Yet, God is a relational Being. He formed humanity with relational capacities, and it is comforting to know that although family may fail us, in His church He provides for rest, healing, and experiences of surpassing family love (*compare Ps. 27:10*).

How does the idea of the church as a household (*Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19*) open the doors to include everybody?

“Household of faith” calls to mind the sense of belonging that families build in one another and the attitude of neighborliness that has always characterized well-functioning family relationships. Many people, who have received Christ individually as their personal Savior, come as households or families to church. Others attend alone. In a sense, though, their families are with them, for each has been shaped by their family experience, and each will always be part of a family somewhere. Church, then, is quite literally a household of households, a family of families. The first Christians broke bread “from house to house”; yet, they were one church (*Acts 2:46, 47*). First Corinthians 12 shows the importance of valuing, incorporating, nurturing, and utilizing all the individual parts in the complex organism.

How is your experience of family at church similar to or different from your present home or the one in which you grew up? Identify a Christian quality of your current home that could make a difference in life at your church. What one quality of life at church would you like to bring home?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25–28; “Who Are My Brethren?” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 321–327.

Untidy living rooms. “The churches of the Revelation show us that churches are not Victorian parlors where everything is always picked up and ready for guests. They are messy family rooms. Entering a person’s house unexpectedly, we are sometimes met with a barrage of apologies. St. John does not apologize. Things are out of order, to be sure, but that is what happens to churches that are lived in. They are not show rooms. They are living rooms, and if the persons living in them are sinners, there are going to be clothes scattered about, handprints on the woodwork, and mud on the carpet. For as long as Jesus insists on calling sinners and not the righteous to repentance—and there is no indication as yet that he has changed his policy in that regard—churches are going to be an embarrassment to the fastidious and an affront to the upright.”—Eugene H. Peterson, *Living the Message* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 71.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss how the church should relate to those who are living in a *family* relationship that goes against the Scriptures. How do we show them Christ’s love and acceptance in a way that doesn’t condone their actions?
- ❷ For singles to gain a sense of wholeness and belonging can be difficult in a culture that holds up marriage as the standard. What can you as a class do to reach out to singles in your own church and show them they are a valued part of the church family?

Summary: “Family” is God’s idea. He formed the human family as an expression of His own relational nature. He has ordained both individual families and the church as a family of families to express His sacrificial love within both these circles of close companionship.

Casting Lots Determines the Truth

by STANLEY SAMUEL

Johnny is a bricklayer in southern India. Most of what he earned went to buy drinks. His wife kept a cow and sold the milk to feed the family. The family suffered financially and emotionally from Johnny's excesses, and even his colleagues at work worried about him.

While seeking treatment for their daughter, who had a serious health problem, the family was introduced to God. They began reading the Bible and listening to Christian radio programs.

Johnny noticed that the speakers contradicted one another. He listened carefully to the messages and looked up the Bible references to validate each point. Still Johnny could not determine which speaker spoke the truth, so they decided to cast lots, as the disciples had done in Acts. They fasted and prayed, then they wrote the names of the radio programs on pieces of paper.

Johnny held the papers in his hand as his mother drew one out. They read the program's name: *The Voice of Prophecy*. From that day on, they listened only to *The Voice of Prophecy*. The family did not know that the program is sponsored by Adventists.

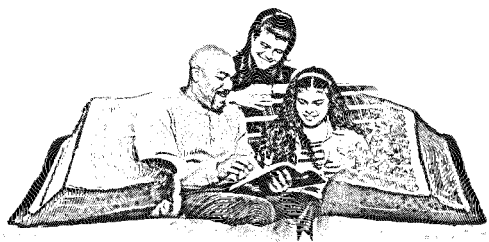
Shortly after this, a group of Adventist pastors and lay workers visited Johnny's village and invited people to attend a Bible study group. When they reached Johnny's home, they introduced themselves as representing The Voice of Prophecy. They invited the family to attend their Bible study group. Johnny was amazed and told them how God had shown them that this radio ministry spoke the truth. Johnny's wife attended the Bible study worship first, asking the members to pray for her health. When she was healed, Johnny began attending the Bible study group, as well. They accepted the Bible truths they learned, and six months later they were baptized.

Jeeva, Johnny's daughter, wanted to keep the Sabbath, but she worked six days a week. She was able to get several Sabbaths off before her supervisor questioned her reasons for wanting every Saturday off. When she explained that she wanted to keep the Sabbath, Jeeva was fired. Although disappointed to lose her job, Jeeva rejoiced that she could worship God on His holy day. The family praised God that Jeeva was willing to stand firm, and they prayed that God would bless them in their financial difficulties.

Johnny's colleagues noticed that Johnny stopped drinking. He responded to their questions by inviting them to the Bible study group. Johnny and his family radiate God's love as they share the good news of salvation with those they meet.

STANLEY SAMUEL is president of North Kerala Section in southern India.

God's Word on Family Living



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:12, Ps. 18:2, Song of Solomon, Isa. 54:5, 62:5, John 10:11, 15:5, Eph. 5:21-25.*

Memory Text: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Romans 15:4, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

Visitors to a science theater were given special eyeglasses. In the darkened room the group saw dramatic nature scenes on a large screen. First, they looked at the pictures without the glasses; afterward, they put the glasses on, and when they did, a photo of an orchard in full bloom brought gasps from the crowd: “Oh, how magnificent!” “What a difference!” It seemed as if the branches stuck out from the screen over their heads. Like these three-dimensional glasses, a change of perspective in looking at Scripture can help us see and appreciate old truths in fresh ways. This week we will put on *family glasses* and view the different ways in which God in His Word has revealed truths about families and family living. This perspective transforms the Bible into a contemporary textbook for life in our homes, as well as in the church, the household of faith.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 14.*

Family Commandments

One way in which Scripture presents its message on family life is through *relational directives*. Some of these command statements apply broadly to all relationships; some address neighborliness and friendship; while others are given for husbands, wives, parents, and children.

What do the following texts teach us about the kinds of “relational directives” we have been given by the Lord?

Exod. 20:12

Exod. 20:14

Deut. 6:6, 7

Prov. 5:18, 19

Eph. 5:21-25

Eph. 5:33

Eph. 6:4

Col. 3:20

1 Pet. 3:7

The quality of marriage and parent-child relationships are important to God. Three of the Ten Commandments focus directly on family life: “Honor your father and your mother” (*Exod. 20:12, NKJV*), “You shall not commit adultery” (*vs. 14, NKJV*), “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (*vs. 17, NKJV*). Other specific directives flesh out God’s expectations for marriage, parent-child relationships, and life in families. General relational directives, such as “‘love your enemies’” (*Matt. 5:44, NIV*), “‘do to others what you would have them do to you’” (*Matt. 7:12, NIV*), and “‘love one another’” (*John 13:34, NIV*) apply equally to relationships at home.

Go back over those relational directives and ask yourself, In which area(s) do I need to make some changes, and what will it take in order for me to make those changes?

Family Narratives

Bible stories provide glimpses into people's lives. The accounts show how, over the course of individuals' lives, they reap the consequences of their choices and grow in spite of setbacks. Through these stories we see how God abides with His people, even through difficult times.

Capture the flavor of a Bible narrative by reading Ruth 1 and 2 (you might even want to read the whole story). What lessons can you learn here about family living?

Not unlike many families today, this Bible family was hit by a series of life-changing losses. Famine, relocation to another country, death of her husband, and death of both sons left Naomi reeling. As the story opens, she despairs, feeling mournful, bitter, and alone. However, as this book shows so well, family means committed companionship. It means helping one another in troubled times and caring for the helpless. Ruth, Naomi's Moabite daughter-in-law, exhibits extraordinary faith in God. She shows this by her loyalty and service to the despondent Naomi. Faced with incredible hardship, these two unfortunate souls finally get real help from a perceptive wealthy relative—Boaz. In fulfilling his legal responsibility (and also obviously acting out of love), Boaz marries Ruth. Those who enjoy a love story are treated to an example of the One who loves with an everlasting love, who does not rest until He, like Boaz, obtains the object of His love. In the end, the baby born to Boaz and Ruth softens the painful memories and provides joy for the present and hope for the future.

Ourselves in view. Stories like these are in the Bible for a purpose. They instruct, inspire, correct, and train God's people in right living (*Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16*). Readers find themselves in them and take comfort in the fact they are not alone in temptation and trial, in struggles and setbacks. The Scriptures' honesty about the weaknesses and mistakes of others reveals pitfalls and how to avoid them. Further, we see good qualities we want to copy for ourselves. God's longsuffering and patience inspire our hearts with courage and hope that He who never changes will be with us today also.

What could you learn from the story of Ruth that could help you and your family through a bad time?

Principles of Relationships

Quite a different category of scriptural instruction about relationships is found in the Bible's presentation of *relational principles*. The book of Proverbs has the greatest collection of this material.

What truths do these examples of relational principles convey? How do you think the writer reached his inspired conclusions?

Prov. 12:25

Prov. 15:1

Prov. 17:9

Prov. 17:22

Solomon was a keen observer of nature, and because his capital, Jerusalem, sat right on the trade routes, he had contacts with people from many parts of the world. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he made a special study of people; his careful observations, scattered throughout Proverbs, speak of universal principles that govern human feelings and reactions.

Principles implanted by the Creator. The universal principles of emotions and relationships Solomon observed reflect the truth described by Ellen White when she wrote, "The senses, the faculties of the mind . . . were placed under law."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415. Though sin has damaged God's creation, human behavior in relationships is still shaped by the laws He implanted within human beings. To discover and apply the insights gained from these principles is to acquire the keys to better family living.

How do you think these implanted relational principles have been affected by sin? What difference does the gospel make? Compare Matthew 12:34, 35 with Philippians 2:2-11 as you think about your answer.

Like an infectious computer virus, sin corrupts the core of human beings, rendering them self-centered and fouling the functioning of all their physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual processes. The gospel puts people right with God and with one another through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

The Royal Love Poem

Further insights on the principles governing relationships, especially the intimate life within marriage, are found in the divinely inspired poetry of the Song of Solomon.

Match the verses in Column A with the characteristics of intimate relationships found in Column B.

Column A	Column B
a. Song of Sol. 1:9, 14, 16; 2:3; 4:1, 3, 7; 5:10-16; 6:9; 7:1.	__Expressing commitment.
b. Song of Sol. 1:15, 2:14, 4:9, 5:12, 6:5.	__Being totally honest, open, vulnerable with each other.
c. Song of Sol. 1:2, 2:6, 7:8, 8:3.	__Using terms of endearment, expressing appreciation, giving affirmation and honest compliments.
d. Song of Sol. 1:6, 2:2, 6:5, 8:10.	__Communicating face to face, making eye contact.
e. Song of Sol. 2:10-13, 17; 7:11, 12.	__Treating each other as friends.
f. Song of Sol. 5:16.	__Spending time together, playing together.
g. Song of Sol. 2:16; 6:3; 8:6, 7.	__Showing feelings through touch.

The Song of Solomon reflects upon the love between Solomon and a woman called “Shulamite” or “Shulamith,” who evidently was his first true love and leading queen (*Song of Sol.* 6:9, 13). The poem emphasizes aspects of their love rather than a chronological history of their relationship.

God draws back the curtain on marital intimacy. Through the experiences of this couple, the Bible presents the relationship principles involved in forming close friendships and in fashioning the intimate love and covenant commitment of marriage. God Himself chose marriage as a figure of His relationship with His people. Thus, the discoveries of love in this poem afford priceless insights into the grandest love relationship of all—the bond between Christ and the soul.

Why is it important to address the *heart* as well as the *head* in understanding relationships?

The Divine Parent and Marriage Partner

What family terms and imagery are applied to God in the following sets of texts? *Isa. 54:5, 62:5, Jer. 31:32 and Isa. 66:12, 13; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1.*

God refers to Himself as the Husband of Israel. The imagery is repeated in the New Testament, where Christ is the Bridegroom and His bride is the church. God also is represented in Scripture as a parent, usually as a father, though some of the comparisons are maternal; for example “like a woman in childbirth” (*Isa. 42:14, NIV*) or as a “hen gathereth her chickens under her wings” (*Matt. 23:37*).

Gazing upon the perfect Marriage Partner and Parent. Watching others is one of the main ways human beings learn. In His Word God permits us to gaze upon Him as the perfect expression of love in marriage and parenting. The family metaphors for God show us more of what our families can be like. They also have the effect of drawing us closer to Him as we come to know Him in family terms.

Principles for study. Comparisons that liken God to a husband or parent contain valuable principles for us to study. They are not intended, however, to be literal blueprints for the responsibilities of married partners or parents. The scriptural imagery is frequently tied to local customs. For example, in Ezekiel 16:6-14, God’s association with Israel is likened to the betrothal and marital customs of the time when a groom spread his garment over the bride, and she, in turn, was washed, anointed, and adorned in preparation for the wedding festivities. More important, the analogies are limited, because humans are not God. All human attempts at intimacy pale into insignificance when compared to the constancy, faithfulness, and closeness God displays toward those He loves. Yet, we are hopeful, for God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. He beckons us to love as He loved and to be empowered for such loving through the gift of His Spirit.

What other Bible images of God might be helpful to those whose memories or experiences in a marriage or with parents make these family metaphors painful for them? See, for instance, Ps. 18:2, John 10:11, 15:5.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Bible Biographies,” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 9–15; *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 19–22.

Selecting relevant Scripture. Though the Scriptures are the basis for understanding God’s plan for family living, not every statement applies literally to all people in all eras, such as the death penalty for a rebellious son (*Deut. 21:18-21*) or for a wife who had been sexually promiscuous before marriage (*Deut. 22:20, 21*).

Detecting God’s will for families as revealed in Scripture today involves:

- ❶ Studying the theological and historical context of the message
- ❷ Determining the original meanings of words
- ❸ Comparing texts on a topic with other similar passages, looking for corroboration by other Scripture writers, and understanding the application and adaptation made by New Testament writers of Old Testament material
- ❹ Discovering broad-based principles and even details that apply to today’s family issues

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss this question: If there is any one factor that is crucial to a healthy family, what is it? Is there more than one factor? If so, what are they?
- ❷ As a class, go through some of the imagery used to describe how God relates to us. Who in the class prefers certain images over others, and why? What should these different preferences tell us about how God relates to different people?

Summary: Scripture employs a variety of means to convey instruction for family living. These include God’s direct commands, various marriage and family examples, proverbs describing relationship principles, and His own modeling as a divine Husband and Parent. Nurtured and guided by such revelation, family members grow closer to Him and to one another.

Like Sheep Among Wolves*

by JEANE ZACHARY

The Waldensian Christians suffered persecution and death at the hands of the religious majority in Europe, beginning in the thirteenth century. They lived in secluded regions and dedicated themselves to sharing the truths of God with their neighbors in spite of the dangers they faced. Many became door-to-door salespersons in order to search for honest-hearted people with whom to share their beliefs. When they discovered someone who was open to God's message, they shared precious portions of Scripture with them.

Today modern Adventists are using similar techniques to bring Christ to unentered areas of Southeast Asia where few Christians live. These Adventists volunteer to live and work in unentered communities where they daily face the threat of persecution. For this reason we will not reveal their location.

The work is rigorous, and most of the volunteers are young people. So, the program's leaders were surprised when Jaibi, well beyond her youth, volunteered to go to a distant unentered community to work. She knew that she would receive housing but would have to earn her income by selling health books. She was so determined to go that she shared her excitement with friends. By the time she left, she had recruited 40 other volunteers to go with her.

Jaibi was asked to supervise her large team. As the group prayed and worked together, the Holy Spirit opened door after door. They found the community happy to learn the health principles the volunteers taught. Friendships developed, and soon small groups formed. It was not long before the volunteers called a pastor to prepare their interests for baptism.

Jaibi continued working in the village far beyond her one-year contract. In three years she and her team had planted five new congregations, a feat that could never have happened through public evangelism.

The strength of the Waldensian-style program lies in three things: Door-to-door visits, offering people valuable health materials; developing friendships that open the way for small groups to study the Bible; and the power of the Holy Spirit to open doors and bring conviction to people.

Some volunteers who came with Jaibi have returned to their homes, but others have joined her in this work. So far Jaibi and her team of volunteers have just witnessed an additional 105 persons baptized as the result of the blessing of the Lord on their work.

The inspiring example of the ancient Waldensian volunteers who spread the gospel through Europe as merchant-evangelists lives on today in Southeast Asia.

* See Matthew 10:16.

JEANE ZACHARY *lives in California.*

Restoration



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24, 25; Gen. 3:1-24; Matt. 19:3-5; Luke 17:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:4; 6:2; Eph. 3:17-19.*

Memory Text: “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral” (*Hebrews 13:4, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Though the institution of marriage was distorted by sin, the gospel can restore marriage to its original purity and beauty.

Marriage was divinely instituted by God as a permanent, monogamous union of a man and a woman. It was meant to be a blessing, another aspect of His great work of creation. Marriage was, perhaps, the greatest pre-Fall manifestation of His infinite love for humanity. How tragic, then, that the openness, equality, and mutuality of the first human pair were supplanted by the curse brought on by their sin. The race has been living with those dire consequences ever since. With Christ, however, a new day dawned for the institution, as well as for the marital experience of couples. In Him, husband and wife may know a restoration of God's plan for marriage.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 21.*

The Genesis Marriage

Jesus discussed marriage in reply to a question about divorce. What source did He use? What points did He make? *Matt. 19:3-5.* Compare *Gen. 1:26-28; 2:24, 25.*

Using Genesis 1 and 2, Christ reaffirmed God’s creation plan for marriage. Genesis 1:26-28 presents humankind in two genders, male and female (*compare Gen. 5:2*). They stand as equals before God, both in His procreative blessing and in the stewardship over the earth. Genesis 2 shows how the male and female were created and how marriage got started. The need of the first human being for companionship and sexual fulfillment led God to plan a “helper” for him (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*). The word *helper* frequently describes God in relationship to humankind (*compare Deut. 33:7, 26, 29*). Following the extraordinary surgery and the exquisite fashioning of this partner, God joined them in marriage (*Gen. 2:21, 22*). Ecstatically, the man acknowledged his companion as “woman” (Heb. *ishshah*)—connected to him but separate from himself as “man” (Heb. *ish*).

What are some of the elements of marriage as outlined in Genesis 2:24?

Marriage—a permanent, exclusive union between a male and a female—includes (1) leaving father and mother, (2) being joined to each other, and (3) becoming one flesh. “Leave” implies the creation of a distinct family unit with specific inviolable boundaries. “Joined” refers to the couple’s mutual commitment expressed in a formal marriage covenant. “Becoming one flesh” describes both the sexual union and the lifelong process of growth in intimacy, unity, and fulfillment that God intends a couple to experience in all aspects of their lives.

In what ways does the Eden marriage reflect principles that should help define our relationship to God?

Crisis and Consolation

How does the account of the fall into sin present the changed situation of marriage and of the marriage partners in their attitudes toward God and toward each other? *Genesis 3.*

The first couple donned clothes made from fig leaves and hid from God in the bushes! Here can be seen the tragic loss of physical, emotional, and spiritual oneness they had known with their Creator and with each other. Neither took responsibility for their actions. Each put the blame elsewhere—he blamed her, and she blamed the snake. In reality, they put the blame on God, who had created both.

How does Genesis 3:16 present the change in the marital relationship that resulted from sin?

Effects of the Fall on marriage. The original mutuality, coregency, and equality were replaced by the subjection of the wife to the rulership of the husband. Down through history, wives often have been viewed as the property of their husbands. Abuse has made many women's circumstances very hard. Ellen White comments on the effects of the Fall: "But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 484. The subjection was not because she was female but because "she was first in the transgression." Also, the subjection was "part of the curse."

In what ways do you see in your own life the tendency to shift blame for your actions on others? What practical steps can you take to change and be more open to responsibility for what you do?

Upholding Marriage

Read the following texts. What principles do they present that are absolutely essential for a good marriage?

Exod. 20:14, 17

Prov. 5:15-20

Gal. 6:2

Phil. 2:4

In biblical thinking, close relationships are bound together by covenants. The predominant covenant is one between God and His people (*Gen. 9:9-17, Isa. 55:3, Heb. 13:20*). Human covenants are binding commitments that include promises, privileges, and obligations—key factors in any marriage. These commitments, made before God, endeavor to bring the qualities of divine faithfulness into human relationships, where promises are so often unreliable (*compare Deut. 7:9*).

The prophet Ezekiel uses the human marriage covenant to describe God in His relationship to His bride, Israel (*Ezek. 16:8*). The marriage covenant is violated when the marital union has in some way been desecrated; for example, when an adulterous wife leaves “the partner of her youth,” ignoring “the covenant she made before God” (*Prov. 2:17, NIV*), or when a husband repudiates the wife of his youth, the wife of his “marriage covenant” (*Mal. 2:14, NIV*). Sacred promises made at the beginning of marriage—in one’s “youth”—are intended to be honored throughout life.

Why is death to self so important in keeping any marriage strong? In what areas might you need more of this *death* in any of your relationships?

Restoration in Christ

“Marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty.”—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64.

How does the Bible portray the work of Christ in restoring what was lost through sin? *Luke 17:21, 2 Cor. 5:17, Gal. 1:4, Eph. 3:17-19.* What are the implications of these texts for marriage?

Though they await the release from the presence of sin, subjects of Christ’s kingdom of grace are freed from sin’s penalty and power. Believers seek to pattern their lives and relationships in harmony with Christ’s will. For marriage, the Creator becomes Re-creator. By His indwelling Spirit He calls and enables couples to exhibit love and grace in their marriage. Eden lost can be Eden regained. By the study of His plan, by prayer, and by His power married couples may grow more and more toward marriage as it once was, with its spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy.

What principle helps counteract the power of sin? *Matt. 20:20-28; John 13:4, 5, 12-17; compare Phil. 2:5-8.*

What specific words does Paul give to wives and to husbands? *Eph. 5:22-33.*

“The gospel emphasizes the love and submission of husband and wife to one another (1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Eph. 5:21). The model for the husband’s leadership is the self-sacrificial love and service that Christ gives to the church (Eph. 5:24, 25). Both Peter and Paul speak about the need for respect in the marriage relationship (1 Peter 3:7; Eph. 5:22, 23).” —*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Pub. Assoc.)* revised 2000, 16th edition, pp. 192, 193.

If married, what changes can you make in order to allow more fully the principles of the gospel to control your marriage? If unmarried, in what ways can these principles help you in other relationships?

The Creation Plan in a Fallen World

How did Jesus acknowledge both the divine plan for marriage and the reality confronting marriage in a fallen world? *Matt. 19:3-9.*

Jesus restated God's plan for marriage as a permanent union of a man and a woman. Christ's followers seek to uphold this plan, knowing that what He desires He also enables by His grace and the indwelling of His Spirit. Christians have a special obligation to approach marriage prayerfully, to choose their partners wisely, and to prepare carefully for the transition to marriage. Then, in marriage, they must sacredly guard their commitment to each other, seeking diligently for God's grace in the work of adjusting to each other and growing together.

Hardness of human hearts. While marriage is divinely instituted, its subjects are fallen human beings. Marriages between Christian men and women do sometimes break down. Jesus acknowledged that hardness of human hearts led to the concession of divorce by Moses (*Matt. 19:8; compare Deut. 24:1-4*), though Jesus Himself was very explicit about how He viewed divorce.

When a marriage is in crisis, those who are able to minister to them should do everything possible to help them experience reconciliation. Divorce never should be taken lightly. Scripture provides guidance for restoring damaged relationships (*Hos. 3:1-3; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11; 13:4-7; Gal. 6:1*). When divorce has occurred, former partners should be encouraged to seek divine grace to help them examine their experience and to learn the will of God for their lives. God provides comfort to those who have been wounded. He also accepts the heartfelt repentance of individuals who commit the most destructive sins, even those that carry with them irreparable consequences.

How is it possible for the church both to uphold God's plan for marriage and to be a community that shows understanding, provides compassion, and assists believers in rebuilding their lives after divorce?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25–28; “The Builders of the Home,” *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356–362.

Entering marriage intelligently. “The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 18.

Rulership. “Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 47.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Read the second Ellen G. White quote aloud in class. Discuss the principles expressed there. What, if followed, would these principles do for just about any marriage?
- 2 Keeping your answers to the previous question in mind, answer, as a class, this question: What factors are, so often, the cause of divorce?
- 3 How, at least in certain ways, are the principles of a good marriage similar to the principles that could help someone maintain other kinds of healthy relationships?
- 4 As a class, make up a single paragraph, a kind of *official* declaration, of what marriage vows should be.

Summary: Though sin has damaged marriage, God through Christ is working in us to restore what we have lost.

Pathfinders Open Doors

by SETH NYARANGA

The Turkana people of northern Kenya knew little of the Adventist faith. But when believers in the region organized a Pathfinder Club for these people, many of the Turkana children joined.

The children took part in many of the activities Pathfinders around the world enjoy, but they also engaged in their own form of evangelism, visiting villages where groups of believers met and leading out in Pathfinder Clubs there. Children from other Protestant denominations begged to join Pathfinders and were welcomed into the clubs. Some Protestant churches even asked if they could organize their own Pathfinder Clubs.

A camporee was planned that would incorporate these other Protestant Pathfinder Clubs, using the camporee to introduce young people from other faiths to the Adventist beliefs.

Marching and drilling attracts much attention and interest in Africa, and many young people join just to learn marching skills.

The watchman at a Pathfinder camporee watched the young people take part in their activities. He visited the evening meetings and listened to Bible stories and the Christian songs the children eagerly sang. Later he asked some of the leaders how he could enroll his son in Pathfinders and was delighted to learn that there was a Pathfinder Club nearby that his son could join. The watchman brought his son and stayed to watch the program for a few minutes.

The boy continued to attend Pathfinders, though it was a long walk from his home. He found a church with a Pathfinder Club closer to home. Because of this boy's involvement in Pathfinders, he and his parents have been baptized.

This story has been repeated over and over as parents see the benefits of Pathfinders for their children. Children invite their parents to attend special events held in the church, and the parents are introduced to Adventist beliefs.

Once, while Pathfinders were holding a camporee, they learned that a neighbor's calf had fallen into a reservoir and was in danger of drowning. Some of the Pathfinder leaders quickly rescued the calf. When the owner learned what had happened, he was impressed. Some members of this man's family have begun attending church because of the Pathfinders' help.

Every activity of our churches can become a means of evangelism when we invite those around us to join.

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Living *With* Lambs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 16:1; Deut. 8:5; Pss. 30:1-9; 50:10-12; 127:3; Prov. 3:11, 12; Mic. 6:8.*

Memory Text: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*Isaiah 40:11, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: To have children is to be a parent-steward. And God, in His Word, gives parent-stewards instruction on how to execute their responsibilities faithfully.

Children, indeed, are gifts from God; outside of life itself (both temporal and eternal), they are the most wonderful of all gifts. Yet, the greater the gift, the greater the responsibility upon those who receive the gift. Thus, a precious opportunity, and solemn calling, is open to all parents to share with their children the simple good news of Jesus' love and life-giving power. However important it is to impart to our children the good news of Jesus and what He has done for us all, children grasp truth first, not so much from what the Bible teaches but from what their parents live. This week we'll look at some of the instructions the Gift-Giver gave to those whom He gave such precious gifts.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 28.*

A Unique Stewardship

When God created the first human couple, He gave them dominion over the earth. Along with this stewardship, they were privileged to bear and rear children. The Bible considers children to be gifts from God. Actually, children belong to Him; parents are, therefore, accountable to God for the way they treat these offspring. “Children are the heritage of the Lord, and we are answerable to Him for our management of His property.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 159.

What do you think it means for children to be God’s “property”? Study Psalms 50:10-12; 127:3; Isaiah 43:1, 7; and 1 Peter 2:9 as you answer. How does this idea change the way we should perceive children? What do these texts tell parents about their responsibility and obligations toward their children?

Everything is God’s by right of creation and by redemption, as well. Though Satan claimed to be the rightful ruler of this planet after sin, God reclaimed His rulership of the world through Christ. This reclaiming includes everyone, even children. Parents must always remember whose children their children really are. This is certainly one case where no one wants to be deemed an “unjust steward” (*Luke 16:8*).

When you think of parenting as a unique stewardship, what insights come to mind? Why is this kind of stewardship different from every other kind? What might faithful stewardship of children mean? *1 Cor. 4:2*.

Good managers ask advice from the owner of the property they manage. Godly parents likewise seek through prayer and Bible study to be guided as they rear their children. Manoah and his wife asked the right questions, “How shall we order the child [Samson], and how shall we do unto him?” (*Judges 13:12*).

Momentous Decisions

Throughout time, couples have generally expected to be parents. Children continued the family line, provided companionship, helped with work, and cared for aging parents. Like Rachel, women often connected their sense of value to bearing children (*Gen. 30:1*).

Consider these comments from married couples about to have a baby. Which ones represent good reasons for bearing a child? Which do not, and why not?

- ① “We thought a child would help cement our marriage.”
- ② “I’ve always wanted a baby since the time I played with dolls.”
- ③ “We love each other and want to share that love with a child.”
- ④ “We weren’t trying to get pregnant; it was an accident, really.”

Becoming parents is an important choice. The decisions about whether to bear or adopt children and how many to have should be thoughtful ones. What purpose would a child serve? Will God be honored if a new life is brought into the world? Do we have the emotional and physical resources and the long-term commitment to provide for all the needs of a child (*1 Tim. 5:8*)? Rearing children can be difficult in troubled times (*Mark 13:17*).

On the other hand, children have a way of helping families to be more affectionate, patient, and selfless. Few joys compare with joining the Creator in the formation of a new person and experiencing the wonder of life alongside a growing child.

What impact did infertility have on some Bible families? What do you think might have been done differently to ease these situations? *Gen. 16:1, 2; 30:1-9; 1 Sam. 1:1-20.*

Many couples struggle to understand why God withholds children from them. Much soul-searching, quarreling, and domestic turmoil often result. We should not judge such couples then or now too hastily. Sensitivity toward couples without children spares them from unfeeling remarks. They should receive accurate information and counsel when they ask for it and be given privacy to decide the best course to follow.

Lessons From the Heavenly Parent

The Bible describes God as a Parent. Jesus called God “Father” and introduced Him in winsome ways (*Matt. 5:16; 6:9, 14, 15, 18*). God wants to be Father to each of us personally. This picture of God complements the view of those who grew up in loving homes, while those who had difficulty relating to a parent may have trouble trusting Him. All who come to God, however, are treated with the care that only this Parent, the most attached and nurturing of all fathers, can give. Before we parent our children, we must be *parented* by Him.

What parental responsibilities are seen in God’s relationship with His people? What guidance for parenting today does this provide?

God as Parent	Responsibility	Guidance for Our Parenting
Deut. 1:31, John 6:33-35, Phil. 4:19		
Ps. 32:8, Isa. 54:13, Hos. 11:3		
Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11, 12; Heb. 12:5-7		

God’s love especially helps parents who have invested heavily in their children only to have them reject values that are dear. “ ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him. . . . But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me’ ” (*Hos. 11:1, 2, NIV*). God experienced all the emotions parents know when teenagers ignore counsel, behave in disappointing ways, or turn their backs on home. He values human freedom. He can guide parents to know how or whether to pursue a wayward one or to acknowledge an adult child’s decision and wait, as did the father of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11-32*).

How is God’s attitude toward those who reject Him helpful to parents in dealing with wayward children? In what way does knowing that He knows the pain of rejection bring comfort and encouragement to troubled parents?

Doing What Is Good for Children

“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (*Mic. 6:8, RSV*).

How should parents use these principles in regard to how they raise their children?

Ellen White elevated the importance of *kindness* and *firmness* in dealing with children: “The combined influence of authority and love will make it possible to hold firmly and kindly the reins of family government.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 308. Current parenting research shows the significance of *control* and *support* to the development of emotionally healthy, well-functioning children. *Support* refers to demonstrations of warmth, affection, and sense of belonging that convey the respect of parents for children. *Control* has to do with parents providing structure, regulation, boundaries, and restraints in their children’s lives that help children respect themselves and others. “Kindness” and “support,” “firmness” and “control” express qualities within the biblical concepts of Micah 6:8.

Evaluate the parenting practices in these families: **Jacob** (*Gen. 37:3, 4*), **Manoah and his wife** (*Judg. 14:1-3*), **Eli** (*1 Sam. 2:22-25, 3:13*). **How could parenting with both firmness and kindness have made a difference? What practical changes would be necessary in order to incorporate both?**

Optimal parenting involves an abundance of warmth, affection, and affirmation, as well as appropriate limits, with realistic expectations appropriate to the child’s age. Rules are few, consequences are clear, and there is follow-through on consequences. In homes where firmness and kindness are found together, the likelihood that children will adopt their parents’ values is increased. They also will develop morally in keeping with their ages and be socially responsible and caring in relationships with others.

Shepherding a Child's Heart

Research confirms what many parents and teachers know already—children do have an active spiritual life. They believe God is important in their lives. Jesus honored children and taught us about their spiritual development.

How did Jesus relate to children? What did He say regarding their faith? *Matt. 18:2-5; Mark 9:36, 37, 41.*

Jesus affirmed the faith of children. This faith can be cultivated by the emotional security caring parents provide. If it is safe to ask any question, to talk about any topic at home, then children will learn to be comfortable talking anything over with God. When home is a caring place where one's needs are met, when parents are both physically and emotionally available to children, the young readily learn that God can be counted on to care for them. When children are made aware of how precious they are to their caregivers, it will help them to understand that God values them too.

What was Christ's warning to those who would offend children or cause them to sin? *Matt. 18:5, 6; Mark 9:42.*

Attitudes or actions toward a child that emotionally or physically harm him or her make it hard for the young person to believe in or trust in God. When sexual abuse of a child takes place, especially by a parent, betrayal goes to the deepest places of the soul. What follows is an often-lifelong struggle to relate to the perfect love of God or to the affection of a mate. An experience with the grace of God; life in a healing, accepting environment; and the guidance of trained counselors have enabled many such individuals to cope with these scars.

How does your relationship with the heavenly Shepherd influence the shepherding of your *flock*? What changes would you like to make in your approach to your child or to the children with whom you live or work?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Misconception of the Mother’s Work,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 244–247; “Discipline and Its Administration,” *Child Guidance*, pp. 221–268.

Younger members of the Lord’s family. “Your children are the younger members of the Lord’s family—brothers and sisters entrusted to your care by your heavenly Father for you to train and educate for heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 251.

One such correction enough for a lifetime. “Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she [the parent] should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control.”—Page 250.

Discussion Questions:

1 In the previous passage “Whipping may be necessary . . .” list the principles found there regarding child discipline. What would you like to do differently in your relationship with your child?

2 In your church are there children of single parents or children from homes in which there has been some recent turmoil? If so (and where appropriate), why not plan some activities in which your class can help these children?

Summary: Children are younger members of the Lord’s family. As responsible stewards, Christian couples seek God’s guidance in the decision regarding whether to be parents and in the number of children they can appropriately care for. God supplies an abundance of instruction in His Word for His parent-stewards. His own providing, teaching, and correcting of His people offer important instruction.

Breaking Ties With Satan

by VOLODICHIEV ALEXANDER

I returned from Russian military service, feeling spiritually empty. I had grown up in a Communist family and did not know God. Some Satan worshipers invited me to join them, and I discovered religion. I attended their worship services until a devil-possessed girl began speaking to me in a man's voice. I was terrified.

My grandmother had told me, "If you are afraid, recite the "Our Father," the Lord's Prayer. I recited the prayer loudly, trying to drown out the girl. She pointed a finger at me and laughed furiously, but I chanted the prayer over and over.

I felt powerless in the face of this demon, as if I were trying to stop a military tank with a stick. I realized that I needed a stronger power, and the only power stronger than Satan was—God, the very Person I was railing against.

As I repeated the Lord's Prayer aloud, in my heart I was pleading, God, if You exist, protect me from this evil. As soon as I prayed, the girl fell down, silent. Suddenly everyone in the room became quiet. I ran past the girl and never returned.

Leaving the satanic church left an emptiness in my heart, a spiritual longing I did not know how to fill. But how could I get to know God? I began my search in my grandmother's church. The services were beautiful, but they seemed formal and cold. I did not find God there. Disappointed, I stopped trying and started drinking and smoking marijuana to drown my confusion.

One day some friends invited me to go with them to some evangelistic meetings to heckle the speaker. I went along. After several meetings, in spite of our bad manners, someone invited us to visit a house church. We went, and to our surprise, we liked it. Soon several of my heckling friends and I accepted Jesus as our Savior.

I remembered the books on the occult that I kept in my parents' home. I returned one night to retrieve the books and burn them. But the family awoke and began shouting at me for removing the books. I realized what a strong hold Satan had on my family, as well as on me. I wavered, but with prayer I was able to destroy the books and know God's complete forgiveness. A week later I was baptized.

God took a Satan worshiper and made him a disciple of Jesus. He has blessed my life beyond all I could have imagined and made it beautiful. I praise His name. Thank you for your weekly mission offerings, which helped make possible my introduction to Jesus.

VOLODICHIEV ALEXANDER *is a pastor in Briansk, Russia.*

Disciples Making Disciples



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 29:38-42; Prov. 1:8; 22:6; Matt. 28:18, 19; John 8:31; 13:35; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 6:1-4.*

Memory Text: “‘All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children’ ” (*Isaiah 54:13, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Parents are called to lead their children to embrace godly values and to introduce them to the Lord.

Like an Olympic runner passing a torch, Moses sought to put faith in the hands of those who followed him. One thing was clear to Moses: Home is irreplaceable as a setting in which parents and children grasp faith in God, live it, and hold on to it. The greatness of the nation depends upon faithfulness to God's Word at home. Throughout its pages the Bible is concerned with enabling children to receive the heritage of faith of their parents and grandparents. Themes of Deuteronomy echo in Proverbs and Ephesians. These all offer guidance and hope to parent disciples who would make disciples of their children.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 4.*

Parent Disciples

Jesus commissioned His followers to go everywhere and make disciples. Earlier, He had defined what He meant by disciple. Study the definitions Jesus gave. In what way does His teaching about making disciples and being disciples help define the mission of the Christian home? *Matt. 28:18, 19; John 8:31; 13:35; compare Deut. 6:6-9.*

A disciple is one who follows his master's teaching (*John 8:31*). This kind of disciple is formed by sharing the truths of Christ so another person absorbs them. Elsewhere, Jesus defined disciples as individuals who know how to love others (*John 13:35*). Making disciples by this definition means helping people become the kind of individuals who love God and love people.

Parents as disciple makers. The family is a natural place to carry out Jesus' marching orders. Parents have a mission to attract children to Jesus and to invite them to be His disciples. Both definitions for making and being disciples apply to the Christian home. Family is the primary place in which children absorb truths and values. It is also in their families that children get their first messages about love and loving. A loving relationship with parents who dearly love Jesus and bring that love into their relationships with others increases the likelihood that a child will grow up loving Jesus and others too. Such children are apt to be more successful with their own children and likely will be able to form friendships that most naturally lead to fruitful witnessing.

What is the prerequisite for parents before attempting to guide children spiritually? *Deut. 6:5, 6; compare Deut. 6:18.*

Why is it more important to rear children to know a perfect Savior than to rear *perfect* children? Think about your personal experience with the good news of the gospel. What is your testimony of faith you would like your children to know about?

Spiritual Education at Home

How does Moses convey the all-important need for parents to focus their attention on sharing God’s truth with their children? *Deut. 6:7*. What special challenges face latter-day parents who stand near the border of the heavenly Promised Land?

“Teach diligently” or “impress” (*NIV*) is the same as “whet” (*Deut. 32:41*) or “sharpen” (*NIV*). As mothers and fathers share their spiritual experience with their sons and daughters, they “sharpen” these young “arrows” and help prepare them for the spiritual challenges they will face. The pairs of expressions “sit”—“walk” and “lie down”—“get up” convey that the sharing is incessant and persistent and involved with all life’s activities. Faith sharing takes time.

What does Solomon say is the intent of his parental instruction? *Prov. 2:1-9, 3:5-8*.

The passing of faith to the next generation is not an exact science. Even godly, attentive parents understand that they can perform only half the task. As youth mature they make choices and, ultimately, will assemble their own set of values. Christian parents do want their children to have freedom of choice but sometimes fear that their children might not make responsible choices. Proverbs pleads with youth to learn from their elders, to lay aside their youthful invincibility and self-sufficiency—their “own understanding”—and give God the control of their lives. Yet, Proverbs also upholds human freedom of choice and repeatedly endeavors to engage the minds and hearts of young people so they will choose God’s way.

Contemporary research has demonstrated an unfavorable comparison between the amount of focused attention given by parents to their children (sometimes only seconds per day) and the amount of time children spend with television, video games, and computers. What can parents do to make a difference? Is *quality time* the answer? How do parents compete with *high-tech* toys and television or anything else that steals time that could be better spent?

Family Worship

What experience of morning and evening worship did God's people have in Old Testament times? *Exod. 29:38-42*. What spiritual lessons can we, today, draw from this ancient practice of the Israelites?

The offering of a yearling lamb morning and evening at the temple took place at regular times each day when the Israelites worshiped the Lord. At these times they remembered their covenant history and expressed anew their faith in God as their Savior. Every sacrifice prefigured the death of Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (*Rev. 13:8*). "In this custom Christians have an example for morning and evening prayer. While God condemns a mere round of ceremonies, without the spirit of worship, He looks with great pleasure upon those who love Him, bowing morning and evening to seek pardon for sins committed and to present their requests for needed blessings."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 354.

Prayer is so important for family life. The members of such families, drawn close by a common faith, gain strength from one another in fighting the battles of life. They experience a peace that is unknown in families that have not made Christ the center of their lives. Surveys of youth indicate that regular worship at home with their family does enhance the quality of their spiritual development and increase the likelihood they will accept their parents' values and continue their family's heritage of faith.

The best time of the day. Ellen White offers the hope that family worship can be the best time of the day when it is regular, "short and spirited," "intensely interesting," and "full of life."—*Child Guidance*, pp. 521, 522. Family worship should be varied from time to time. It can include a few Bible verses and brief comments, time for the young to ask questions, singing, prayer, and parental sharing of their stories of faith. Children should have a part in the selection and presentation of Scripture, stories, songs, and other activities.

When were some of your most memorable experiences with family worship? What can parents do to create more of these memorable experiences? How do children's questions provide opportunities for faith sharing?

Winsome Witness to Your Child

Read Proverbs 22:6. What principle is expressed here?

The words *train up* are closely related to a word for “initiate,” which describes the way a midwife helped a newborn, reluctant to take the mother’s breast. By rubbing the baby’s gums with a tasty substance like date juice, she started the sucking response. “The way” likely means “the way he *ought* to go”; as in “the way of wisdom” and “right paths” (*Prov. 4:11, 2:20*), though it has become popular in Christian child-rearing literature to read “his way” or “the way he should go” as “according to his individual aptitude.” Taken together, the verse conveys the thought that, like the midwife luring the infant into taking the mother’s milk, parenting children and adolescents is about making godly values winsome and attractive, creating a thirst for spiritual things youth will find irresistible.

Some parents whose children have rejected their beliefs feel anxious or guilty when they read Proverbs 22:6. They assume their son’s or daughter’s loss of spiritual interest was caused by their poor parenting. Proverbs, however, presents *probabilities* rather than *promises*. This proverb is not intended to imply that the future choices of children *always* will be in line with their upbringing, whether that upbringing was wholesome or unwholesome. Rather than taxing parents with the impossible weight of moral responsibility for their child’s future (which is the responsibility of the adult child), the proverb conveys the thought that wholesome attitudes toward spiritual things, developed in childhood, tend to linger into maturity.

What kind of practical advice and encouragement would you give to some parents whose older children have wandered from the Lord? How might the following texts, and the principles behind them, be of help? *Luke 15:11-22, Rom. 8:28, 2 Pet. 3:9, Rev. 16:7.*

A Service of Love

What is the counsel in Ephesians to children? What are the unique features of the parenting instruction that follows? How are these two ideals related to each other? *Eph. 6:1-4*.

The validity of the commandment to “ ‘honor your father and mother’ ” (*NIV*) continues for Christians. The plural “parents” (*Eph. 6:1*) indicates that the child honors both. A mutual partnership in parenting is in view here; mothers are not to bear the responsibility alone. The apostle adds a qualifier to a child’s obedience—the phrase “in the Lord.” Children are not expected to obey those commands or expectations of their parents that are contrary to the Christian faith (*compare Acts 5:29*).

The overall instruction to parents surely applies to both fathers and mothers, but “fathers” is specifically used. This may be because the management and discipline of the household typically rested with them or because, as was the case with fathers then and now, their parenting style and use of power could exasperate and embitter their offspring.

“Exasperate” (*Eph. 6:4, NIV*) means “to rouse to wrath, to provoke, exasperate, anger.” Parents must be sensitive to the individual emotional needs of their adolescent children and accompany their regulations by relationship building. “Nurture and admonition,” or “training and instruction” (*NIV*), express the intention that children are to be reared in a manner that includes discipline *and* godly values.

Here again is a qualifying phrase—“of the Lord.” The parenting described in these verses is Christian in nature, and its most significant task is helping children to have a relationship with God and an appreciation of eternal things. The teaching of Jesus shapes Christian parenting. Christian parenting, as described in these verses, is a service of love that Christian mothers and fathers render to their children.

What is your relationship to your parents? What changes might you need to make in order to be sure that you are, indeed, honoring them?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Responsibility for Eternal Interests,” “Every Home a Church,” “Leading Little Children to Christ,” “Preparing for Church Membership,” *Child Guidance*, pp. 471–502; “Blessing the Children,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 511–517.

A sacred trust from father to son. “In his childhood, Joseph had been taught the love and fear of God. Often in his father’s tent, under the Syrian stars, he had been told the story of the night vision at Bethel, of the ladder from heaven to earth, and the descending and ascending angels, and of Him who from the throne above revealed Himself to Jacob. He had been told the story of the conflict beside the Jabbok, when, renouncing cherished sins, Jacob stood conqueror, and received the title of a prince with God. . . .

“By communion with God through nature and the study of the great truths handed down as a sacred trust from father to son, he had gained strength of mind and firmness of principle.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 52.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If some people in class are willing, have them talk about their relationship with their parents and/or children and what things they have learned from those experiences that could help others in the class better relate to either their parents or children.
- ❷ What special stresses in values transmission to children are faced by parents in troubled marriages, by single parents, or by those who are married to non-Christians or members of other faiths? How might your class be of practical help in such situations?

Summary: The passing of faith to the next generation is a concern expressed throughout Scripture. When vibrant faith in God and His Word is found first in parents, it manifests itself in every aspect of their life with their children.

Louder Than Words

by GAIL SCHATZSCHNEDIER

“We want Arshad! We want ADRA!” the Muslim villagers demanded to the government official. But who was Arshad, and what was ADRA? The Pakistani official did not know. He had come to the village to inquire why the villagers had refused to allow their children to be vaccinated against a serious outbreak of polio.

For 10 years the villagers had allowed Arshad Inayat and his team of ADRA workers to enter their villages in southern Pakistan. They knew Arshad, and they trusted him to vaccinate the children. But when funding ran out, Arshad and the ADRA workers had to stop their work. Then a serious outbreak of polio erupted, and the children needed vaccinations. In desperation the government official told his assistants, “Go find Arshad, and find ADRA!”

The government health officials called Karachi Adventist Hospital and found Arshad. They told him the problem and pleaded with him to return to the village and vaccinate the children.

When Arshad returned to the villages, the Muslim women asked him, “Where have you been? We have prayed to Allah for you to return.” Arshad vaccinated the children, and with funds from other countries, he installed hand pumps for the wells that his team constructed in the rural villages that had no water.

Sometime later Arshad and a government official entered the courtyard of a mullah, a Muslim holy man. Hundreds of Muslims had come to see this man and ask for his blessings. Many had brought offerings of cattle and sheep. When the government official introduced Arshad, the mullah replied, “Yes, I know you.” Then the mullah turned to the waiting people and said, “Mr. Arshad is a Christian man. He has helped our poor, vaccinated their children against diseases. He has taught them how to be healthy and has drilled wells in the villages that had no water.” Then the mullah asked the crowd, “What have you done for the poor?” The mullah continued to chide the waiting crowd for neglecting the poor.

In Pakistan, Christians are not allowed to speak to Muslims about their belief in Christ. But this mullah had spoken in Arshad’s stead. As an astonished Arshad listened, this mullah had told the crowd more than Arshad ever dared say on behalf of Christ.

Arshad’s quiet, faithful deeds had not gone unnoticed. In fact, they had spoken louder than words.

When GAIL SCHATZSCHNEDIER wrote this story, she was director of community health services for Karachi Adventist Hospital in Pakistan.

Wise Words *for* Families



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Prov. 5:3-14; 13:22; 14:26; 17:22; 23:13; 31:10-31; Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4.*

Memory Text: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (*Proverbs 3:5, 6, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: The book of Proverbs presents powerful, practical advice for marriage and family to those who will listen.

The book of Proverbs contains a combination of instructions, poems, questions, and wise sayings filled with practical wisdom. Family relationships are directly addressed, and other words of wisdom can be applied to the home. Proverbs is, in fact, cast as a family document in which keys to a godly life are handed down from parent to child. Just as parents might write a letter of advice to a son or daughter going off to college, setting up his or her separate dwelling, or taking a job away from home, so Proverbs is addressed from father to son, “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother” (*Prov. 1:8, NKJV*). Deuteronomy directs parents to share their convictions with the next generation. This is what Proverbs does. In the father’s summons, we hear the voice of the heavenly Father calling us to learn.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 11.*

Love the Right Woman

List the problems and consequences involved with a sexual liaison before marriage or an extramarital affair as depicted in Proverbs 5:3-14.

The godly person reserves (if not married) and preserves (if married) his or her deepest affections and sexual intimacy for marriage. Men specifically are addressed in Proverbs, but the same idea as it relates to women is expressed in the Song of Solomon (*compare Song of Sol. 4:12-15*). The powerful attraction of illicit love must be weighed against the horrific consequences of this sin. Casual sexual liaisons lack commitment and, therefore, fall far short of true intimacy. Material, physical, and emotional resources are squandered. Most important, one must answer to God for the choices made in life.

Sexual intimacy, one of God's greatest gifts to humans, is a privilege of marriage only (*Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4; Heb. 13:4*). In Proverbs the imagery of nourishing, plentiful water is used as a delicate symbol of the pleasure and satisfaction a married couple ought to obtain in their love together. This is contrasted with the waste that results when there is unfaithfulness. The use of "the wife of your youth" (*Prov. 5:18, NKJV*) indicates that, even when the two grow older, their commitment is to continue. A husband is still ravished ("intoxicated" [*vs. 19, margin, NKJV*]) by his wife's charms.

In the human fallen condition, sexual instincts can lure individuals away from the divine design for sexuality. However, God has also given humanity the power to reason and to choose. These temptations, if not continually suppressed, can become overwhelming. A firm commitment to the divine design for sexuality in marriage can prevent the development of illicit sexual relationships. The choice of lifelong faithfulness to God's design for sexuality in marriage not only is prudent but carries its own bountiful rewards.

If you knew someone struggling with sexual temptations that could destroy a marriage, what counsel would you give that person?

A Call to Fathers

Note the character qualities of fathers described in Proverbs that can have long-term consequences for children:

Prov. 13:22; 27:23, 24

Prov. 14:26

Prov. 15:1, 18; 16:32

Prov. 15:27

Prov. 29:17

The characters of fathers have a direct impact on their children and the legacy they pass on to them. Children look to their fathers for support, devoted affection, guidance, and modeling. Proverbs lauds those fathers who are reliable providers and wise managers of family resources. Many are the ways in which “a greedy man brings trouble to his family” (*Prov. 15:27, NIV*); fathers must be mindful to give priority to family over work. Godly fathers seek to be patient and in command of their emotions. They respect their children’s dependence upon them. They discipline their children but are careful not to abuse their position of authority. Most important, dedicated fathers want to follow God, to be controlled by His love and by the teaching of His Word, that they might guide the feet of their children in the right way.

In the end, the most important thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. His faithfulness and continuing affection for her, or the lack of these, have a telling effect upon children’s well-being even into adulthood.

In Proverbs, loyalty to God, commitment to marriage and family, and integrity in one’s personal and community life are key themes. Success in everything depends upon the condition of the individual heart. The attractions of sin—whether sex, sloth, wealth, or power—abound, but the wise husband and father looks to God for help to make right choices continually.

How are the moral principles expressed here important for anyone, whether or not a father? How have your actions, either for good or bad, impacted others, especially children? In what ways might you need to be more careful?

Correction With Love

What does Proverbs teach about the importance of discipline and correction of a child? *Prov. 10:17; 23:13, 14; 29:1; 29:15.*

Parents sometimes discipline their children to impress upon them what is socially unacceptable behavior, to punish for disobedience, or even to express their displeasure when embarrassed. But what is God's intention regarding discipline for these young members of His family? Proverbs sets discipline in the context of hope for the future (*Prov. 19:18*). Godly parents know that children have a sinful nature. Only one power can help them with this, and this power is Christ (see Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 29). The mission of Christian parenting, including discipline, is to lead children to God.

Supporting a tender plant. Through Christ discipline is seen not as punishment, nor an expression of authority, but as redemptive correction. God's plan is that loving parents, knowing the strength of sin, guide their children's footsteps to Christ. Caring parents correct kindly and firmly, restraining and guiding children through the early years, much as a horticulturalist provides support to a newly planted tree, until self-control emerges and a youth comes to trust in God and cooperates with the divine plan for salvation, growth, and maturity.

What message for parents is found in Proverbs 13:24; 23:13, 14?

All told, just a few verses mention the "rod" (Heb. *shebet*) in the context of disciplining children. Popular within Christian parenting literature is the notion that parental use of the rod should be like that of the heavenly Shepherd who uses it to guide His flock (*Ps. 23:4*). Elsewhere, Scripture points to patient teaching, consistent modeling, good communication, and close relationships for influencing change in children (*Deut. 11:18, 19*). The child's feeling of being loved by his or her parents is vital if discipline is to have its desired effect of being corrective and redemptive (*Prov. 13:24*).

When discipline has missed its intended purpose by being too harsh or misunderstood, how can parents set matters right with their children?

Is Life Better on a Rooftop?

In what way does the book of Proverbs sprinkle humor on some of the irritations in domestic living? *Prov. 21:9, 19; 27:15, 16*. What effect does this humor have?

A number of the proverbs consider the ways we treat each other in close relationships. They make their point with a light touch and a flash of wit, like the ones about the insensitive friend who “sings songs to a heavy heart” (*Prov. 25:20, NKJV*) and the early rising family member who “blesses” sleepers “with a loud voice” (*Prov. 27:14, NKJV*). Wives reading these verses about contentious women may want to add some *proverbs* about men! They may retort that such sayings perpetuate the very problem of these proverbs by targeting only women when husbands, who share responsibility for the home atmosphere, are equally capable of contentious behavior. (Imagine what it must have been like living in the home of Caiaphas or Annas!)

A merry heart helps. Having a sense of humor in family living is a good thing. Humor lubricates the machinery of living, helping to reduce stresses and strains. “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones” (*Prov. 17:22, NKJV*). Proverbs takes some of its own medicine throughout the book and gives us permission to chuckle at a few of the behaviors that annoy and irritate. Perhaps when we have smiled (or smarted a bit if the joke is on us), we are in a better place to talk about habits or behaviors that irritate or annoy us. On the other hand, humor should not be used to minimize or bypass issues that need serious attention.

A low-grade fever may be symptomatic of a chronic infection. Quarreling, nagging, and complaining may signal that there is suppressed anger in one or more family members, perhaps related to difficulties with mutuality or communication in the relationship. The complaining partner tries to offset his or her partner’s perceived power, control, and unwillingness to communicate. If the infection is cleared up, the symptoms will go away. In families, rather than avoiding the problem or one another, members build on their love for the Lord and their commitment to one another to communicate their needs and feelings, get to the root of their anger, and clear it up.

Why is laughter so important for the home? How can it be used for good, or how can it be perverted and used for evil? Bring your answer to class.

A Truly Wealthy Wife

The book of Proverbs closes with praise for a wife of noble character. Identify the characteristics and qualities that are lauded. *Prov. 31:10-31.*

The woman described is special, and so is the poetry. Each of the verses, commencing with Proverbs 31:10, begins with one of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. One senses from this tribute to a worthy wife that even the whole national alphabet barely provides a sufficient framework to extol her properly!

Proverbs's emphasis on marrying a good partner is reflected in a dictum of the rabbis: "A man's home is his wife." "A wife of noble character is her husband's crown, but a disgraceful wife is like decay in his bones" (*Prov. 12:4, NIV*). Here, at the end of the Proverbs, rolled idealistically into a portrait of one, are many varied skills: clothing manufacture, buying real estate, agriculture, home and financial management. Meanwhile, she cares well for her family. They love her and praise her.

These extensive talents are not to be expected in every woman, nor are they a blueprint whereby husbands should measure their wives. Rather, through describing these capabilities and qualities, Proverbs conveys what is most important and universally relevant for women, as well as for men: the traits of trustworthiness, compassion, reliability, faithfulness, kindness, and industry. The secret of such a life, according to Proverbs 31:30, is that she "fears the Lord" (*NKJV*).

In Proverbs 31:10 the word for "virtuous," or "of noble character" (*NIV*), means "strength," "might," or "wealth." It is translated as "riches" in Psalm 62:10 and describes Joshua's "men of valour" (*Josh. 1:14*). Boaz commends Ruth with the word *virtuous* (*Ruth 3:11*). In Proverbs 31:10 there is a play on the concept of "wealth." True wealth lies in character, integrity, and the fear of the Lord. This vastly exceeds the worth to be found in precious stones.

Who are some of the women of valor and virtue who have influenced your life? How would you expand the list of character qualities, virtues, and capacities of godly women?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Marital Duties and Privileges,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 121–128; “Manual Training,” *Education*, pp. 214–222; “Security Only in Right Thinking,” *The Faith I Live By*, p. 222.

Keeping the heart in heaven. “Christians should be careful that they keep the heart with all diligence. They should cultivate a love for meditation, and cherish a spirit of devotion. Many seem to begrudge moments spent in meditation, and the searching of the Scriptures, and prayer, as though the time thus occupied was lost. I wish you could all view these things in the light God would have you; for you would then make the kingdom of heaven of the first importance. To keep your heart in heaven will give vigor to all your graces, and put life into all your duties. To discipline the mind to dwell upon heavenly things, will put life and earnestness into all our endeavors. . . . We are dwarfs in spiritual attainments. . . . [Eph. 4:13.]”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1157.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Many Christians find a support group network helpful as they seek to *guard their hearts* against temptation. In what way might this augment prayer, Bible study, and reliance on the Holy Spirit?
- ❷ As a class, read your answers aloud to Wednesday’s final question. Discuss the implications of your various answers.
- ❸ In contrast to Proverbs 31, what qualities does contemporary culture tend to exalt in women? How can we as individuals protect ourselves from partaking of that same degrading attitude?

Summary: The book of Proverbs passes on the distilled wisdom of generations of godly men and women who have valued loyalty to God and also the freedom of the human will. Appeals are made to the people of future generations to reverence God and make wise choices that will strengthen marriage and family life.

The Balance of Life and Death in Chad

by JAMES APPEL

The sun beats fiercely from the brilliant blue sky as we make our way along the well-worn path toward the river. The path disappears into a flooded rice field. Removing our sandals, we wade into the warm water.

Occasionally we pass locals and greet them with a friendly “lapia.” When we arrive at the river, the half-naked children quickly leave their fishing spears to watch the foreigners swim.

The sun sets as we make our way back across the rice paddies, tired but refreshed. A little recreation helps us focus on the difficult tasks we face working in the mission hospital in Béré, Chad.

One morning a baby is brought in with a severe infection in her lower abdomen and legs. Antibiotics fight the infection, and I remove large patches of dead black skin to save the child’s life. Later that day, Sarah, one of our mission nurses, reports that the baby is unconscious. I rush to her and find she is not breathing. Desperately I perform CPR, but it is too late; the child is dead. Sarah is devastated, thinking that somehow the child’s death is her fault. But I blame myself. If I had checked on her more often, maybe I could have saved her. We see death all the time, but this child’s death troubles me deeply.

A young woman comes in with abdominal pain. The nurse suggests a urinary tract infection; I suspect appendicitis. She says she is not pregnant, but I wonder. A pelvic exam suggests an infection of the uterus or fallopian tubes. I wish I had an ultrasound that could identify the source of infection. I put her on antibiotics.

That evening the staff wants to go to the river. I do too. But I stay behind to check on the woman. She is worse. I ask more questions and search the medical books. A urine test reveals she is pregnant. If it is an ectopic (out of uterus) pregnancy, only surgery will save her life. But if I am wrong, she has undergone major surgery for nothing. I pray, then I decide to operate. I find a swollen mass that is about to rupture. I thank God for revealing her problem, even without proper equipment.

What if I’d gone to the river instead of staying with this woman? How does one find balance in a world so overwhelmed with the never-ending needs of a place like Béré?

Your weekly Sabbath School mission offerings make ministry such as that at the outpost hospital in Béré, Chad, possible.

JAMES APPEL is a missionary doctor serving in Béré, Chad, central Africa.

AD



teach a teacher to teach

The civil war in Mozambique that ended in 1994 left the country in ruins. The educational system is still recovering, and parents struggle to find a school for their children.

Adventists in Mozambique are working to improve their schools, but they don't have enough trained teachers.

The church is expanding its seminary in Mozambique to a four-year, degree-granting college that will offer education courses, as well as business and religion. But to accomplish this, the school needs classrooms and dormitories for students.

Part of your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering this quarter will help the church in Mozambique to provide teachers for the future. And that is vital for the future of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Mozambique.

MISSION

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www.adventistmission.org

The Royal Love Song



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Song of Solomon.*

Memory Text: “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (*Song of Solomon 8:6, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: With an openness some might find shocking, the *Song of Solomon* explores the beauty of sexual love within marriage.

The *Song of Solomon* portrays, in sensitive terms, the attraction, the passion, and the exquisite delights of sexuality. Certainly in these days when the whole trend of society is to dishonor marriage and devalue love, we can be grateful for the instruction, insights, and inspiration found in this part of the Bible.

The *Song of Solomon* is an invitation to enter the private world of a wedded couple. They are not embarrassed to speak about their sexuality, though the poem uses delicate metaphors and symbols to express the delights of their love. The openness of the *Song of Solomon* is in keeping with the view of Scripture that sexuality is an integral part of life. Further, because the redemption of Christ includes the whole person, His followers can trust in the guiding of the Holy Spirit as they seek to become more comfortable with this sensitive yet crucial topic, so interwoven with life.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 18.*

Indivisible Life

Based on the following passages, how would you characterize the Bible’s view of the human body? *Gen. 2:7; Pss. 63:1; 84:2; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20; 1 Thess. 5:23.*

Some religions believe in dualism, a philosophy that views the human body as a problem for the life of the spirit. In Scripture, however, the human body, including its sexual characteristics, is integral to the whole being. Life is “body” and “spirit” (*Gen. 2:7*). The psalmist gives the whole of himself in worship to God (*Pss. 63:1, 84:2*). The total person is to be sanctified, set apart for the holy purpose God intended.

This positive view of the human body, in the context of sexual relations, is reflected in the Song of Solomon. How do these texts reveal this attitude? *Song of Sol. 1:2, 13; 2:6; 5:10-16; 7:1-9.*

Throughout this sacred text the human body is admired. The physical aspects of married love are not an embarrassment. A full range of emotions is presented openly.

Toward greater comfort with the topic of sexuality. Powerful sexual taboos typically exist in many cultures. Married couples thus often find it difficult to communicate in healthy ways regarding their intimate life. Similarly, children often are deprived of the opportunity to learn about sexuality in the setting of a Christian home, where godly values can be integrated with accurate information. The Bible’s openness with sexuality calls His people to a greater level of comfort with this topic so this vital aspect of life is treated with the respect and dignity due so great a gift from the Creator.

How can we protect ourselves against cultural and moral forces that either make sexuality into nothing but degrading animal passion or turn it into something shameful that must never be talked about? How does the Bible show us that both extremes are wrong?

The Loves of the Love Song

Describe various aspects of love presented in the Song of Solomon. *Song of Sol. 1:2, 13; 2:10-13, 16; 3:11; 4:1-7; 5:16; 6:6; 7:1-9; 8:6, 7.*

Friendship love. The Song of Solomon shows how friends spend time together, communicate openly, and care about each other. In the Song of Solomon, two good friends become married partners. The wife declares, “This is my friend” (*Song of Sol. 5:16*). The word *friend* expresses companionship and friendship without the overtones of sexual partnership. Happy is the husband or wife whose spouse is a dear friend.

Throughout the poem intimate compliments and loving gestures convey the strong attraction and the physical and emotional delight that the male and female find in each other. The natural intimacies of romantic love are a gift of the Creator, to help partners bond closely to each other in marriage. As partners are open to the work of divine love in their hearts, their human love is “refined and purified, elevated and ennobled.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 99.

These verses also convey the loftiest of thoughts about love. True love, though, is not natural to the human heart; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit (*Rom. 5:5*). Such love bonds husband and wife in a lasting union. It is the committed love so desperately needed in the parent-child relationship to build a sense of trust in the young. It is the self-giving love that binds believers together in the body of Christ. The Song of Solomon calls us to make this love an active force in our relationships.

How does this kind of intimacy reflect, in its own way, the kind of intimacy we can have with God? What are some parallels one can draw (for example, spending time, giving completely of ourselves, and so forth)? What other parallels are there?

A Loving Knowledge

Many have seen a “return to Eden” theme in the Song of Solomon. Though the couple described is not the first man and woman, the poem calls to mind the earliest Garden. God’s plan that they be “one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24, 25*) is portrayed throughout in delicate metaphors and symbols.

How does the Song of Solomon present a commitment to mutuality in the intimate life of the married couple? *Song of Sol. 4:7–5:1*. How is Paul’s instruction of *1 Corinthians 7:3–5* similar?

Solomon invites her, “Come with me” (*Song of Sol. 4:8*). His bride responds. Later she invites him: “Let my beloved come into his garden” (*vs. 16*). He responds (*Song of Sol. 5:1*). Scripture here teaches that there is to be no force or manipulation in this intimate setting. Into this relationship both partners freely and lovingly enter. “My garden” is “his garden.”

“Solomon” and “Shulamith” share names that are derivatives of the Hebrew *shalom*, “peace,” or “wholeness.” Their admiration is mutual (*Song of Sol. 4:1–5, 5:10–16*). The balance in their relationship is evidenced even in the poetic style of paired lines and verses. The covenant expression “My beloved is mine, and I am his” (*Song of Sol. 2:16*) echoes the language of Eden, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (*Gen. 2:23*).

How does the description of the marital union as “knowing” enrich our understanding of our relationship with God? *Gen. 4:1, 25; 1 Sam. 1:19; Luke 1:34; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:3*.

The Bible uses *know* for the intimate union of husband and wife. In this loving “knowledge,” the most hidden inner depths of their beings are offered to the other. Not only two bodies but also two hearts are joined in “one flesh.” *Know* also describes the relationship between individuals and God. For the discerning Christian the unique and tender knowledge of marriage, with its companionship, commitment, and unbounded delight, provides a profound insight into the most sublime and holy mystery ever, the union of Christ and the church.

Love at the Right Time

Study the following passages and the comments. Then make observations of your own. How do these add to the scriptural teaching that sexual intimacy is to be reserved for marriage? Compare Gen. 39:7-9, Proverbs 5.

“Wall” or “door”? (*Song of Sol.* 8:8-10). During her childhood Shulamith’s brothers wondered whether she would open herself to others like a “door” or guard her purity as a “wall.” Both before and within marriage, she has decided to be a “wall,” keeping herself only for her husband. Such a decision enabled her to be “as one who found peace” (*vs.* 10, *NKJV*). Peace (Heb. *shalom*) is a word-play on her name and his name and means “wholeness” or “completeness.”

A locked garden (*Song of Sol.* 4:8-12, 16; 5:1). A verdant garden symbolizes the woman in this poem. On their wedding night her husband affirms her for being “a garden enclosed . . . , a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (*Song of Sol.* 4:12, *NKJV*). “The image of the garden behind its walls and with the gate locked suggests the unapproachableness of the area to all but those who rightfully belong. . . . Here, a fountain sealed and a garden locked speak of virginity. The couple, while approaching consummation of their love, still have not reached that level of intimacy.”—G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 123.

Guarding one’s affections. A poetic device has the bride speaking words of caution to the “daughters of Jerusalem” in conjunction with moments of physical intimacy with her husband: “Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases” (*Song of Sol.* 2:7, 3:5, 8:4, *NKJV*). The likely intent is “Do not start the process of loving exchange until the appropriate occasion is present.” These verses join others that call upon young and old to guard against premarital and extramarital sexual intimacy.

What good news is there for individuals who regret their wrong choices in the expression of their sexuality? *1 John* 1:9; compare *Ps.* 103:12, *Isa.* 55:7, *John* 8:11.

What practical steps can be taken by those who are single and those who are married to reserve or preserve intimate sexual expression for marriage?

Safeguarding the Creator's Gift

God had a special purpose in creating humankind as male and female (*Gen. 1:26-28*). While each bears His image, the joining of gender opposites in the “one flesh” of marriage reflects the unity within the Godhead in a special way. The union of male and female also provides for procreation of a new life, an original human expression of the divine image.

What attitude does Scripture take toward sexual practices not in keeping with the Creator's plan? *Lev. 20:7-21, Rom. 1:24-27, 1 Cor. 6:9-20.*

Scripture disapproves of all that alters or destroys God's image in humankind. By placing certain sexual practices off-limits, God guides His people toward the right purposes of sexuality. When human experience is confronted by God's precepts, the soul is convicted of sin.

What guidance is given Christian believers for relating to their sexuality and that of others in a fallen world? *Rom. 8:1-14; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; 2 Cor. 10:5; Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:3-10; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.*

Believers wait for release from the corruption of sin at Christ's return. They wait in faith, considering themselves dead to sin through Christ's death on the cross and alive in Him through His resurrection. Through unceasing prayer, watchfulness, and the power of the Spirit, they treat their sinful nature as crucified and seek to obey Christ in their thoughts. They acknowledge God's ownership of their bodies and sexuality and use them according to His divine plan.

Submitting our sexuality to God. God forgives those who repent of sin (*1 John 1:9*). The gospel enables individuals, who formerly engaged in promiscuity and sinful sexual activity, to be part of the fellowship of believers. Because of the extent to which sin has altered sexuality in humanity, some may not be able to know full restoration in this aspect of human experience. Some, for example, might choose a life of celibacy rather than get involved in any sexual relationships that are forbidden by God's Word.

How should we as a church relate to, for instance, homosexuals? How should their own attitude about their sexual orientation influence our response?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Love and Sexuality in the Human Experience,” *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 218–239.

True love. “True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested. It is by faithfulness to duty in the parental home that the youth are to prepare themselves for homes of their own. Let them here practice self-denial and manifest kindness, courtesy, and Christian sympathy. Thus love will be kept warm in the heart, and he who goes out from such a household to stand at the head of a family of his own will know how to promote the happiness of her whom he has chosen as a companion for life. Marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be only its beginning.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Why is it important to present sexuality education within the context of the Christian message? How can parents and others involved with youth best fulfill their responsibility to guide youth in knowing truth in this area?
- ❷ Unwed mothers, AIDS, broken homes . . . the list goes on regarding the impact of sinful sexual relations. How can you as a class, in a practical way, help those who have suffered because of these wrong choices?

Summary: Lessons in close relationships, with applications for friendship, abound in the Song of Solomon but especially for marriage. The consummation of the royal couple’s love in the poem beckons married couples toward deeper levels of knowing each other and invites each human heart toward greater intimacy with God.

One Bullet for Porras, Part 1

by ANTONIO SENDING, JR.

Fourteen-year-old Porras was a bright student and a born leader. His father, Chief Tranning of the Manobo people of Mindanao in the Philippines, was proud of him. One day Porras would be a warrior, so his father took him along on headhunting expeditions.

Porro's village often received threats of tribal war, so they were constantly alert for signs of danger. His father had rifles and taught his son to use one. But Porras did not share his father's dream for him. He wanted to lead his people in a different way; he wanted to study at Mountain View College, where his teachers studied; and one day, he hoped, he would return to the mountains of southern Philippines and teach his people to read and to write and introduce them to Jesus.

One day, a chief from another Manobo village came to visit Porras' father. He brought a horse, a gift from a family in the chief's village. The chief had come to ask Porras' father for permission for Porras to marry a girl from his village. Porras knew that in the past there had been problems between these two villages. A marriage would resolve those problems and prevent further bloodshed. Porras wanted nothing to do with this marriage. But to Porras' horror, his father agreed to the marriage.

Porras was in serious trouble. To refuse the marriage surely would mean bloodshed between the two tribes, and Porras's own life was at risk. But if Porras accepted the offer of marriage, his dreams for the future would vanish with the smoke from the morning fires.

Confused and frightened, he went to talk to his teachers, student missionaries from Mountain View College. The missionary teachers, however, did not dare advise Porras what to do. That would be to interfere with the village's customs. They could only advise Porras to pray that God would reveal His will for this young man.

Porras went home and prayed. "Dear Lord, I want to be a teacher! Please help my father understand that I want to attend the Adventist high school and then study at Mountain View College. If I marry, that will be impossible."

Porras' father and mother argued about what to do. His father wanted Porras to marry the young woman from the nearby village, but his mother refused to allow her beloved son to live in another village. "He is still a boy!" she sobbed to her husband. "I don't want to give him away!"

(continued next week)

ANTONIO SENDING, JR. was a missionary teacher at the Ulo't Langilan Mission School in Mindanao, southern Philippines when he wrote this.

Keys to Family Unity



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 33:12-14, Ruth 1:16-18, John 17:21-26, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:11-22, 5:21-6:9.*

Memory Text: “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*John 17:21, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: The Bible exalts Christ as the great Center who draws all disconnected relationships together in His body on the cross.

Life in the household of God should help us grow closer at home, for in both cases the same principles should be at work—principles of love, humility, selflessness, and concern for others.

All this doesn't come automatically. On the contrary, each of us must fight constantly against the sinful and selfish tendencies of our fallen natures.

Though in the body of Jesus Christ on the cross all humanity has been reconciled to God and to one another (*Eph. 2:13-16, Col. 1:21-23*), on a daily practical level we must appropriate for ourselves the grace of Christ, which alone can make this unity a living experience for all who seek it in faith. This must be a daily experience in our lives. Fortunately, through the grace of Christ, it can be. We, though, have to make the choice to be what the Lord wants us to be.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 25.*

Christ the Center

What illustration does Paul use to describe the new unity that exists between peoples in Christ? How has Christ made “one” out of “two”? *Eph. 2:11-22; see also Gal. 3:28.*

The Cross of Christ removes the barriers that separate people from one another. Walls separated worshipers in the Jewish temple, men from women and Jews from Gentiles. Describing the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ, Paul used language that applies equally to other divisions between nations, people groups, social strata, and gender. “To create out of the two a single new humanity in himself, thereby making peace” (*Eph. 2:15, NEB*) is good news that helps couples to truly know “one-flesh” unity in marriage. Also, by faith in Christ, long-divided families can be reconciled.

It’s one thing to quote Bible texts about oneness in Christ; it’s wholly another actually to experience it. What practical changes does Christ bring to our lives that enable us to experience the oneness and unity we have been promised? *See, for instance, Rom. 6:4-7, 2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 4:24-32.*

“Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another. . . .

“The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.

“Between father and son, husband and wife . . . stands Christ the Mediator, whether they are able to recognize him or not. We cannot establish direct contact outside ourselves except through him, through his word, and through our following of him.”—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963), p. 86.

How close is your family, or church family, to the center of that circle? What else must come down in order for the relationships to be as they ought to be?

Becoming One Through His Love

“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else” (1 Thess. 3:12, NIV).

Jesus prayed to His Father that His followers would “be one as we are one” (John 17:22, NIV). Summarize what Jesus was saying here, focusing specifically on the role of love needed in order to achieve this oneness.

Unity among His followers was on Jesus’ mind in this prayer. Experiencing *agape* love is essential to this unity. Agape is the Bible word for God’s love used in this prayer and in many other places in the New Testament. Such love is God’s very nature (1 John 4:8), and it identifies Jesus’ followers (John 13:35). God’s love is not natural to the sinful human heart. It comes into one’s life as Jesus dwells with the believer by His Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11).

“Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12, NIV). The disciple John, who wrote these words, was once not lovable but proud, power-hungry, critical, and hot tempered (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54, 55; see also Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 295). Later in life he remembered how Jesus had kept on loving him in spite of these traits. Jesus’ love gradually changed John, enabling him to love others in Christian unity. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NKJV), he wrote, and “if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (vs. 11, NKJV).

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Try placing your name where the word love appears. How well does it fit? Ask Jesus to bring these qualities of love into your life by His Spirit. What changes might the Spirit prompt you to make in order to reach this Christian ideal?

Selfishness: Family Destroyer

“If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119.

As human beings, our natures have been corrupted by sin. And, perhaps, the greatest example of that corruption is the curse of selfishness. We seem to be born selfish; we can see this reality in small children, whose basic nature is want for themselves. “Me, me, me! . . .” By the time we reach adulthood, this trait can manifest itself in some pretty terrible ways, especially in the home.

Of course, Jesus came to change this (*Eph. 4:24*). His Word promises us that we, through Him, don’t have to be dominated by this destructive character trait. His whole life is a perfect example of what it means to live without selfishness; to the degree we emulate His life (*1 John 2:6*), we will overcome the tendency to live only for ourselves.

Look up the following texts. What do they tell us about living a life of selflessness?

Phil. 2:3-5

1 John 3:16-18

As Ellen White wrote above, if pride and selfishness were put aside, so many problems could be solved very quickly, long before they fester and brew and eventually turn into something nasty. All members of the family, especially the parents, must be purged (*Prov. 16:6*) of this sin at the foot of the Cross (the greatest example in all the universe of selflessness), even if that means constantly coming back to the Cross and kneeling in prayer, faith, tears, and submission.

How much time are you spending at the Cross fighting against whatever selfishness appears in your life? How does this verse (*Matt. 7:16*) help show you whether or not you have been spending enough time there?

Submission

What counsel does Paul have regarding humility and service in relationships? *Eph. 5:21*. How do you think this attitude contributes to unity in the church? Why is it so important at home? *Eph. 5:22–6:9*.

The word *submit* (*Eph. 5:21*) means to place oneself humbly before another person on the basis of voluntary choice. This unique principle began with Christ (*Matt. 20:26-28; John 13:4, 5; Phil. 2:5-8*) and characterizes all those who are filled with His Spirit (*Eph. 5:18*). “Reverence for Christ” is what motivates people to submit in this way (*vs. 21, NIV*). Mutuality in self-giving was, and still is, a revolutionary Christian teaching about social relationships. It brings to life the spiritual reality that all are one in Christ; there are no exceptions.

A household principle. The proving ground of Christian submission is in the home. If this principle is effective there, it will make a dramatic difference in the church. Paul moves immediately from the introduction of the principle of submission to discuss its application in families.

Three pairs of relationships are addressed in Ephesians 5:22–6:9—the most common yet most unequal relationships in society. The intent is not to reinforce an existing social order but to show how the faith culture of Christ operates when there is a radically different voluntary submission of believers to one another.

Why do you think Paul consistently speaks first to those who are socially weaker in the culture—the wives, children, and slaves? Write the qualifying phrase attached to the submission of each of these.

<i>Eph. 5:22</i>	<i>Eph. 6:1</i>	<i>Eph. 6:5</i>

Those with greater social power—husbands, parents, masters—are always addressed second. Each receives a directive quite uncommon to the culture. These directives must have astonished the believers of the first century. They leveled the ground around the Cross and opened the way for true oneness to be experienced in relationships.

Living the Love We Promise

Ultimately, family cohesion and unity rest on the commitment of family members, beginning with the commitment of the marital partners, to care for one another. Sadly, Bible history is strewn with examples of failed promises, broken trust, and lack of commitment where it should have been present. Scripture also has stirring examples of ordinary people who, with God's help, committed themselves to friends and families and kept their promises.

Look at the following families and their levels of commitment. How could commitment have been strengthened in some families? What encouraged the commitment shown in the others?

Parent-child commitment (*Gen. 33:12-14, Exod. 2:1-10*)

Sibling commitment (*Gen. 37:17-28*)

Family commitment (*Ruth 1:16-18; 2:11, 12, 20; 3:9-13; 4:10, 13*)

Marital commitment (*Hos. 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:1-3*)

When we commit ourselves to another person, as in marriage or in the decision to bear or adopt a child, there must be a willing surrender of ourselves in order to make a different choice in the future, a surrender of control over an important segment of our lives. Laws may restrain negative behavior, but marriage and family relationships need love within them to enable them to flourish.

What does Jesus' promise of commitment (*Heb. 13:5*) mean to you personally? What effect should His commitment to you have on your commitment to Him, to your spouse, to your children, and to fellow believers?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “A Sacred Circle,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 177–180; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 236–238.

Unity—the first work. “The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. . . .

“The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 37.

The secret of family unity. “The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties—though there will be much of this to do—but union with Christ.”—Page 179.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Talk about the forces in your own society that work against family unity. What practical solutions can you offer to a family that is struggling against these influences?
- 2 Is there a family in your church right now that has come apart? If so, what can you do as a class to help each member in this crisis time?
- 3 Discuss this whole question of submission. How is it to be understood in a Christian context? In what ways has the principle been abused?

Summary: The Bible exalts Christ as the great Center who draws all disconnected relationships together in His body on the cross. His love courts and wins sinners, reconciling them within a warm and caring fellowship that astounds the world and glorifies God.

One Bullet for Porras, Part 2

by ANTONIO SENDING, JR.

Porras watched his dreams for the future crumble as his father accepted a proposal for him to marry a girl from a neighboring village. The marriage would ease tensions between the villages and prevent future bloodshed, but Porras wanted to study and become a teacher. To disobey his father could well mean his death, but to obey meant the death of his dream. Frustrated and confused, Porras asked his student-missionary teachers what to do. They could only pray for him and urge him to pray for God's will to be done.

God answered Porras's prayers, and no wedding was held. A gift of another horse averted the possibility of war between the villages.

When it was time for us to return to Mountain View College to give our monthly report, we asked the chief to allow Porras to go with us. We planned to spend several days working on the new Adventist high school for Manobo youth. To everyone's surprise the chief agreed to let Porras go. "I want Porras out from this village," he said. "If anyone else asks him to marry, surely there will be bloodshed."

But Porras's mother could not be convinced to allow her son to leave. "No!" she wailed. "I will die if my boy goes! I will never see him again."

"If you did not want him to go to the new high school, you should have given him in marriage!" the chief roared.

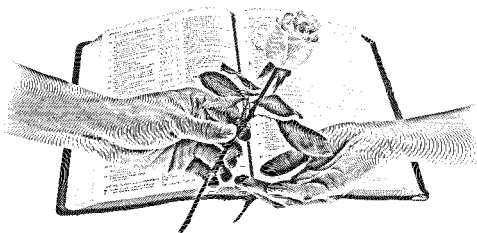
Finally Porras was allowed to go. The villagers gathered for a last farewell. Porras comforted his crying mother as his father spoke. Holding his rifle, he announced, "Today marks the day when my boy will leave this village for the first time. He is the first one to go from this village to attend the Adventist high school. When he finishes there, he will go to Mountain View College to study. And, if it is God's will, he will return to us and be our teacher. I will miss my boy. I don't want him to come home until he is done with school, because if he does, someone will trap him into marriage. Now, I will shoot one bullet for Porras, to drive away any evil spirits that would keep him from following his dreams."

BANG!

Everyone hugged Porras goodbye. His mother cried as we walked down the path toward his future. Through tear-filled eyes his father watched us go. They wait eagerly for the day when he will return, educated and able to lead his people out of spiritual darkness into God's light.

ANTONIO SENDING, JR. was a missionary teacher at the Ulo't Langilan Mission School in Mindanao, southern Philippines when he wrote this.

Homes of Peace and Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 37:8, Matt. 5:22, 12:1-14, 18:15-18, Mark 7:6-13, Phil. 2:1-16, Col. 3:12-15.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ ” (*John 14:27, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: The Bible gives us principles that, if applied, can help minimize family conflict and turmoil.

The schoolchildren were trying out a new seesaw. The bigger and heavier kids moved closer to the center; lighter riders stayed out at the end. Once everyone was balanced, each child got a good ride. Things went fine until some mischievous bigger boys seemed to get pleasure from bouncing girls in the air like rag dolls until they screamed to get off. Then kids started piling on at opposite ends, each side trying to outweigh the other. Before long, the seesaw, the toy that had been the setting of so much fun, became a painful place. No one wanted to ride on it anymore.

Family life is sometimes like a seesaw. Life is more pleasant when people respect and care for others. Sadly, individuals experience pain when some use their status or position in the family to dominate, control, or treat others harshly. This week's lesson looks at ways relationships run into difficulty and how God, in His Word, provides insights that help His children move from hurt to healing.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 4.*

Saints Have Family Problems Too

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (*Eph. 4:3, NIV*).

Christian believers possess by faith the precious spiritual reality of being seated in heavenly places with Christ (*Eph. 2:6*). In daily life, as they await His return and their removal from the presence of sin, some tension, discord, even conflict may occur. This is a part of the human experience with intimate relationships (*Gal. 5:17*). Friction can come because people differ widely in disposition, habits, education, and ways of looking at things. Families must find ways to respect the individuality of each member yet be able to function and enjoy life as a close-knit group. The mark of healthy Christian relationships is not only keeping conflicts to a minimum but surmounting, in ways that accord with the gospel, those conflicts that do come.

How does the Bible teach God’s people to deal with the conflicts that may arise among them? Summarize the principles in *Matthew 18:15-18*, *Philippians 2:1-16*, and *Colossians 3:12-15*.

Christian love and tolerance enable many families to cope with great differences. Others find themselves in uncomfortable situations that must be remedied if unity and peace are to be maintained. Without resolution—anger, hostility, and distance may develop in the relationship. Facing conflict can be difficult; many avoid or shy away from it, deny it exists, or withdraw emotionally. Others determine to get their way at any cost, while many simply give in to keep peace.

Think back over family struggles you either have experienced or seen. What caused them? How might they have been more easily resolved? How could the principles seen in today’s text have made a big difference?

Putting Anger in Its Place

Scripture plainly condemns angry attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to individuals and relationships (*Gen. 49:6, 7; Ps. 37:8; Matt. 5:22; Gal. 5:19-21*). These belong to the “old man,” whom Christians are called to “put off” (*Eph. 4:31, Col. 3:8-10*). However, the Bible acknowledges that anger as an *emotion* is part of life in Christ (*Eph. 4:22-27*).

Anger sounds an alarm inside us when inequity or injustice is recognized or when there is oppression of the innocent. Moses felt this emotion in defense of God’s name and cause (*Exod. 32:19*); Jesus did, too, when His ministry, the Sabbath, and the man with the withered hand were all treated with coldhearted indifference by the religious leaders (*Mark 3:1-5*). Injustice aroused anger in David and Nehemiah (*compare 2 Sam. 12:5, Neh. 5:6*). Jacob loved Rachel (*Gen. 29:30*) but became angry when he felt accused unfairly by her (*30:1, 2*).

What do you think “In your anger, do not sin” (*Eph. 4:26, 27, NIV*) means for believers?

❶ “In your anger do not sin” indicates that the emotion of anger and sin are not one and the same. The feeling of anger is not sin in itself. Family members are to give each other permission to have this emotion and to report it without guilt.

❷ “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (*Eph. 4:26, NIV*) indicates that anger is to be processed promptly. Final resolution of issues may take time, but anger can often be diffused by a “soft answer” (*Prov. 15:1*). “Soft answers” are caring responses that result from listening, accepting the person, and recognizing the deeper feelings such as fear, frustration, or hurt that triggered the anger. Getting behind the anger like this helps families clear things up and grow closer to each other.

Some people tend to blow up the instant they are angry; others hold it inside, where it seethes and festers. What is your own tendency, and what promises can you find in the Bible that can help you toward a more Christlike resolution of your anger?

Anguished Hearts

Unthinkable as it is, research reveals that the home is the single most violent place in society. Family violence touches all kinds of families, including Christian homes. Violence is an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one person or persons against another in the family.

The Bible includes accounts of family violence, even among God’s people. What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these verses? Why do you think these stories were preserved in Scripture?

Gen. 37:17-28

2 Sam. 13:1-22

2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6

Though people today don’t burn their children on altars to pagan gods, what are some modern parallels to this same practice?

Abusive behavior is the conscious choice of a person to exercise power and control over another. It cannot be explained or excused by alcoholism, stress, the need to fulfill sexual desires, the need for better control of anger, or any behavior of the victim. Victims are not responsible for causing the abuser to abuse. Abusers distort and pervert love, for “love does no harm” (*Rom. 13:10, NIV*). Professional treatment can facilitate change in an abuser’s behavior but only if the person takes responsibility for the behavior and seeks such help. To those who will open themselves to His presence, God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly” to help abusers stop abusing, to repent of their attitudes and behavior, to make restitution in every way possible, and to embrace the qualities of agape love to heal their own hearts and to love others (*compare Eph. 3:20*).

Try to put yourself in the place of someone traumatized by violence. What words of acceptance, comfort, and hope would you like to hear? Why is it important to provide safety and caring acceptance rather than offering advice about how to live better with the abuser?

Twisting the Word

With which of these statements do you agree or disagree? Why?

- ❶ People who are abused should turn the other cheek.
- ❷ Wives should be submissive, regardless of what their husbands do to them.
- ❸ Violent behavior by a spouse or a parent is just a cross some people have to bear.
- ❹ The pain we encounter in life is ultimately for our good.

Victims of violence in Christian families need support to find safety for themselves and their children and to meet other practical and emotional needs. Times of domestic violence are times of great spiritual crisis. Where was God when I was being abused? Is God punishing me for something I have done or trying to teach me a lesson? Sometimes their deep-seated beliefs or the counsel they receive will have a tendency to prolong, rather than relieve, their situation.

No Christian principle supports or condones abuse. Those who seek biblical texts to defend their behavior are guilty not only of abuse but of perverting the Word of God. Christ championed the cause of the oppressed. It is His Spirit to love and accept, to affirm and build others up rather than to abuse or tear others down. His followers are called to rectify those religious and cultural beliefs that some may twist and pervert in order to justify or cover up family violence.

The New Testament has examples of people twisting doctrines in order to justify their own ways. See, for example, Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 7:6-13. Which Bible texts might some people pervert in an attempt to justify their abuse?

Victims need people who are sensitive and careful about offering hasty solutions or moralizing. Abused persons need help accessing the specialized help they need. While those seeking to help them encourage victims in getting professional care if possible, they also minister to them graciously and compassionately, providing them with stability in a time of unrest.

The Gift of Forgiveness

At the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—*forgiveness*. It is God’s gift to families when hearts and relationships have been wounded.

What do the following texts tell us about forgiveness? *Matt. 18:27, Luke 23:34, Rom. 5:6-11, Eph. 1:7.*

Through the Cross of Christ, forgiveness is offered, even before the offenders ask for it (*Luke 23:34; compare Acts 5:31, 13:38, 26:18*). By His grace God made a fountain that has washed us and invites us to come, repent, and be clean (*compare Rom. 2:4*). Humanly, forgiveness is a decision to let go of the destructive malice of revenge. We remind our wounded hearts that Christ has suffered for all sin, ours against God and that of others against us. We then pass forgiveness on. The hurt one is now freed within, whether or not the offender asks for forgiveness. It does not, however, free the wrongdoer from responsibility, from the need to repent, or from all the consequences of the abusive behavior.

What do these texts tell us about forgiveness? *2 Chron. 7:14, Matt. 18:32-35, 1 John 1:9.*

Notice the conditional “if” in these texts. If forgiveness is ultimately to be effective, there must be repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Recognizable earmarks of true repentance include: stopping the offending behavior, giving a sincere apology, taking responsibility for the behavior and damage done, showing care for the pain of the wronged one, making restitution in every way possible, and making changes to protect against reoccurrence.

Reconciliation is not the same as forgiveness. For reconciliation to occur, both must want it and be willing to try to rebuild trust again. Over time, through open communication and consideration of each one’s needs and feelings, destructive relational patterns can change. Patterns of conflict resolution that meet the needs of both can be cultivated.

In what way does the assurance that we have been forgiven by God in Christ give us courage to offer forgiveness to a wrongdoer or to make a much-needed apology?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 304–306; “The Measure of Forgiveness,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 243–251; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 142; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 100.

Justifiable indignation. “It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the cultural attitudes that exist in your own society that help create an environment in which family abuse is tolerated? What can you as a class do to help church members be on guard against assimilating these attitudes?
- 2 For those who are willing (and only to an appropriate degree), talk about how their own family works through conflicts. What have they learned from their own experiences that could help others facing similar challenges?
- 3 Discuss the difference between forgiveness and what sometimes is mistaken for forgiveness—tolerance, excusing the wrongdoer, absorbing the blame, or rationalizing the hurtful behavior. Why is it so important to know the difference?

Summary: Some conflict can be expected in close relationships. Often, through prayerful use of scriptures that teach about relationships, these can be reduced and managed by Christians.

The Accident That Saved His Life

by MASAMI TANAKA

Masami lay in the emergency room trying to answer the doctor and the police's questions. "I was driving, then I lost control of the car. It skidded. Then I heard a thud. The next thing I remember was crawling out of the car."

Masami had suffered only a few bruises in the crash, so the doctors released him from the hospital that night. He could find no bus or taxi, so he walked several miles to his home.

During the days following his accident, Masami had time to think about life and his near-fatal crash. He could not deny the conviction that something—or someone—had saved him from death. But who?

Masami had resented all religion and was glad when he no longer had to follow the foolish beliefs his father had taught him. He did not need his father's god—or any god. He could care for himself.

After the accident, he was willing to admit that some powerful deity might exist somewhere. He remembered an acquaintance who attended a Christian church. Perhaps he could ask his friend to help him sort out what had happened to him. He contacted his friend and asked which church he attended. Masami decided to visit the church—not every week, but occasionally. He knew little about God, but he enjoyed the fellowship and the Bible study. He found his commitment to God increasing. This is a faith I can believe in, he told himself. It's not like my father's religion.

Two years after he began attending the church, he was baptized.

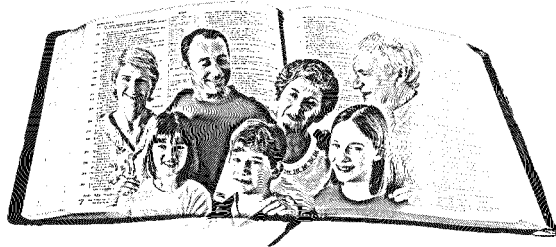
He met some volunteer missionaries who were teaching English and giving Bible studies in Osaka. He feels that God sent them to show God's love and compassion to him, giving him a strong tie with the church. Throughout his life God provided good people to guide him and strengthen him. He met his wife in church, and she strengthens him. God's presence had never been conspicuous in his life before he invited Him in to live in his life. But Masami is sure that He was always there, watching over him, protecting him.

Masami has had several accidents and experiences since then that have developed his faith. As his faith was growing, he had another accident. Falling while playing ball, he fell and broke both wrists. Because he had no serious pain, he did not go to a surgeon. But some time later he began feeling pain in his shoulders. The doctor examined him but found nothing wrong with his shoulders. A little further investigation led to the old break in his wrists. The doctor x-rayed and found that the wrist bones had both been broken and had never healed. He had to have surgery on both wrists. This was not good news, but it gave him time to spend with God. While he was still in the hospital after the surgery, his church called and asked him to work with the youth.

To this day God has led him gently, kindly. He wants to let many people know about this wonderful God. He would like to do whatever he can to bring others to God.

MASAMI TANAKA is a businessman living in Osaka, Japan. He is active in the Osaka Central Church.

Families of Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:12, 13; 3:7; Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1.*

Memory Text: “Therefore . . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Hebrews 12:1, 2, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Families face a lot of cultural pressures; the power of the gospel can allow them to confront those pressures victoriously.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (*Matt. 24:14*). We, living in the early twenty-first century, have the opportunity to see this prophecy being fulfilled in a way that earlier generations could not. Of course, as the gospel is spreading into new lands, new cultures, it meets with various traditions and practices, some of which might fit nicely with the truths given to us by God about families; while others, in contrast, might be in conflict with these truths in marked ways.

Regardless, though, of the culture in which the gospel is preached and lived, Christian families confront cultural challenges all the time. The great news is that the power of the gospel gives us light, comfort, and strength to deal with these challenges and to be “families of faith.”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 11.*

Hold Fast What Is Good

As the gospel circles the globe, Christians encounter different cultures and practices, many of which pertain to family and social relationships. One of the great questions for Christian missionaries regards how they should relate to various cultural norms about many things, including family relationships they might personally find uncomfortable.

Read Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35. **What can we learn here about our need to overcome our own barriers and prejudices when dealing with other cultures?**

Christ's death was for the sins of every human being everywhere. Many people simply do not know this great truth yet. To bring this news with an invitation to respond is the evangelistic mission of Christians. Because God shows no partiality, Christians are called to treat everyone with respect and integrity, giving them a chance to embrace the good news that is for them, as well.

What conclusions did early Christian missionaries reach regarding the presentation of the gospel to other cultures? **What principle can we draw from these texts?** Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22.

Though every culture mirrors the fallen condition of the people within it, cultures also may have beliefs that are compatible with Scripture, even useful to the cause of the gospel. The value placed upon close relationships in family and community in many parts of the world is an example. Christians can uphold and strengthen that which is good and in keeping with biblical principles.

At the same time, God's truth must not be compromised. Church history sadly shows that compromise and accommodation to cultures have yielded a patchwork of pseudo-Christian beliefs posing as authentic Christianity. Satan claims to be the god of this world and happily spreads confusion, but Jesus has redeemed this world, and His Spirit guides His followers into all truth (*John 16:13*).

How much of your faith is shaped by your culture, and how much is biblical truth? How can you learn to discern between the two? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.

The Power of Culture on Family

“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” (Gen. 18:19).

Though they might come in various configurations, families are the building blocks of society; thus, many distinct cultural traits of various societies are directly tied to family. For instance, in one ancient culture it was deemed a man’s responsibility to eat the corpse of his dead parents; in another, a man who wanted a bride had to bring her father a dowry of shrunken heads from a rival tribe. Even in modern times, ideas relating to children, courtship, divorce, marriage, parents, and so forth vary widely. As we spread our message to these various cultures, we have to learn how to relate to them in ways that, while not compromising our beliefs, do not cause unnecessary problems. At the same time, and closer to home, we have to be very aware of just what cultural influences impact our families.

In what ways did culture impact family life in the following examples? What principles can we learn from these examples?

Gen. 16:1-3

Gen. 35:1-4

Ezra 10

1 Kings 11:1

None of us lives in a vacuum; all of us and our families are impacted by the culture in which we live. Our responsibility as Christians is to exist within our culture the best we can, keeping that which is in harmony with our faith, while shunning, as much as possible, that which conflicts with it.

What things in your particular culture are helpful to family life and in harmony with the Bible? What things are not? How can you best adapt your faith to your culture without compromising essential truths?

Sustaining Families Through Seasons of Change

Change is an inescapable, unsettling occurrence in families, regardless of whatever culture they live in. Some change is related to predictable passage through the life cycle. Often change is unpredictable; such as deaths, disasters, wars, illnesses, family moves, or career failures. Many families face economic and social changes in their communities and countries. Other changes are directly related to the culture.

Below are some examples of great, even traumatic, changes people faced. Using your imagination, put yourself in their positions. How did these changes impact their family life? What mechanism would you have needed in order to help cope? In what ways might you have reacted differently?

1 Abraham, Sarah, and Lot (*Gen. 12:1-5*)

2 Hadassah (*Esther 2:7-9*)

3 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (*Dan. 1:1-21*)

With change comes the experience of loss and the anxiety of uncertainty as to one's immediate future. Depending on a family's ability to adjust to changes, these experiences can propel people to new levels of growth and appreciation for spiritual things, or they can lead to stress and anxiety. Satan exploits the disruption that changes bring, hoping to introduce doubt and distrust in God. The promises of God's Word, the resources of family and friends, and the assurance that their lives were in God's hands helped many heroes and heroines of faith cope successfully with momentous life upheaval.

If you know someone (or even a whole family) who is facing a traumatic change, do something in a practical way to give them some help and encouragement.

Toward a First-Generation Faith

What crisis of faith developed in Israel after Joshua and his peers died? *Judg. 2:7-13.*

Studies of how values and beliefs in organizations, such as churches, are transmitted to subsequent generations show that the founders have very high levels of commitment to the beliefs. They were the ones who first championed them. Within a generation or two, many lose sight of the principles behind the values. They may go along with the organization but often from habit. In subsequent generations, habits tend to crystallize into traditions. The founders' passion is no longer present.

It has been said that God has no grandchildren, only children. What do you think that means? *See also John 1:12, 13; 3:7; 1 John 5:1.*

A common approach to transmitting values through long generations of Christianity has been for older ones simply to tell the youth what they believe. Learning what one's parents believe or what the church believes is not personal faith, however. Being a Christian is more than belonging to an organization with a history and a dogma. True faith is not something genetic, is not something that is passed on naturally from one generation to another. Each one needs to know Christ for himself or herself. Parents can do only so much. The church, as a whole, and parents in particular, need to do all they can to create an environment that will make young people want to make that right choice, but, in the end, a generation is saved or lost for the gospel one person at a time.

Joe, coming out of atheism, joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an adult after a powerful conversion experience. He married an Adventist woman and had a few children, whom they, of course, raised in the faith. One day, thinking about the spiritual condition of his children, he said, "Oh, if only my children would have the experience that I had!" If you had been there, what would you have said to him?

Twenty-first-Century Runners

In his popular Bible paraphrase *The Message*, Eugene Peterson uses *message* wherever the biblical word for “gospel” appears. The good news about Jesus is truly the *message* still needed by the world today. Christian families are called to experience it together and to share it in whatever culture they live.

How would you summarize “the message” using the following texts?
Matt. 28:5-7; John 3:16; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:18-21.

The earliest news with which the disciples ran everywhere was of the resurrection of Jesus. Christian families today join a long line of runners, proclaiming, “He is risen, as he said” (*Matt. 28:7*). The reality of His resurrection makes credible everything else Jesus said about Himself, about God and His love for sinners, about forgiveness, and about the assurance of eternal life by faith in Him.

Passionate about the gospel. Scripture gives glimpses of the gospel’s sweeping effect on the lives of Jesus’ early followers. They opened their homes for Bible study; they prayed and ate together, shared money and resources, and took care of one another. Whole households embraced the message. Were they suddenly flawless people? No. Were there some conflicts and discord among them? Yes. But somehow these followers of Christ were different. They acknowledged their needs for God and for one another. They put a priority on unity and harmony at home and at church, endeavoring to fulfill the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus (*John 17:20-23*). They witnessed to one another and to unbelievers with boldness, even putting their lives at risk for their beliefs.

So must it be for us. Even in the current age, jaundiced as it is toward godly things, people who are excited about something still get a hearing. The Spirit longs to fill human hearts with excitement about the gospel. When the good news really becomes as good in our hearts as it is within the Word, sharing will be spontaneous and unstoppable.

What changes might need to be made in your own family that could help it become a better harbinger of the *message* we have been called to share?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “In the Court of Babylon,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 479–490; *Gospel Workers*, pp. 325–332; “Rejoicing in the Lord,” *Steps to Christ*, pp. 115–126.

No respecter of persons. “The religion of Christ uplifts the receiver to a higher plane of thought and action, while at the same time it presents the whole human race as alike the objects of the love of God, being purchased by the sacrifice of His Son. At the feet of Jesus, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, meet together, with no thought of caste or worldly preeminence. All earthly distinctions are forgotten as we look upon Him whom our sins have pierced. The self-denial, the condescension, the infinite compassion of Him who was highly exalted in heaven, puts to shame human pride, self-esteem, and social caste. Pure, undefiled religion manifests its heaven-born principles in bringing into oneness all who are sanctified through the truth. All meet as blood-bought souls, alike dependent upon Him who has redeemed them to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 330.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, discuss your answers to the questions in Sunday’s study.
- 2 What principles can we find from the Ellen G. White quote above that, if applied, would revolutionize our family lives?
- 3 How well has your local church done in nurturing the younger generation of believers? What can you as a class do to help the church in this important task?

Summary: The earliest evangelists understood that God shows no partiality with people. The gospel belongs to all, and every culture must hear it, as uncomplicated by the cultural trappings of the carriers as possible. The good news introduces radical change, working strategically but surely in the hearts of individuals and families.

Delayed Delivery

by KRISTINA MUEHLHAUSER

Our home in Uganda was chaotic as we prepared to leave for a few weeks' vacation. In the busyness of life, I asked God to help us not to miss opportunities to be a blessing to others.

Then Lucy, my language teacher, called me to attend the birth of her grandchild. I hopped on my bicycle and pedaled through the dusty streets to the hospital. I found the expectant mother, Christine, lying on a bed in the maternity ward, surrounded by other women in labor. Christine was not in true labor yet, but I hesitated to leave.

Darkness fell. Lucy and I lay down to rest on a thin mat on the cold cement floor. The sheet that covered us was inadequate. I slept fitfully.

In the morning I hurried home to finish packing for our trip. Several times I returned to the hospital to check on Christine's progress. Still no baby. I feared I would have to leave before the baby was born. Finally Christine's labor started in earnest. She paced the floor, moaning and crying in pain. I could not sleep. At dawn, she still had not dilated completely, and my plane would leave in three hours.

I hurried home and told my husband to meet me at the hospital on the way to the airport. Then I hurried back to the hospital. Christine was exhausted, and the doctors were concerned that the baby would die if not delivered quickly. I had to leave, but Christine clung to me, begging me to stay.

I ran outside and told my family to go check in for the flight, that I would take a *boda boda* to the airport. Then I ran into the hospital.

Holding Christine's head, I whispered, "You can do it. Push!" She pushed with more strength than she had.

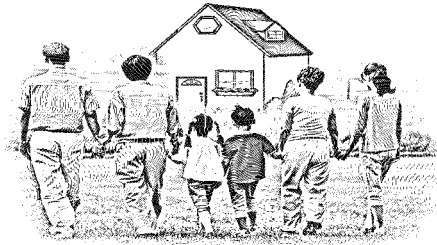
The phone in my pocket rang. It was my son. "Mom, the plane is due any minute!" I did not dare look back. Choking back sobs, I raced toward the street and hailed a *boda boda* driver to rush me to the airport. As we raced through the streets tears streaked my face.

I arrived at the airport and boarded the small plane. We roared into the air. God, I cried, You are all powerful. Please take care of them. When we arrived at the airport, I called home. Christine had delivered just minutes after I left.

I am back home in Uganda, and I have visited Christine and held her beautiful little boy. Thank You, God, for letting me be a part of their lives.

KRISTINA MUEHLHAUSER is a midwife. She and her husband, Darrel, work for the South Sudan Field from Arua, Uganda.

What Have They Seen *in* Your House?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isaiah 38; 39; 58:6, 7, 10-12; 1 Cor. 7:12-15; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2; 3 John 11.*

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

The Week at a Glance: The home life of Christians can be a powerful evangelistic resource.

Emissaries from Babylon came to King Hezekiah of Judah to hear firsthand about his miraculous recovery. Hezekiah happily received these guests with a tour that showcased his armory and expansive treasure. When they were gone, the prophet Isaiah confronted him with a penetrating question: “ ‘What have they seen in your house?’ ” (*Isa. 39:4, NKJV*).

What a question! Suppose that were asked of us? What have people seen in our house? What have heavenly angels seen? What does anyone see when walking in the door? What kind of spirit permeates our residences? Can one *smell* the scent of prayer? Is there kindness, generosity, love? Will someone who is there walk away thinking Jesus is in this home?

Let us dedicate our home life to Him and seek guidance in order that our homes may bring glory to God.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 18.*

Learning From a King's Mistake

Review the account of Hezekiah's healing and the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors (*2 Chron. 32:25, 31; Isaiah 38; 39*).

Scripture points out that the messengers are interested in the miraculous recovery of King Hezekiah. However, Hezekiah seems to be silent about his healing experience. He does not emphasize the things that would have opened the hearts of these inquiring ambassadors to the knowledge of the true God. The contrast between his gratitude for being healed in chapter 38 and his silence about it in chapter 39 is striking.

"God left him to test him." This state visit is a most significant occasion; yet, there is no record of Hezekiah seeking special guidance about it in prayer, from prophets, or from priests. Nor does God intervene. Alone, out of the public eye, with no consultation with spiritual advisers, the work of God in his life and in the life of his nation seems to recede from his mind. The intent of the historian in 2 Chronicles 32:31 may have been to show how easily God's blessing can be taken for granted and how prone the recipients of His mercy are to becoming self-sufficient.

Below are some lessons about faithfulness in home life that can be gleaned from the experience of Hezekiah. What others can you think of?

① Every visit to the homes of Christians is an opportunity for people to meet followers of Christ.

② Few visitors are likely to open conversation about spiritual things. Christians must find ways that are sensitive and appropriate to the occasion to share the good news.

③ Christians are not called to show off their material prosperity or accomplishments, though they may recognize these as blessings from God. They are called to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*) or, to use Hezekiah's experience as a symbol, to declare that they were dying, but Christ has healed them; they were dead in sin, and Christ resurrected them and seated them in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:4-6*).

In what ways are you able to use your home to witness to others? How could you share your faith in Christ more forthrightly with visitors to your home?

Family First

The most natural first recipients of our gospel-sharing endeavors are the people in our households. There is no more important mission field than this.

What conclusions can be drawn from **John 1:40-42** about sharing faith at home? *See also Deut. 6:6, 7; Ruth 1:14-18.*

An enthusiastic report. Andrew went beyond mere reporting; he arranged for his brother, Simon, to meet Jesus. An enthusiastic report about Jesus and an introduction to Him as a Person—what a simple formula for sharing the gospel with relatives in our homes! After the introduction Andrew stepped back. From then on, Jesus and Peter had a relationship of their own.

Helping children to a place of faith. Children in a home can often be overlooked as fitting recipients of gospel-sharing efforts. Parents mistakenly assume children simply will absorb family spirituality. This must not be taken for granted. While children and young people learn from the modeling they observe, it is also true these younger members of the Lord's family need individual attention and opportunity to be introduced personally to Him. Deuteronomy 6 is insistent on this point: Attention must be given to the most effective kind of religious education. Regular spiritual habits of personal and family worship are to be encouraged in the home. Time and earnest efforts must be put forth on behalf of children and youth.

What can we learn from the evangelistic efforts of Naomi? *Ruth 1:8-22.*

Ruth saw Naomi at the lowest of moments: when she tried to push her daughter-in-law away and when, bitter and depressed and overwhelmed by grief as she recounted her losses (*Ruth 1:15, 20, 21*). No more eloquent testimony than Ruth's can be given to show that youth can meet and make a commitment to a perfect God, even when introduced to Him by an imperfect parent.

How does the notion of home as the most important mission field affect your attitude toward the people who live with you? Work together as a family to prepare a list of specific efforts your family can make to lead unsaved relatives to Christ.

Peace That Wins

What counsel does the New Testament have for marriages divided by religion? *1 Cor. 7:12-15; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2.*

The blessing of being a Christian partner. In 1 Corinthians Paul responds to converts' concerns that staying married to an unbelieving spouse might be offensive to God or bring defilement upon themselves and their children. Not so, says Paul. The sacred state of marriage and its intimacies are to continue after a partner's conversion. The presence of one Christian partner "sanctifies" the other partner and the couple's children. The word *sanctifies* should be understood in the sense that unbelieving spouses come into contact with the blessings of grace through living with their Christian partners.

Heartrending as it is, the unbelieving partner may decide to abandon the marriage. Though consequences will be serious, the merciful word of our God—who always upholds human freedom of choice—is "let him do so." The believer "is not bound in such circumstances" (*1 Cor. 7:15, NIV*).

Called to live in peace. The clear preference of the Word of God is that, despite the challenges of a spiritually divided home, a way might be found for the peace of Christ to reign there. The hope is to keep the marriage intact, to give evidence of the triumph of the gospel in the midst of difficulty, and to promote the comfort of the partner with whom the believer is one flesh, though he or she be unbelieving.

What might be the limitations of a spouse's responsibility toward a nonbelieving partner?

Lovingkindness, unwavering fidelity, humble service, and winsome witness on the part of the believer create the greatest likelihood of winning the non-Christian spouse. Submission in a Christian marriage arises out of reverence for Christ (*compare Eph. 5:21*). When a spouse relates with Christian submission to an unbelieving partner, the first allegiance is always to Christ. Faithfulness to the claims of God on one's life does not require a spouse to suffer abuse at the hands of a violent partner.

Is someone in your church struggling with an unbelieving spouse? If so, in what practical ways could you possibly help?

Family Life Is for Sharing

In the following verses, trace the New Testament uses of the words *follow* (KJV) or *imitate* (NIV). What do they tell us about the process of becoming and growing as a Christian? What do you think they suggest about the relationship between modeling and witnessing? *1 Cor. 4:16, Eph. 5:1, 1 Thess. 1:6, Heb. 6:12, 13:7, 3 John 11.*

The New Testament emphasis on *imitation* acknowledges the important role of modeling in the learning process. People tend to become like whom or what they watch. This principle applies to relationships generally and especially in the home, where imitation is common. There, children imitate their parents and siblings; married partners often imitate each other. This concept provides an important clue to how couples and families can bear Christian witness to other couples and families.

The power of social influence. We witness from our homes when we provide opportunities for others to observe us and to share in our home experience in some way. Many simply have no good example of marriage or family relationships to follow. In our homes they may see how the spirit of Jesus makes a difference. “Social influence,” wrote Ellen White, “is a wonderful power. We can use it if we will as a means of helping those about us.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 354.

As married couples invite other couples for meals, fellowship, or Bible study, or when they attend a marital-growth program together, the visitors see a model. The display of mutuality, affirmation, communication, conflict-resolution, and accommodation of differences testifies of family life in Christ.

In this context, however, of what must we always be careful? *Jer. 17:9, John 2:25, Rom. 3:23.*

Follow believers who follow Christ. All human examples are flawed; however, the witness of the Christian home is not about modeling absolute perfection. The New Testament notion of imitation is a call for individuals to follow believers who follow Christ. The idea is that individuals will grasp Christian faith as they see it demonstrated in the lives of others who are as human and fallible as they are.

What could you do to make your home a better model for Christian witnessing?

Centers of Contagious Friendliness

Compare biblical references on hospitality with actual incidents in the homes of several Bible families listed below. *Isa. 58:6, 7, 10-12; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9*. Note the attributes of hospitality that are demonstrated.

Abraham and Sarah (*Gen. 18:1-8*)

Rebekah and her family (*Gen. 24:15-20*)

Zacchaeus (*Luke 19:1-9*)

Hospitality meets another person's basic needs for rest, food, and fellowship. It is a tangible expression of self-giving love. Jesus attached theological significance to hospitality when He taught that feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty were acts of service done to Him (*Matt. 25:34-40*). Using one's home for ministry may range from simply inviting neighbors to a meal to the radical hospitality of lending a room to an abuse victim. It may involve simple friendliness, an opportunity to offer prayer with someone, or the conducting of Bible studies. True hospitality springs from the hearts of those who have been touched by God's love and want to express their love in words and actions.

Families sometimes complain that they lack the facilities, the time, and/or the energy to offer hospitality. Others feel awkward, unskilled, and unsure about reaching beyond what is familiar in order to associate with unbelievers. Some wish to avoid the complications to their lives that may arise from becoming involved with others. Many contemporary families confuse *hospitality* and *entertaining*.

In what ways does your home life reflect your own spiritual condition?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “A Powerful Christian Witness,” “Attitude Toward an Unbelieving Companion,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 35–39; pp. 348–352; “Ministry of the Home,” *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 349–355; “The Ambassadors From Babylon,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 340–348.

The power of the home in evangelism. “Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. . . .

“Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 352, 355.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Ask anyone in class if it were the influence of someone’s home that helped him or her make a decision for Christ. Discuss just what it was that made such an impression. What can the class learn from that experience?
- ❷ In what practical ways can you as a class minister to a family with an unbelieving spouse?
- ❸ As a class, talk about some of the pressures in the home that work against faith. Write up a list of some of these things; then across from them, write down possible solutions.

Summary: The private lives of Christians are a means of witness to children, unbelieving spouses, other relatives, and visitors. While faith sharing at home may not always be as complete as one would like or result in the conversion of relatives and visitors, imperfect family members seek to point the way to a perfect Savior. Through generous hospitality, expressed in the Savior’s name, they bring within the realm of grace all whose lives they touch.

God Shall Provide

by SALNAVE RIARD

I loved sharing my faith with others and received little satisfaction from operating my small business. I felt God calling me to study theology at the Adventist university in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

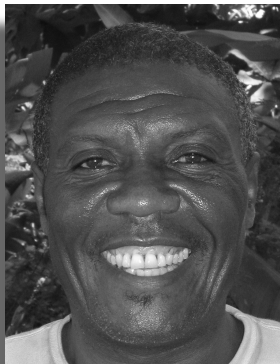
Finances were a problem. I did not earn enough to pay my tuition and eat. I gave my problems to God and focused on reaching others, and God blessed.

One day as I walked out of my house, I saw some people crying. They told me that a child had died. The mother and father led me to the child, about four years old, who lay limp and cold on the bed. His mother said that he had been sick for two days and had died some time later. I picked up the child and hugged him to my body. I prayed for God to help me, then I read Psalm 46: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way" (NIV). Then I knelt to pray.

"God, I present myself and this child to You. You can see his weeping family. Come to us, Lord, and show these people that You are God, that Your name will be praised."

Suddenly someone shouted, "Pray, pray!" Then I felt a slight movement in my arms. He was alive! My prayers turned to praise as I thanked God for the life of the child. The child lay calmly in my arms as I praised God. Then I gave the child to his mother.

The family asked me what they owed me for bringing their child back to life. Shocked, I told them they owed me nothing, but they owed God their lives and their praise. He was the One who had saved the child's life. I invited the family to visit the nearby Adventist church to listen to the message of God.

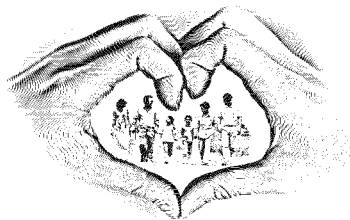


When I returned from holding meetings in southern Haiti, I visited the family and studied the Bible with them. At least one member of the family has become an Adventist.

I had been concerned about money, but God showed me that I could trust Him for everything. I quit fretting about my bills, and God provided a sponsor to help me through school. It is true what the Bible says, "My God shall provide all my needs."

Salnave Riard (left) lives in central Haiti; he studies theology at the Adventist University of Haiti.

Turning Hearts *in the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 3:2; 11:14, 15; 17:10; 18:20-45.*

Memory Text: “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (*Malachi 4:5, 6, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: In the closing verses of the Old Testament, a heart-turning work by Elijah is predicted before the day of the Lord.

A boy ran away from home. After years of no word from him, the parents got a postcard. He was coming their way and wanted to see them. “I’ll be riding the train that runs behind our house,” he wrote. “If it’s OK for me to stop and see you, hang a white handkerchief on the fence, and I’ll get off at the next station. If it’s not there, I’ll just keep riding.”

As the train hurtled toward his boyhood home, he wondered, *Will the handkerchief be there?* Finally, the fence came into view, covered with handkerchiefs, towels, bedsheets, and pillowcases, not only on the fence but on the shrubbery and the trees—a great mass of white, saying WELCOME HOME!

The point should be obvious.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 25.*

The Prophecy of Turned Hearts

Compare the prediction of the coming of Elijah with New Testament references to this event. *Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:14, 15; 17:10; Mark 6:15; Luke 1:17.*

In the days of Malachi, God's appeal to the nation, "Return to Me, and I will return to you," met with the arrogant response, "In what way shall we return?" (*Mal. 3:7, NKJV*). The frustrated prophet announced that one further opportunity for revival would be given. Recalling the heart-turning reform begun by Elijah (*1 Kings 18:37*), Malachi predicted his coming again to "turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (*Mal. 4:6, NIV*).

A Jewish tradition developed that Elijah would appear personally as the herald of the Messiah (*compare Matt. 17:10, Mark 6:15*). However, the New Testament presents John the Baptist as a fulfillment of the prophecy (*Matt. 11:14, 15; Luke 1:17*).

What do you think the phrase "turn the hearts" means?

Several applications are possible for these texts: *It refers to the reconciliation of the people of Israel with the Lord. God as Father (Isa. 63:16) has turned from His wrath toward His children (Mic. 7:18, 19) and calls them to return to Him (Isa. 44:22, Mal. 3:7). It refers to the reconnecting of later generations with their faithful ancestors through covenant renewal. The prophetic call for God's people to follow the faith of the patriarchs was given repeatedly in the Old Testament. Whether the land continued as a blessed dwelling place was directly related to covenant faithfulness (Deut. 4:29-31). It refers to the restoration and renewal of family relationships. Parent-child relationships are a practical expression of covenant faithfulness with God. Here, too, fulfillment of responsibilities to parents and children interweave with continued inheritance of the land and God's blessing (Prov. 2:21).*

What is the connection between a restored relationship with God and restored relationships in our families? Why must one precede the other?

Family Reunion

The introduction of Baal worship into Israel by Jezebel, the Sidonian wife of King Ahab, hastened the nation's downward moral slide. The teachings of God that uplifted marriage, family, and sexuality were overshadowed by practices such as incest, prostitution, and other sexual perversions. Into this arena of conflict over worship stepped Elijah, whose very name, "Jehovah-is-my-God," rebuked a belief in Baal.

What experience of Elijah associated him with overturning heathen beliefs and bringing new life to families? *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; compare Luke 4:25, 26.*

Elijah was a marked man after announcing the curse of drought upon the land. God sheltered him in an unlikely place—at a poor widow's dwelling in Zarephath of Sidon, near Jezebel's hometown. Elijah greeted the widow with a grim test, to use her last bits of kindling, oil, and flour to feed him and to trust God for her future. Her faith became legendary. Jesus Himself would later commend her (*Luke 4:26*). As her oil and meal stretched out over many days, the woman came to understand more about Jehovah. Then, tragically, her only son fell sick and died. In expressing her grief to Elijah, she reflected the familiar religion around her, the perverted beliefs that now engulfed Israel, in which one's sin could require child sacrifice (*1 Kings 17:18; compare Jer. 19:5, Mic. 6:7*).

What effect did the reunion with her son have upon the Phoenician widow's spiritual experience? *1 Kings 17:24*. **What can we learn from her comments?**

The mother's response reveals the effect of the Elijah message. Faith in God and His Word arises in the heart as, by His power, life is restored and the family is reunited. Many today may give assent as doctrines are preached but are lukewarm in their spiritual experience. However, when the truths of God's Word are experienced personally and revival and restoration occur in home relationships, conviction comes ever so much more powerfully upon the heart.

What are some family reunions that you are still waiting for? What promises of God are you clinging to that give you hope of that reunion?

Turning Hearts at the Altar

Read 1 Kings 18:20-45. Write out what essentially this whole episode is about. Though the context is totally different, how can the principles seen in this story apply to family life?

On Mount Carmel, Elijah longed for covenant renewal on the part of his nation, a turning back to the faith of their fathers that would bring healing to their lives, their homes, and their land.

The hour of the evening sacrifice. After the heathen priests' failure with their sacrifice, Elijah took his turn. He was deliberate. The time of day drew attention to God's redemptive plan revealed in the sanctuary service (*compare Exod. 29:41*). The invitation " 'Come near to me' " (*1 Kings 18:30, NKJV*) reminds us of the Savior's welcoming sinners (*compare Matt. 11:28*). Parents who are pained at the waywardness of a child can be assured God loves him or her as truly as He loved the Israelites. God works unceasingly to draw wayward ones to Him.

Elijah's focus on Jehovah's altar finds its equivalent in our time when Jesus and His saving grace are uplifted in families. Family worship is an opportunity to talk to Him in prayer, to speak of Him to one another, to receive anew His free gift of salvation, and to give our hearts time to reflect on His teachings.

The response Elijah requested would signal that God had taken them back to Himself. First Kings 18:37 says, " 'That this people may know . . . You have turned their hearts back to You again' " (*NKJV*). We cannot turn our hearts to God; we can only respond to His grace, and that He freely gives.

The all-consuming fire fell, not upon the guilty but upon the sacrifice, pointing forward to Jesus, who was made "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). Confession and praise burst from the people's lips. Because they did not respond to God's call, the false priests were executed. Then refreshing rains ended the curse upon the land.

In what condition is your home altar? What specific ways can you *rebuild* the altar in your home, if indeed it needs some rebuilding?

Turning Hearts at the Jordan

Alongside Gabriel's prediction (*Luke 1:17*) and Jesus' confirmation of John the Baptist as the predicted Elijah (*Matt. 11:14; 17:12, 13*), the Gospel writers affirm that he was the "messenger" who would prepare the way of the Lord (*Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27; compare Mal. 3:1*).

Note the main aspects of John's message. In what way is his message one of heart-turning? *Matt. 3:2, 8; 14:4; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14.*

Like a farmer who plows hard ground to prepare it to receive seed, John denounced sin and urged sinners to repent. Human nature is such that, without self-examination, without an awareness of one's true condition, no need is felt for something better. His message turned people toward the holiness of God's requirements and their need of His perfect righteousness. Genuine repentance is always marked by humility and looking to God for help to change one's behavior. By exposing the shallow, self-centered hypocrisy of those who claimed Abraham as their father, he sought to open the deeper meaning of the faith of their fathers.

How did the message of John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus? *John 1:35-37, 3:27-30.*

John had been shown that Jesus was the Lamb of God. When he introduced Jesus this way (*John 1:29, 36*), he literally turned people to the Lord. Andrew and another of John's disciples, John—the Gospel writer who wrote the account of that day—left the Baptist's side and became the first of Jesus' disciples. Not only does the Elijah message point to the need for repentance; it identifies the One who saves from sin, generates excitement about Him, and introduces people to Him.

If John the Baptist were to step into your home, what do you think he would be saying to you?

Turning Hearts in the Last Days

In a sense, we as Adventists see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist. The herald of reform and repentance sought to prepare the way for the first coming of Jesus; we, as a movement, see ourselves doing the same for the Second Coming.

Read prayerfully Luke 1:17. How do these words capture our message?

The heavenly Father has turned the hearts of His children back to Himself and has turned the hearts of His children to one another through the Cross of Christ. The Elijah message pleads with families to believe this incredible good news (*2 Cor. 5:18-21; compare Eph. 2:11-18*) and to be people filled with grace as His Spirit yields a harvest of love in them.

The world needs desperately a demonstration of unselfish caring, lasting commitment, and unswerving devotion to God. By God's grace Christian families can provide such a demonstration. Yet, we must remember that the message we have for the world is also for ourselves. Until the principles of gospel, of unity, of love, of self-sacrifice are made manifest among us, especially in our own families, we will be powerless to share this message with others. All the eloquent sermons, all the logic and biblical presentations, aren't enough: The world needs to see manifest in our lives, especially in our family lives, the repentance, the turned hearts, the love, and the commitment we preach about. Just as John the Baptist had a power that changed lives and made his preaching effective, we can do the same through the grace of God, but only to the degree in which we are willing to cooperate.

We are, through Jesus, part of the family in heaven (*Eph. 3:15*). Thus, whether we are a family of one or more, we are called to be witnesses for the God we profess to serve, and nothing can make our witness more effective than to show the world what a family, regardless of its size, can be through the power of the gospel.

What can you do, in a special way, to show those closest to you, whether immediate family or others, that you love and care about them?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Carmel,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 143–154; “The Voice in the Wilderness,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 97–108.

A message to prepare a people. “Our message must be as direct as was that of John. He rebuked kings for their iniquity. Notwithstanding the peril his life was in, he never allowed truth to languish on his lips. Our work in this age must be as faithfully done.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss the relevance of the Elijah message to your local church. What can you do to help your church understand the message and its role in helping to spread it?
- ❷ Have those who are willing share with the class their own personal experiences of having their hearts turned. What changes came about? What difference did this experience have upon their lives and the lives of their families?
- ❸ If we see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist, what should we expect to happen to us? What is the implicit message in that answer?
- ❹ As a class, work on a paragraph, a kind of “Declaration of Family Principles,” that best encapsulates what the biblical idea for a family is. Be prepared to share it with the whole church.

Summary: An appeal for faith in God and acceptance of His reconciling gospel of grace is going forth today just before Christ returns. A positive response to this good news alone secures the bonds of earthly children to the heavenly Father, as well as parents and children to one another.

The Late Visitor

by ELIJAH ANGELOV

I was a pastor in a charismatic church in Bulgaria for years. Then the Adventists held evangelistic meetings in my village. I was sure that Adventists did not have the Holy Spirit, for they did not speak in tongues. But I decided to attend the meetings, just to hear what these people said about God.

I was shocked by the compelling Bible truths that were presented, that Saturday is God's holy day and that the soul does not go directly to heaven or hell after death. The subjects were clearly presented and backed by Bible texts.

As I searched the Bible, I became convinced that what the Adventists teach was the truth. Others tried to convince me that Adventists are wrong, but they could not back their statements from the Bible. I continued praying and studying the Bible.

My wife, Zoya, attended the meetings too. She noticed my distress and asked me, "Are you thinking about what the Adventists teach too?"

"Yes I am," I told her.

We did not join the Adventists during those meetings, but we continued studying the Bible and struggling over what God wanted us to do. Then one day months later, Zoya told me, "I am convinced that the Sabbath message is correct."

I asked her how she came to that conclusion.

"I asked God plainly," she said. "I told God that if the Adventists are His people, and if I am wrong, then please send Sister Nina to our home to tell me, 'Do not waver, the Sabbath is God's truth.' If this happens, then I will be convinced that Adventists are right. But send Nina today. Otherwise I will know that Adventists are wrong.

"The hours dragged by," Zoya continued. "Noon passed, and Sister Nina had not come. Dinner was over, and still she had not come. Soon it was time for bed, and Nina was not there. I decided that the message the Adventists teach is wrong.

"I was ready for bed when someone knocked at the door. It was Nina. She did not mince words, but said, 'Sister Zoya, do not waver. The Sabbath is God's truth.' I started to cry and shout, 'Praise the Lord!'

"Then Nina told me she had resisted an impulse to come see us all day. But finally she could not wait any longer, so she came."

I praised God, too, for opening our minds and showing us His power and His truth.

ELIJAH and ZOYA ANGELOV live in Bulgaria.

The Holy Spirit, our study for the next quarter, is based on a previously published Bible study guide, written by the late Arnold V. Wallenkampf. While the lessons will present a doctrinal picture of the Holy Spirit, they also will emphasize the daily and practical aspect of His work in our lives. The powerful reality of His work is manifested not only in our personal experiences but in the life and power of the church. Thus, we deal extensively with the vivifying power of the Spirit as we seek to present Him as God's regenerating Agent.

Lesson 1—The Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: The Triune God

MONDAY: God the Holy Spirit

TUESDAY: God the Holy Spirit: Continued (*Acts 5:3, 4*)

WEDNESDAY: The Unity of God (*Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14*)

THURSDAY: Evidences of the Spirit's Personality

Memory Text—*Matthew 28:19*

Sabbath Gem: This week we'll concentrate on one often misunderstood aspect of the Holy Spirit: His Divinity. The Holy Spirit is not just some impersonal force that emanates from God. Instead, He is God, one of the three Persons who make up the Godhead of the Christian faith.

Lesson 2—The Holy Spirit Symbolized in Scripture

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: Dove (*John 1:32*)

MONDAY: Water (*John 7:37-39, RSV*).

TUESDAY: Oil (*Matt. 25:1-4*)

WEDNESDAY: Seal and Guarantee (*2 Cor. 1:22, RSV*)

THURSDAY: Light and Fire (*John 1:9*)

Memory Text—*John 3:8*

Sabbath Gem: The Spirit is frequently alluded to through the use of a variety of symbols. It only is through an acquaintance with the symbols, emblems, or illustrations used for the Spirit that His work and ministry in the believer's life can be adequately understood.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired: The regular Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, old age, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.

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