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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.
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.
How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the adult standard edition Bible study guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

► **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.

► **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.

► **The Inductive Bible-Study Method** emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner’s investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly, understand the passage in context, avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.

► **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.

► **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

*Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it often is possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.*
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?
Key Text: Genesis 1:27, 28

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that families were established for companionship and were created to reflect the unity of the Godhead.
2. To establish the family as a means of experiencing and expressing God’s love.
3. To explore the church as a unit of many families joined together.

Lesson Outline:
I. The First Family (Gen. 2:18, 24)
   A. The first family was established at Creation.
   B. Families were intended to meet our social needs.
   C. The first man and woman were created to be one flesh as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One.
   D. The family should experience and reflect the love of God.

II. The Family as a Reflection of God’s Love (1 John 4:12)
   A. Family members express love through their treatment of one another.
   B. Christ, our Example, expressed love for His mother, even at the cross.
   C. Love and obedience to God should be stronger than family ties.

III. God’s Family Is a Family of Families (Eph. 2:19)
   A. The Bible reveals various kinds of family structures.
   B. Single people are a vital part of the family of God.
   C. In the church family, people should experience the love of God and have a sense of belonging.

Summary: God created families to fulfill our needs for companionship and community. Although there are various kinds of family structures, each one of them is to be a reflection of the love and of the character of God. Church-family members should experience oneness and express the love of God.

COMMENTARY
I. Introduction
While Scripture and Ellen White have given Adventists principles and directives for building healthy families, what has occurred in the wider culture also has influenced us. During the last 150 years, there have been major changes in what society expects from a family. Class members may have a more informed discussion of the Bible study guide if they are aware of some of these changes.

II. Transitions in Family Types
Prior to the Industrial Revolution in America and in Europe, the typical family was commonly called the Institutional Family. Such a family sought stability and security by stressing family loyalty,
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?
the value of children, and community ties. The role of the father’s authority also was important. Children most often were valued because of their work potential. The Institutional Family was well-suited for “a world of family farms, small family businesses, and tight communities bound together by a common religion.”

—William J. Doherty, The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, Inc., 1997), p. 4. This was the common family type during the time of James and Ellen White.

The Industrial Revolution started to change the Institutional Family, and, beginning in the 1920s, a new type of family system emerged. What Doherty termed the Psychological Family prized “personal achievement and happiness more than . . . family obligations and tight community bonds.”—Page 4. The Psychological Family valued a secure married couple with close emotional ties, good communication in the family, and a working partnership in child rearing. The goal of such a family was that each member be satisfied with their roles.

Within the Psychological Family, there was a theoretical form of spousal equality. The wife was the expert with homemaking and child-rearing issues, while the husband was the expert outside the home. Both had equality, but satisfaction was more difficult to achieve.—Page 4.

The question facing many married couples was how to have one’s personal needs met while maintaining an equal relationship. What emerged as the answer was learned communication skills, commitment, conflict resolution, and the ability to nurture and affirm each other. The high expectations for marriage, along with the realization that divorce no longer was a social stigma, resulted in many couples being overwhelmed by the daily nature of their marriages. These issues contributed greatly to both the cause and effect of increased divorce rates. “The cultural image of the two-parent nuclear family from cradle to grave splintered into a montage of family forms.”—Page 6.

Societal revolutions and changes in the 1960s and in the 1970s led to the disintegration of the Psychological Family. This gave way to the emergence of the Pluralistic Family. Such a family is still common today in America and Europe. The Pluralistic Family claims that there is no ideal family. The traditional two-parent family is just one alternative among others, including cohabitation, single parenting, remarriage, and gay and lesbian families. Flexibility is the operative word in any debate on the subject.—Pages 6, 7.

The Institutional Family is closest to the biblical ideal. The Psychological Family, with its insistence on promoting the rights and freedoms of individuals, can be harmful to the “well-being of the family unit.” Is this the best model for the Seventh-day Adventist family? Perhaps not!
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?
Certainly, the *Pluralistic Family* type also creates problems for Adventists. If there is a right way, there must be also a wrong way. How can we remain silent regarding family practices not supported by Scripture?

Family sociologists suggest another way. The *Intentional Family* calls for choices supported by grounded ethical and moral convictions that will shape family units for now and for eternity.—Pages 7, 8. This view challenges Adventist families to refocus on divine

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Ephesians 2:19, 20*

1. Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus’ genealogy back to Abraham (*Matthew*) and Adam (*Luke*). As you skim through the lists, you’ll find names both familiar and unfamiliar. And as you recall the Bible stories connected with each name, you’ll remember episodes that were both heroic and shameful. What is the overriding point we should take from the stories of God’s flawed family? What lessons can you apply to the people with whom you live and worship?

2. God had high ideals when He created the first couple and established the first family. Make a list of the characteristics that, even in a perfect environment, were necessary for the success of a family. How were these characteristics altered by sin’s entrance into the world? What are the remedies for those who want to get back to God’s ideal?

3. Give three examples from Christ’s life and teachings that demonstrate His high regard for the family. How can these examples be translated into modern settings—especially those settings that are less than ideal?

4. Think of the families represented in your congregation. Identify as many types of families as you can (divorced; widowed; never married; married, no children; retired; single parents; and others). Next, describe how ministries currently offered by your church can meet the spiritual, social, and material needs of those on your list. Imagine some ministries that might have to be developed to take up the slack.

5. Read Romans 16:1-16. What is the sociological profile of the church in Rome? What do the individuals mentioned have in common? How is their role in the church affirmed by Paul?
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?
connections, love for one another, and a sense of community. These values apply both for the family at home and for the church family.

III. Inspired Wisdom About Marriage and Family

“It is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed. Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection.

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.

Witnessing

Read Acts 2:41-47. From this passage we learn several things about the believers:

1. They met together daily in the temple (they did not simply dabble in religion).
2. Their hearts were full of rejoicing (self-transcending delight).
3. They ate together with gladness and singleness of heart (no strife, overindulgence, or disorder).
4. They shared not only food but also the practical necessities of life (liberation from materialism and selfishness; preparedness to meet the emergency of ostracism inflicted by relatives, employers, and community).
5. They studied doctrinal truth with sustained interest and unity of belief (the scriptural basis of God’s church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth [1 Tim. 3:15]).

The unhindered openness and freedom of this association implies purity of conduct and motive, without which the whole fellowship would quickly have degenerated into a farce and spectacle of shame. (Consider 1 Cor. 1:1-12.)

Christ established His church not merely to serve as a mechanism for promulgating a message; nor did He institute it as a social club for merriment, feasting, and subjective dialogue. He created the church to be His family and awake to its heavenly calling, brimming over with sociable benevolence. It is God’s desire that the church be evangelistically active and cleansed of all worldliness in pursuing its mission to make disciples for His kingdom among the peoples of the world.

Point to ponder: What if the apostles had not been of one accord prior to Pentecost? How would that have affected their preaching, demeanor, and influence?
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?

“How 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?
“Though difficulties, perplexities, and discouragements may arise, let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union was a mistake or a disappointment. Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. Study to advance the happiness of each other. Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love.

“Cultivate that which is noblest in yourselves, and be quick to recognize the good qualities in each other. The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction. Sympathy and respect encourage the striving after excellence, and love itself increases as it stimulates to nobler aims.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 358, 360, 361.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “A. B. Davidson tells how he was in lodgings in a strange city. He was lonely. He used to walk the streets at evening time. Sometimes through an uncurtained window he would see a family sitting round the table or the fire in happy fellowship; then the curtain would be drawn and he would feel shut out, and lonely in the dark.”—William Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1975), vol. 1, p. 118.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Years ago, in some Adventist communities that tended to be more sheltered from contact with the world, the word *outsider* could be heard often: “He’s marrying an *outsider*” or “There were four *outsiders* in church today!” Since then, the politically correct church of today is careful not to air such negative comments, but prejudice continues to have a stronghold in more subtle ways. Identify some of them. What measures can your church take to steer away from such prejudices?

2. The church is oftentimes comprised of a mixture of people—culture, ages, and interests. How does one cope with these differences and find ministries and activities that cross these barriers?

**Application Question:**

The lesson presents the church as the *family* of families. How far can you take this analogy or comparison? Identify some positive qualities of a human family that can be replicated by the church family. What are the negative qualities of the human family that also can be seen in the church family? How should we deal with them?

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:

1. 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?

2. 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.
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?
**Key Text:** Ephesians 5:17, 21

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that Bible truths are the guidelines for family living today.
2. To apply Bible principles to family relationships.
3. To stress the importance of the family’s relationship with God.

**Lesson Outline:**

**I. An Outline for Family Living** *(Rom. 15:4)*
A. The original Bible principles are still the standard by which we should live today.
B. The Bible gives specific instructions on God’s plan and purpose for family living.
C. The role of each family member is outlined in the Word of God.

**II. Principles for Healthy Relationships** *(1 John 4:11)*
A. The Bible gives specific behavioral guidelines for family relationships.
B. According to the Bible, family members are to speak words of love and forgiveness to one another.
C. The Scriptures admonish family members to look out for the needs of another.

**III. Family Relationships Should Be a Reflection of Our Relationship With God** *(Isa. 54:5, 66:13)*
A. As a parent loves a child or as a husband loves his wife, God loves the church.
B. The Bible images of God’s love and of His relationship to the church reveal the importance of family relations to Him, as well.

**Summary:** The Word of God is still the standard by which we should govern family life. In it we find guidelines on how we are to relate to one another within the family unit. Healthy family relationships help lead us to a closer relationship with God.

**COMMENTARY**

**I. Introduction**

Last week we discussed four family types from a sociological perspective. This week we will learn more about the *Intentional Family* type.

**II. Definition of the Intentional Family**

Years ago our family took a canoe journey down the Delaware River in the eastern United States. Our trip was scheduled for ten miles, and along those miles we were expecting to see beautiful scenery and exciting wildlife while the current carried us lazily along. But we were unprepared for a 25-mile-per-hour headwind,
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?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
and we had no idea how important it was to steer the canoe. What transpired was often comical, sometimes frightening, and usually just hard work. We encountered rapids, low-hanging tree limbs that drew us like magnets into their clutches, and constant wind. With a considerable sense of accomplishment, we finally reached our goal; but the journey was not what we had expected.

Family living can be much like that trip. We had one plan for the trip, but it became a constant work in progress. In spite of that, the trip was made easier because of the plan. Family members also must have a plan as they face the difficulties and challenges of their journey together. The plan will flex according to needs and circumstances. However, the goals set at the beginning may not need to change. Stephen R. Covey suggests that in setting family goals, one should start with the “end in mind.”—*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997), p. 70. Believe us, being able to dock that canoe after our ten-mile journey was something we thought about along the way. And like the canoe, a family also must make allowances for weather conditions, keep steering in the right direction, and paddle like it really matters—because it does.

In the *Intentional Family*, members work together to stay on course, to keep reaffirming their goals, and to refocus their plan. Repeated activities and family customs keep the connections strong in addition to providing ongoing meaning to the journey. They build a sense of community that will keep the family balanced. What might some of these rituals be?

1. **Family worship**—These should be age-appropriate for the children in both time and content. Worship should reinforce God’s love, grace, and salvation, along with faith and hope. Each family member should have a role to play in these events. An established time for worship should be honored, with limited exceptions made.

2. **Bedtime routines**—These provide wonderful opportunities to focus attention on each child. Affirmations of love and support will become some of their most cherished memories.

3. **Eating together**—In this age of family grazing, the connections made during shared meals should not be underestimated.

4. **Annual vacations**—These also can help a family build community. It is important, however, that negative attitudes be left behind. Much family bonding can occur while hiking a mountain path, going on memorable camping trips, or during similar activities.

5. **Holidays**—Could it be that a family that celebrates together stays together? Traditional and cultural holidays are perfect times for family bonding.

6. **Sabbath observance**—In what special ways does your family begin and end Sabbath? Do you have special Friday-night suppers? Are Sabbath dinners shared with others in ways that make Sabbath more of a delight?

7. **Service**—Think of how you may have been blessed by easing
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 load another carries. How could your family make a statement about your love for God by serving those with real needs? Remember that “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”—Ellen G. White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 143.

Family routines can become rituals by emphasizing four factors (see William J. Doherty, The Intentional Family, pp. 11, 12):

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Ruth 1–4, Song of Solomon 1–8, Hosea 1:2–2:1, Luke 15:11-32

1. The families described in the Bible are so diverse that they can hardly be described as *normal*. These stories remind us that envy, unfaithfulness, estrangement, heartache, and even violence are the fruits of living in a sinful world. We hardly should be surprised if these same things afflict modern families. Yet, God almost always brings something redemptive out of the most broken human relationships. What is redemptive about the stories of Joseph? Ruth? Rahab? David? Solomon? Hosea?

2. Read the wise sayings recorded in Proverbs 12:25; 15:1; 17:9, 22. Remember a modern saying repeated by someone in your family or one you often say that reflects a principle that strengthens relationships in your family or church.

3. The Song of Solomon is one of two books in the Bible that does not mention the word *God* (Esther is the other). How does this fact shape the way you regard this book? How do you explain the presence of the Song of Solomon in the Scripture canon? What do you think is its primary purpose?

4. God uses marriage and family relationships as metaphors to illustrate His relationship with individuals, as well as with the church. What image do you find most appealing when thinking of your own relationship with God? Why that one?

5. As mentioned in question 1 (above), not all family relationships in the Bible are models to be emulated; many of them contain lessons of things to avoid. What life lessons have you learned that you’d do differently if you could live your life over? What Bible promises do you claim in order to help you move past your mistakes?
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.

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

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?**
Witnessing

Twenty-six-year-old Todd, unchurched and single, regarded family life as a necessary evil for the biological perpetuation of the species. His own family background had been full of strife, repression, and wounded love. When he started experimentally attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Todd noticed that some of the families there were genuinely happy. He observed husbands and wives treat each other kindly and address their children with loving respect, not as *brats* and nuisances who constantly needed to be punished and held in check. This was a revelation to Todd. He accepted invitations to several Adventist homes where he had a chance to observe the family dynamics and was amazed by how richly gratifying home life could be. If it had not been for this practical, living demonstration of Christianity, Todd probably would not have joined the church, as he did one year later, and eventually married to raise a family, who joyfully shares the same faith and spiritual beliefs.

“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 31, 32.

Ask yourself, whether married or single: What can I do to make my home life a more effective witness in my community?

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1. **Predictability**—Rituals occur regularly. If the children have to beg Dad to read them a story every Friday night, it is not a ritual.

2. **Connection**—Routines can be good times to build connections. Keeping certain routines, such as bedtime, positive and stress free can quickly turn them into pleasant rituals.

3. **Identity**—Tell children stories about their family. They love knowing where they came from, what is unique about their family, and who some of their notable relatives are.

4. **Enacting Values**—When values are enacted throughout certain routines, those routines can become rituals that teach those same values. Thus, specific routines involving the Sabbath day can become rituals through which children learn the value of worship and a day of rest.

In closing, it must be said that the material presented here is not a prescription of how to bring intentionality to families through the use of rituals. Families can be very diverse, whereby each family’s needs may differ widely. That is why family members need to decide together what is needed and how to make it work. This may require some sacrifices and some reprioritizing. It likely will require becoming more intentional, but the potential rewards are great.
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.*
**Icebreaker:** Proverbs 22:6 urges us to “train up a child in the way he should go.” “What is meant by train up? . . . The original root word is the term for ‘the palate, the roof of the mouth, the gums.’ In verb form, it is the term used for breaking and bringing into submission a wild horse by a rope in the mouth.

“The term was also used in the days of Solomon to describe the action of a midwife who, soon after helping deliver a child, would dip her finger into the juice of chewed or crushed dates, reach into the mouth of the infant, and massage the gums and the palate within the mouth so as to create a sensation of sucking, a sense of taste. The juice was also believed to be a cleansing agent in the newborn’s mouth. Then she would place the child in its mother’s arms to begin feeding from the mother’s breast. So it is the word used to describe ‘developing a thirst.’ ”—Charles R. Swindoll, *You and Your Child* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998), pp. 5, 6.

A paraphrase of Proverbs 22:6 could read: “Develop in a child a thirst for the Lord, and when he is grown he will not depart from Him!”

**Thought Question:**

In both the human and the church family, oftentimes the ones in charge feel obligated to “train up” their charges by making them do the right thing. One reason for this forcefulness is a genuine interest in saving the souls of those in their care. Another reason is the literal interpretation of Scripture or of the Spirit of Prophecy, without considering the original meaning, use, and connotation of the passage. Think of incidents in churches and among families in which good intentions end with poor results. Share these with the class and come up with ways to avoid the same mistakes. What is the importance of cutting the apron strings, so to speak, in such instances? What about reliance on the Holy Spirit’s competence? How does the need for individuals to make their own choices and to learn from the consequences also factor into child rearing?

**Application Question:**

Evaluate the failed ministries of your church. Think of reasons why they did not succeed. Next, read the icebreaker and compare the church with the midwife. Is your church in the business of training up people for God? Come up with at least four different ways you can create a thirst for the Lord in your community.

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:
1. Studying the theological and historical context of the message
2. Determining the original meanings of words
3. 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
4. Discovering broad-based principles and even details that apply to today’s family issues

Discussion Questions:
1. 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?
2. 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.
**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


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?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________
Key Text: Romans 12:2

Teachers Aims:

1. To establish that marriage was instituted by God to be a permanent and binding relationship.
2. To show how sin has affected the unity of man and woman and their unity with God.
3. To show how marriage can be restored to the blessing God intended it to be.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Essential Elements of Marriage (Matt. 19:6)
   A. Man and woman join in marriage to form a distinct family unit.
   B. Marriage was established for companionship, for procreation, and for sharing responsibilities.
   C. The family has specific God-given boundaries that should not be violated.

II. The Consequences of Sin (Gen. 3:8, 12, 14-19)
   A. The oneness that man and woman once shared is now marred by sin.
   B. The unity between humankind and the Creator was lost as a result of sin.

III. The Sacredness of Marriage Is Restored Through Christ (Phil. 2:4, Eph. 5:28, 29)
   A. Through the Holy Spirit, married couples can display the love of God.
   B. Each partner in the marriage union should seek to meet the needs of the other.
   C. Through the power of God, couples sacredly can guard their marital vows and their commitment.

Summary: When sin entered the world, the trusting relationships between man and woman and between humankind and the Creator were broken. But God, through Christ and the indwelling Spirit, seeks to restore unity in the marriage relationship and ultimately restore humanity’s relationship with Himself.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction
   In this week’s commentary we will share lists of negative and positive reasons for getting married. We also will take a look at the marriage of James and Ellen White, who lived during the era of the Institutional Family. Finally, we will share some letters written by the Whites to each other. Considering the context of their times, do they reflect more the culture of their society or the culture of heaven?

II. Reasons to Marry
   Some years ago Christian writer and counselor H. Norman
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?
Wright and a colleague pastor, Wes Roberts, shared a list of ten negative reasons why couples marry, which was compiled by recognized marriage and family-life-education specialists. It was suggested that during counseling, couples should submit their own list of why they were marrying then compare their list with the following negative reasons:

1. To spite their parents
2. Because marriage will make you feel worthwhile and will give meaning to your life
3. To be a therapist or counselor to your fiancée to try to fix your fiancée
4. The fear that you might never be married
5. The fear of independence or thinking you need to be with someone to feel safe and/or fulfilled
6. To ease the pain of just having broken up with someone else
7. Being worried over what will happen to your fiancée if you break up, even though you know this marriage should not occur
8. To escape an unhappy home
9. Because your fiancée is pregnant
10. Because you already have had sex


In addition to these ten negative reasons, the experts listed five healthy reasons why couples marry:

1. Companionship
2. To work together and fulfill your own and each other’s needs
3. To fulfill sexual needs in the way God intends
4. Love
5. Because you are convinced that it is God’s will for you to marry this person

(Wright and Roberts, p. 7).

It might be interesting to have your class members share some of their reasons for having married. Note that the above information was compiled years ago. What would be the negative and positive reasons for marrying today?

Marriage readiness also involves personal growth in many areas of the fruits of the Spirit (*Gal. 5:22, 23*), being appropriately adaptable and flexible, having the ability to empathize, being able to work through problems, being able to give and receive love, being emotionally stable, having things in common, having certain communication skills, and having similar family backgrounds.

We have discovered some level of incompatibility with virtually every couple we have worked with. Two people coming from different gene pools, being reared by different parents, perhaps even from different cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds, and being different genders—it is no wonder there are incompatibilities that must be dealt with from time to time. Our best advice is to confront
**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?**

____________________________________________________________________

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them lovingly, do not turn them into battlegrounds, and if an impasse is reached, prayerfully agree to discuss it at an agreed time. This implies processing incompatibilities, not trying to change the other for your sake, healthy communication and conflict resolution, and faith and trust in God.

### III. The Marriage of James and Ellen White
Because James and Ellen lived and worked together, and because both of them were driven by a belief that they must accomplish

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**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** *Genesis 2:21, 22; Matthew 19:3-9; Ephesians 5:22-33*

1. When Adam and Eve fell for Satan’s deceptions, not only was their relationship with God damaged, so was their relationship with each other. As you look back on your marriage experience, what are the biggest threats to marital happiness? If you’ve never been married, what do you think the greatest challenges would be? What biblical principles provide the remedies to those situations?

2. Read Matthew 19:3-5. Who were the questioners? What was the reason for their question? What did it reveal about the way they regarded marriage? What is it about marriage that leads many to regard it as a sentence rather than a blessing?

3. God created Adam and Eve as equals, but the entrance of sin into the world redefined their relationship (*Gen. 3:16, last part*). Is the *lordship* of the husband over the wife something that should be maintained until Jesus comes, or should couples strive for equality in their relationship as part of God’s original ideal for them? Explain why, or why not.

4. Sin is a fact of life. At one time or another, each partner in the marriage relationship will have to ask for, and extend, forgiveness to the other partner. Yet, divorce courts are full of people who find themselves unwilling or unable to forgive their spouses. What is the solution? What biblical principles apply?

5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: *In a divorce there are no innocent parties*? Let your class discuss this declaration. Have each speaker support his or her point with a Bible verse or passage. How should the church treat couples involved in a marital breakup?
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 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?
what God had called them to do, they did not have an easy marriage. James “firmly believed that his wife’s messages came from God,” but her “straight words” about his working too much were difficult for him to accept.

After James suffered a series of strokes between 1865 and 1881, he became subject to mood swings and suspicions. James, meanwhile, was responding quite defensively.

Sometime later, Ellen wrote to James, “Forgive me and I will be cautious not to start any subject to annoy and distress you. . . . Wherein I have done this, I am sorry.”—George R. Knight, Walking with Ellen White (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publ. Assoc., 1999), p.76

James countered with an apology of his own.

Whatever the tensions and frustrations of their marriage may have been, their love was real. After James died in 1881, Ellen reportedly missed him very much. Twenty-five years

Witnessing

In today’s world, marriage is the butt of many sarcastic and suggestive jokes. The general assumption is that after the sensual joys of marriage fade, it becomes a yoke of bondage and a battleground between husband and wife, as well as a breeding ground for adulterous intrigue; and the best that can be hoped for is a seldom-violated truce between mates. This is a cynical travesty of the true purpose and potential of marriage.

God’s stated ideal for marriage is that husband and wife should blend into a sanctified unity that preserves, while it enhances, the individual identity of each partner.

In order for ideal marital relations to be fulfilled, as set forth in Ephesians 5:20-25, both partners must consistently ask themselves, Is my conduct and attitude Christlike? Am I patient, considerate, forgiving, helpful, generous, and tenderhearted?

Each partner must strive to be worthy of the other’s respect and trust and avoid the futile trap of trying to make the other reveal all the gracious qualities lacking in both.

Of the three options below, which seems the best for the restoration or maintenance of a fulfilling marriage?

1. I will periodically give my mate a gift book on how to be a better husband or wife.

2. I will systematically (and tactfully) bring to my mate’s attention the exemplary acts and traits of others that I wish to see reproduced in my own partner.

3. I will seek to exemplify in my own conduct the virtues and graces that I prize in others.

Point to ponder: Of these three, which stance comes closest to the golden rule of Matthew 7:12?
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 sacrally 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?**
after James died, Ellen described him as “the best man that ever trod shoe leather.”—Page 78.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** The word *cleave* holds an inherent contradiction: At the same time that it infers a split, or a breaking apart, it also embodies the idea of clinging, or fastening, to the new. Divorce is one of the most traumatic breakages a person can experience, and its meaning emphasizes what is broken or lost. But when a person’s marriage breaks, or cleaves apart, what is there to cleave to in the wreckage and debris that divorce leaves behind? How can cleaving to Christ make a difference, even when the marriage is beyond repair?

**Thought Questions:**

1. Study the following passages: Matthew 18:10-14, Mark 8:1-8, Luke 7:11-15, John 19:25-27. What lessons of compassion can you learn from Christ? The next time you know of someone in your human family or your church family who is going through difficult times, ask yourself, In what specific ways am I able to help?

2. William Barclay points out six virtues in Romans 15 that should characterize Christian fellowship: hope, harmony, praise, consideration of one another, study of the Scripture, and an optimistic attitude of the heart toward life. Barclay then concludes his summary with these words: “The essence of the matter is that the Christian fellowship takes its example, its inspiration and its dynamic from Jesus Christ.”—Barclay, “The Letter to the Romans,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 197. Think of situations within your church that could benefit from these six traits. How can these traits be converted into Christlike actions?

**Application Question:**

Romans 15:1 sets the stage for this week’s memory text. “It is significant that when Paul speaks of *bearing* the weaknesses of others [Romans 15:1] he uses the same word as is used of Christ bearing his Cross (bastazein).”—Barclay, p. 197 Without the original meaning, or context, of the word *bearing*, it is easy to take this verse lightly and say to oneself, “I need to put up with the aggravation!” *Bearing*, however, means more; it involves the element of selfless sacrifice and love. Keeping this in mind, how can your church strive to be more supportive of a member going through divorce? Think of at least two specific ways we may help to bear his or her suffering.

*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.
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?

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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.*

____________________________________________________________________
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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).
**Key Text:** *Mark 10:14*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that children belong to God, who created all things.
2. To explore the reasons for having children.
3. To explain parents’ responsibilities in caring for their children.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. God’s Property (*Ps. 127:3*)
   A. Children belong to God.
   B. Parents are responsible for teaching their children Bible principles.
   C. Parents must seek God’s guidance in raising their children.

II. A Prayerful Decision (*Prov. 3:6*)
   A. Much prayer and thought should be given to the decision to have children.
   B. Couples should have children out of a desire to share their love for one another with those children.

III. Meeting the Needs of Children (*Prov. 22:6, Eph. 6:4*)
   A. Parents care and provide for their children just as the heavenly Father cares for us.
   B. Children are to be disciplined in a spirit of love and kindness.
   C. The home should be filled with affection, acceptance, structure, and boundaries.
   D. Children who are shown respect learn self-respect and become socially responsible.

IV. The Faith of Children (*Matt. 18:3-5*)
   A. The Lord teaches us to cherish and respect the faith of children.
   B. Faith is cultivated by emotional security.
   C. Learning to trust parents teaches children to trust in God’s care for them.

**Summary:** Parents are responsible for teaching their children to be disciples of Christ. Through respect and proper care, children learn to trust God and develop wholesome relationships with others.

**COMMENTARY**

I. Introduction

This week we are focusing on how children are gifts from God. Some in your class may be in the process of rearing their own children, while some may have not yet conceived or adopted. Still others may not desire to become parents. Some may have painful memories of their own childhoods, and some may feel shame about how they have reared their children. Thus, it is important to be sensitive while teaching this topic.
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.
II. **Rearing Children as a “Heritage From the Lord”**

Many profess to understand that their children are a “heritage of the Lord.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 159. They are familiar with the verses studied in this lesson and can quote them to make their point. Along with having dominion over the earth, Adam and Eve were privileged to bear and rear children. However, we see many children who have not experienced a home that reflects the high honor of this privilege.

Ask class members how their parents (or another family member) portrayed to them that they were “an heritage of the Lord” (*Ps. 127:3*).

Monday’s study discusses the decision to have children. In considering the impact of infertility in certain biblical families, I (Sue) was reminded of a couple we knew 40 years ago who had difficulty conceiving. Having a child became an obsession to the woman, until finally she became pregnant. However, the reality of carrying the child, giving birth, and then actually caring for the child had been obscured by her desire for it. Years after the child’s birth, this woman confided to me that she really had not enjoyed motherhood and that she was sorry that she had had a child. Consequently, her husband had done the majority of the parenting.

Most couples desire to have children of their own yet are unable to conceive. In the last twenty years, Assisted Reproductive Therapy (ART) has become available to many such couples. It is not uncommon for ART to cost more than ten thousand dollars up to a six-figure number. The Division of Reproductive Health for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that ART accounts for approximately 1 percent of total U.S. births. Last reported in 2001, there were 421 ART clinics in the U.S. Of those, 384 clinics reported 107,587 cycles, with 40,687 live babies (http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/ART01/nation.htm). The stress involved with ART, including financial pressures, can be overwhelming.

There are many ways, however, individuals or couples can care for children other than having their own. Have your class discuss some of these ways.

Tuesday’s study portrays God as a parent. Why is it so hard for some of us to envision God that way? Eva was 71 years old and a retired minister of a Protestant denomination. When I (Sue) met her at a retreat, I assumed she would describe herself as being close to God. One evening, after spending a day in required silence along nature trails and in rooms where we could pray and study, we came together to eat and to break our silence. It was then that Eva began to weep as she shared that for the first time in her life she realized she was God’s child and that He always had loved and cared for her. She confessed that because of her minister-father’s harshness and
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?

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<th>God as Parent</th>
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<td>Deut. 1:31, John 6:33-35, Phil. 4:19</td>
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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?
disapproval, she had never felt good enough; and although she felt called to the ministry, she now realized she had never heard God speak to her before. Her earthly father was now deceased, but she was overjoyed finally to understand God’s fatherly love for her.

As Ellen White shared the importance of kindness and firmness in dealing with children (see Wednesday’s study), I am reminded of Eva. She never experienced the kind of warmth, affection, and sense of belonging that she yearned to receive from her father.

### Inductive Bible Study


1. No one develops in a vacuum. Ideally, our physical, emotional, and spiritual development take place in the context of a loving-family environment. What are your earliest memories of spiritual insights communicated by someone in your family? If you didn’t grow up in a Christian home, how did you learn about God? Were all your impressions positive? Why, or why not?

2. The raising of children is unbelievably difficult. First, there are unnumbered experts giving often conflicting advice. Then, even the most conscientious parents sometimes have to watch while their children make unwise decisions that lead to disastrous consequences. What Bible promises can parents claim regarding their continuing influence in their children’s lives? How do our experiences with a disobedient child mirror God’s disappointment with us?

3. Jesus taught His disciples to address God as “our Father” (Matt. 6:9). What personality trait from an earthly parent gave you a glimpse into God’s character? If you did not have a positive parental figure, who helped you understand what God is like?

4. Our children know whether our religious experience is genuine or not (and it is not based on our ability to rehearse a list of fundamental beliefs). How do you know your children have embraced your spiritual values for themselves? *(Read Micah 6:8.)* What’s more influential: words or actions?

5. The goal of successful child raising is eventually to give our children more and more freedom, because self-control is the best control. What experiences can you share relative to giving your children more control over their own lives? What worked? What did not? What did you learn about the freedom God grants His children?
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.
Perhaps he did not understand a child’s need for structure (appropriate rules, boundaries, and discipline), along with nurture (an abundance of love, caring, laughter, devotion, and respect). Could it be that he was so concerned with her behavior that he missed a crucial part of his responsibility to her?

Jesus affirmed the faith of children (see Thursday’s study). Our grandson, Alex, recently affirmed our faith. As we were driving along a U.S. highway to the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga, we noticed a man lying on the other side of a chain-link fence with a white dog standing over him. What should we do? Considering the heavy traffic and the fact we were not familiar with the area, we decided to continue on, hoping someone more familiar with the surroundings would know how to reach him. After we had made our decision, Alex suggested that the driver of our car keep his eyes

Witnessing

A child’s core concepts of life are formed by the influences of the home, which lay a nearly ineradicable foundation. Parents should seek to model a manner in which all the affections and thoughts are brought into captivity to the will of God. Lecturing, haranguing, and punishing will not be nearly as productive as a consistent example. Parental instruction is effective in proportion to its fidelity to Scripture, in word and deed.

In the context of this understanding, how can parents avoid

1 blind affection (leading to permissiveness) and undue severity (which crushes a child’s self-respect and ability to attain healthy self-control);

2 arbitrariness (which is unsettling for lack of consistent rules) and inflexibility (which won’t take into account extenuating circumstances)?

“Children cannot be brought to the Lord by force. They can be led, but not driven. ‘My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me,’ Christ declares. He did not say, My sheep hear My voice and are forced into the path of obedience. In the government of children love must be shown. Never should parents cause their children pain by harshness or unreasonable exactions. Harshness drives souls into Satan’s net.

“The combined influence of authority and love will make it possible to hold firmly and kindly the reins of family government. An eye single to the glory of God and to what our children owe Him will keep us from looseness and from sanctioning evil.”

*Ask yourself:* “How can I improve as a parent (or mentor to the young) in the way I administer correction and instill right principles of conduct?”
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.*

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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.*

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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?
opened while everyone else closed their’s to pray for the man. The three adults in the car were surprised that a seven-year-old was the one who wanted to bring this concern to the Lord. This was a child who knew it was safe to bring his needs not only to the Lord but also to his family.

When children are physically and emotionally cared for by the important adults in their lives, they flourish. Sadly, however, many children grow up with feelings of rejection. The result? Their relationships with others easily become troubled, including their relationship with God.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “Charles Francis Adams, 19th century political figure and diplomat, kept a diary. One day he entered: ‘Went fishing with my son today—a day wasted.’ His son, Brook Adams, also kept a diary, which is still in existence. On that same day, Brook Adams made this entry: ‘Went fishing with my father—the most wonderful day of my life!’ The father thought he was wasting his time while fishing with his son, but his son saw it as an investment of time. The only way to tell the difference between wasting and investing is to know one’s ultimate purpose in life and to judge accordingly.”—Silas Shotwell, in *Homemade*, September 1987 (http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/c/children.htm).

**Thought Question:**

“Christianity transformed life for the child. In the immediate background of Christianity, the marriage relationship had broken down, and the home was in peril. Divorce was so common that it was neither unusual nor particularly blameworthy for a woman to have a new husband every year. In such circumstances children were a disaster.”—William Barclay, “The Gospel of John,” *The Daily Study Bible*, Revised Edition, vol. 2, p. 81. While the church is not called to take the place of parents in the rearing of children, it does have a responsibility toward them. How can your church cater to the needs of children?

**Application Question:**

The family takes on different compositions—traditional families, single parents, parents without children, foster families, and others. Like the story in the icebreaker, there are many children with parents who see their role limited to providing food and shelter to children. How can your church take advantage of the different types of families represented in the church to maximize its ministry to its children?

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.
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.

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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.

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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?
Key Text: Isaiah 54:13

Teachers Aims:
1. To show how children first learn faith, truth, and values at home.
2. To show how parents must teach by example and make worship a part of daily living.

Lesson Outline:
I. Teaching Faith and Discipleship (Deut. 6:6, 7)
   A. Children learn to have faith in God in the home.
   B. The Bible is the standard for teaching faith.
   C. Parents should teach children to be disciples.

II. Children First Learn at Home (Prov. 22:6)
   A. The family provides the opportunity for children to learn truth and values.
   B. The home is the place in which children learn to develop loving relationships.
   C. Children, in turn, when grown, pass on learned values to their own offspring.

III. Parents Lead by Example (Prov. 1:8)
   A. Parents help prepare their children for spiritual challenges by sharing their own experiences.
   B. Youthful minds must be guided to choose God’s way.

IV. Daily Worship (Ps. 95:6)
   A. Daily worship in the home is for the purpose of meeting with God and for hearing His Word.
   B. Family prayer strengthens family ties.
   C. Spiritual things must be presented in an attractive manner to the youth.

Summary: Parenting is the mutual responsibility of father and mother. Parents must lead by example, helping the youth to develop wholesome values by experiencing daily worship and by learning Bible truths at home.

Commentary
I. Introduction
For 40 years Sue and I (Don) have been involved in the educational ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My 40 years as a residence-hall dean have been punctuated by stories shared from the hearts of adolescents and young adults. Many of these stories have been about the yearning for parental approval. This commentary is about finding a way to receive and send those messages of approval in the form of what the Bible calls a blessing.

Even the children of well-meaning parents sometimes are
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?
confused about their place in the family. One day a young man who had learned that his parents were giving him a new car for graduation shared with me what he really wanted—their love and acceptance. The car seemed just one more way to manipulate him. Several hours later these parents arrived on campus. They sat in our living room and told us how much they loved their son. As Sue watched them go to their car to drive home, she realized that if children do not feel loved, it does not matter how much their parents love them.

Children do not need perfect parents; but they do need parents who understand their developmental needs, their temperaments and personalities, their joys and sorrows, and how they best receive love. This requires continual dialog throughout life. Just as a continual dialog with Christ keeps our relationship with Him strong, the same is true with parents and their children.

II. The Blessing

If you have a legal will, you have spent time thinking about how certain family possessions will be passed on to the next generation. Items passed on are a significant part of the family legacy. However, a legacy is more than money or possessions. A legacy also can be a validation of accomplishment, a recognition of achievement, and an affirmation of acceptance. It can be a statement of hope and trust in the future of the family and a confirmation of family values. If your child asked you to explain the meaning of your family, how would you answer?

In biblical times the family legacy was passed on through the blessing given to the eldest son. God blessed Abraham (Gen. 12:2, 3) and Isaac (Gen. 25:11). In turn, Isaac blessed Jacob (Gen. 27:26-29). The tradition of passing on the blessing became a strong thread in the fabric of Hebrew culture.

What can we learn from these examples of personal affirmations that we can apply to current realities? According to Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent, the fundamental ingredients of a blessing are:

- Meaningful touch
- A spoken message
- Attaching high value to the one being blessed
- Picturing a special future for the one being blessed
- An active commitment to fulfill the blessing


Now let us consider some of these ingredients.

III. Meaningful Touch

Did you witness your parents embracing, kissing, or holding hands? Were you hugged enough and kissed enough as a child? Is appropriate physical touch a means of loving communication in your current family?
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?
Meaningful touch is an important part of the blessing. Descriptions of physical touch often accompany the stories in Scripture of passed-on blessings.

IV. A Spoken Message

“A blessing becomes so only when it is spoken.”—Smalley and Trent, p. 25. “There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. . . . We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Proverbs 3:5-12, Ephesians 6:1-4

1 Training our children to become Christ’s disciples assumes that we have accepted Christ’s discipline in our own lives. Make a list of seven essential characteristics parents should be able to pass on to their children by word and action. For each characteristic, mention at least one strategy to accomplish that transmission.

2 Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is God’s mandate to communicate spiritual truths to the next generation. Notice the progression: “when you sit . . . when you walk . . . when you lie down . . . when you rise up.” Today, when family members often head off in different directions, what specific methods can parents use to carve out quality time to transmit values to their children?

3 Morning and evening worship is one way families can bond with one another in a typical work/school day. What methods have you developed that meet the needs of your family? What have you tried that didn’t work? What devotional activities appeal to your family the most?

4 The parable of the lost sons (Luke 15:11-32) reminds us that the child who stays home to work can sometimes be just as lost as the child who travels to a distant country. How do you know that your children understand grace, as well as discipleship? How have you tried to communicate grace?

5 The other side of the commandment “Honor your father and your mother” (Exod. 20:12) is Paul’s admonition: “Fathers, do not provoke your children” (Eph. 6:4). We have to earn our children’s respect. The older they get, the more difficult that becomes. What’s the one thing you want your adult children never to forget? What’s the best way to communicate that?
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.*

**V. Attaching High Value to the One Being Blessed**

Consider the blessing Isaac gave Jacob in Genesis 27:26-29. If you were affirming a son or daughter what would you say to tell that child how much you value him or her? Be specific. Avoid flat-tery and words like *always* and *never*. For example, “I cherish you and the kindness you showed that little child just now” is better than “You always do so well with children.”

**Witnessing**

Discipling comes about through the intimate contact of mind with mind and the daily example that teachers and parents set before those they wish to instruct. Children note everything that adults do. They observe our facial expressions, tones of voice, style and tempo of movement, as well as the things we say and the priorities that engage our attention. We are all living epistles, but the question to be settled is What content may be read in the scroll of our lives?

Mary Jane grew up in a home where worships were exploited as a platform for her father to assert his authority as the head of the house. He lengthily catechized Mary Jane and her siblings to cease being rebellious and always to obey their father. He assured them that they were all on the path to perdition, because they did not adequately conform to his requirements. Mary Jane and her brothers and sisters actually did strive to do what was right, but their performance always fell short of their father’s burdensome expectations and inquisitorial probes. As a teenager Mary Jane determined that when she became a parent, she would not turn family worship into a judicial inquest. It took her many years to discover how much God loves His children and seeks to impart His joy to them and how different His discipline is from the censure and condemnation that was wrapped about her childhood like a shroud.

**Objective:** Draw up fresh plans for making family worship pleasant, lively, brief, substantive, and uplifting. How can children be included in the selection of various parts of family worship? How can we make family worship an experience of coming into God’s banqueting house where His banner over us is love, instead of a dreary trek to a spiritual wasteland?
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?

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**Icebreaker:** Nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Horatius Bonar asked 253 Christian friends how old they were when they were converted. Here’s what he discovered:

- Under 20 years of age—138
- Between 20 and 30—85
- Between 30 and 40—22
- Between 40 and 50—4
- Between 50 and 60—3
- Between 60 and 70—1
- Over 70—0

(Daily Bread [http://www.christianglobe.com/Illustrations/the Details.asp?whichOne=c&whichFile=children]).

**Thought Question:**

A 35-year-old, third-generation, Seventh-day Adventist single man unburdened his heart to a female friend one day. He said, “I’m an Adventist only by habit. I believe in God. I read my Bible and pray every day. Yet, I don’t know who Jesus really is. Where do I find that intimate relationship you have with Jesus?” While his friend searched for words of consolation, she thought of her mother, her grandfather, and her junior Sabbath School teacher, who showed her the real Jesus. She realized how fortunate she was to have met Jesus when she was younger. Discuss why your church loses church members. Identify discipleship programs and methods for the under-twenty-age-group members of your church.

**Application Question:**

“Merrill Lynch now offers a ‘financial parenting’ service to the children of its wealthiest clients (those with at least $100 million in net assets). The financial powerhouse contracts with psychologists to help children cope with such ‘affluenza’ symptoms as ‘sloth and selfishness and a general disconnect from the average Joe.’ The service also helps educate its young clients about the responsibilities of wealth, including the importance of charity.” —U.S. News & World Report, “Poor Little Rich Kids,” Discipleship Journal, vol. 118 (July/August 2000), p. 14. The trend in today’s busy society is to find someone else to do parental jobs. While one person cannot single-handedly change this trend, each of us can seek to meet the needs of parents in the community. Challenge your class to research the needs of families in your area. How can your church meet at least one of these needs?

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:

1. 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.

2. 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.
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?
Key Texts: Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 7:3, 4

Teachers Aims:

1. To discuss God’s design for human sexuality.
2. To explain the father’s and the mother’s role in the home.
3. To show how positive attitudes make the home more pleasant.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Divine Standard for Sexual Intimacy (Phil. 4:13)
   A. God-fearing individuals reserve sexual intimacy for marriage.
   B. Christians must make a firm commitment to God’s plan for sexual intimacy.
   C. Making the right choices can come only through Divine intervention.

II. A Father’s Influence in the Home (Prov. 27:23)
   A. A godly father looks out for the well-being of his children.
   B. A father’s influence has a direct impact on the character development of his children.
   C. Children look to their father for spiritual guidance.

III. A Father’s and a Mother’s Presence in the Home (Prov. 13:24, 31:10)
   A. Parents’ love and respect for each other affects the well-being of their children.
   B. A wise man will seek the Lord’s guidance in his role as husband and father.
   C. Loving discipline is vital to leading children down the right path.
   D. A godly woman diligently works to meet the needs of her family.

IV. The Home Atmosphere (Prov. 17:22)
   A. Cheerfulness makes the home more pleasant.
   B. To avoid suppressed anger, problems in the home should be confronted right away, in the spirit of love and forgiveness.

Summary: Reverence for God will strengthen the marriage and the family. Through Divine intervention a couple can guard their marital vows and have loving relationships with each other and their children.

COMMENTARY

Many words of wisdom and practical advice exist for couples and families. Spend time in your class sharing some of the advice and wisdom that has been passed down in each other’s family.

The following words of advice and wisdom are either from Scripture, Ellen White, or other Christian authors:

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers [or sisters] live together in unity” (Ps. 133:1, NIV).
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?**
“Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in his ways” (Ps. 128:1, NIV).

“‘From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked’” (Luke 12:48, NIV, last part).

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’” (Eccles. 12:1, NIV).

“One of the worst feelings in the world is when you realize that the ‘first things’ in your life—including your family—are getting pushed into second or third place, or even further down the list. And it becomes even worse when you realize what’s happening as a result.”—Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful Families*, p. 113.

“As long as we’re in the role of judge and jury, we rarely have the kind of influence we want.”—Page 211.

“Communication is an art, and like any art form it requires disciplined practice. Initially, the practice may be tedious and unfulfilling. Many people drop out or look for shortcuts, but those who stick with it are rewarded with deep and fulfilling relationships. Like a musician who has mastered his instrument, they are free to make beautiful music—and communication is the music of marriage.”—Richard Exley, *Marriage in the Making* (Tulsa, Okla.: Honor Books, 1994), p. 80.

“As surely as we need God’s help to overcome temptation, to master the disciplines of prayer and to mature as men of God, so we need divine enablement to become the kind of husbands and fathers our families need us to be. Even as God willingly helps us in all the other areas of our lives so will He help us become godly husbands and fathers.”—Page 49.

“The church needs to be first and foremost a place where the gospel is preached and where Christ is honored as our Lord and Savior. But God designed the church to be a caring community as well.”—Smalley and Trent, *The Blessing*, p. 190.


“Marriage, in a majority of cases, is a most galling yoke. There are thousands that are mated but not matched. The books of heaven are burdened with the woes, the wickedness, and the abuse that lie hidden under the marriage mantle.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 44.

“There must be love and respect manifested by the parents for one another, if they would see these qualities developed in their children.”—Page 216.

“Pity the man who is married to a woman who cannot listen without offering advice.”—Exley, *Marriage in the Making*, p. 53.
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?

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“In truth, you expect too much! A spouse can love you, listen to you and affirm you, but he or she can not be responsible for your emotional well-being. Such unrealistic expectations set you up for disappointment, which often leads to despair, then resentment.”—Page 33.

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Pet. 1:13, NIV).

“Every marriage should be romantic. I feel sorry for couples who have let the romance go out of their marriages. However, a marriage needs more than romance to survive. Sitting up all night with a sick

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Proverbs 3:5, 6; 5:3-14; 17:22; 31:10-31

1. When we are young, we chafe under the demands and expectations of those who are older than we are. As we get older, we long to live free of any external restraints. Yet, as we get older, we also discover how life is interconnected; rarely can we do something without having that action affect someone else. Who are those whose actions are most likely to affect you directly? Whose lives do you directly touch with your actions?

2. The story of David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) is an object lesson in the disintegration caused by immorality. Instead of making a course correction and admitting his misdeeds, David’s life spirals downward into adultery, deception, and murder. Why is it that we’re so often blind to the heartache caused by pre-marital or extramarital affairs? What is God’s counsel to those tempted to leave what they have for something they hope will be better?

3. Someone has said, “When your only tool is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.” Rather than being one-dimensional, parental discipline uses a variety of methods to guide its charges. What kinds of discipline does God use in guiding us? How do these translate into methods we can use in guiding our children and grandchildren?

4. Read Proverbs 21:9, 19; 27:14-16. Do you see the humor in these proverbs? What examples of humor do you see in Christ’s life and teachings? (Hint: Read Matt. 7:3-5, 19:24, Luke 11:11.) You may have to translate these verbal images into visual ones. How does your family use humor to soften the bumps in life’s highway?
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.
child is not very romantic, especially by the third or fourth night. Caring for your mate when he or she has the flu is not romantic. Changing dirty diapers is not at all romantic. There are many aspects to marriage that are not romantic and that require more than infatuation to get through. Romantic love is based on feelings; however, genuine love is based on commitment. It is the commitment, not romance, that will carry a couple through the difficult times.”

Witnessing

Perhaps no book on earth is so full of practical and pithy counsels on marriage and family life as the book of Proverbs. Solomon, the world’s wisest man, understood that homes are the building blocks of society. He recognized that he was dealing with a subject of primary importance.

Solomon’s inspired maxims never were meant to be quoted in jest or used as darts against the opposite sex. Rather, they are meant to function as a handheld mirror to aid us in correct self-knowledge. Solomon’s foundational precept by which husbands and wives each can improve is “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding; In all thy ways, acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6).

For men, Solomon strongly advocates moral purity (Proverbs 7) and fervent, affectionate loyalty to one’s own wife (Prov. 5:15-19). The observance of these two precepts would prevent most marital problems. Could it be that Solomon has several observations about the stressful behavior of frustrated wives, because so many of them have insensitive and domineering husbands? Certainly in all the world’s religious literature, no more beautiful description of a practical and virtuous wife can be found than in Proverbs 31:10-31.

Qualities of the kind described here are best brought out in a woman whose husband expressively and reciprocally is appreciative of her goodness.

“If your dispositions are not congenial, would it not be for the glory of God for you to change these dispositions?

“A husband and wife should cultivate respect and affection for each other. They should guard the spirit, the words, and the actions so that nothing will be said or done to irritate or annoy. Each is to have a care for the other, doing all in their power to strengthen their mutual affection.”—Ellen G. White, The Adventist Home, p. 345.

This kind of home life, which is very rare, illustrates the life-beautifying effects of the gospel.

Solomon’s own moral fall with women (1 Kings 11:1-4) demonstrates that we need more than pure wisdom to stay on the right path; we also need grace (see 1 Cor. 1:30, 31).
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 vasty 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?

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “He was one of the greatest rulers in African history and the creator of modern Ethiopia. Born in 1844, he was captured during an enemy raid and held prisoner for 10 years. Escaping, Menelik II declared himself head of the province of Shewa. He began conquering neighboring kingdoms and developed them into modern Ethiopia with himself as emperor. When Italy tried to take over Ethiopia, Menelik’s army met and crushed the Italians at the Battle of Aduwa. This victory, as well as his efforts to modernize Ethiopia (schools, telephones, railroads), make Menelik world-famous. The emperor had one little-known eccentricity. Whenever he was feeling ill, he would eat a few pages of the Bible, insisting that this always restored his health. One day in December, 1913, recovering from a stroke and feeling extremely ill, he had the entire book of Kings torn from an Egyptian edition of the Bible, ate every page of it—and died.” (http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_application_of.htm)

**Thought Questions:**

1. Like Menelik II, the church sometimes is guilty of ingesting the words of the Scriptures while failing to *apply* God’s Word to everyday life. Find examples of how this is done in not only the church but in the home, as well.

2. Someone once said, “We have 35 million laws on the books to enforce the Ten Commandments.”—Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 47. Imagine a world where the only laws were the Ten Commandments. What would that do for society? For the validity of the Bible? For other religions and cultures? Would there be revolt or peace? Defend your answer.

**Application Question:**

Family or personal worship often becomes routine. Without relevance to changing personal needs and crises in life, worship soon becomes meaningless. Find texts in Proverbs that provide practical ways the Word can be used in your life. Share creative ways of worship with your class.

*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:

1. 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?

2. As a class, read your answers aloud to Wednesday’s final question. Discuss the implications of your various answers.

3. 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.
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.*

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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 (*Ps. 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.*

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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?
Key Text: *Proverbs 5:15-17*

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To show that sexuality is a sacred gift from God.
2. To reveal the importance of intimacy and of unity within the marriage.
3. To emphasize that infidelity is a sin against God.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. The Spirituality of Sexuality *(1 Cor. 6:18-20)*
   A. The Scriptures reveal sexuality as an essential part of life.
   B. The body, including the sexual nature, is to be set apart for holy use.
   C. Christian parents should share godly values and truths regarding sexuality with their children at an appropriate age.

II. Intimacy in Marriage *(1 Cor. 7:2, 3)*
   A. Friendship between marital partners is important to the well-being of their relationship.
   B. The Bible teaches husbands and wives to have monogamous relationships.
   C. Marital partners can safeguard against sexual immorality by not withholding affection from each other.

III. Unity in Marriage *(Gen. 2:24)*
   A. The Scriptures reveal the oneness that God desires married couples to share.
   B. Complete oneness is expressed in the sexual union.
   C. Unity in marriage is a revelation of the unity between God and the church.

IV. Infidelity Is Sin Against God *(1 Thess. 4:3)*
   A. The Bible admonishes Christians to avoid sexual immorality.
   B. Sexual sin destroys God’s image in humankind.
   C. God offers forgiveness to those who have sinned in the past.

**Summary:** Sexual intimacy is a gift from God and should be reserved for marriage. The sexual experience is an expression of the unity between husband and wife. Parents should explain the biblical values of sexuality to their children at an appropriate age.

**COMMENTARY**

I. Introduction

Popular culture has so distorted our thinking that many people believe sexuality is anything but holy. Are you, as the teacher, ready for a frank but reverent discussion of a topic often viewed as profane? Why was the Song of Solomon included in Scripture? What does it teach us that has life-saving relevance for today? Why are there still some Seventh-day Adventists who want to argue about why it is wrong to have sex on the Sabbath? How can we teach our
The Loves of the Love Song

**Describe** various aspects of love presented in the Song of Solomon.  

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**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?

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children about the holiness, beauty, and joy of sexuality when all around them are conflicting messages?

II. Why Study About Sexuality?

Sexuality is a major preoccupation of contemporary society. How does one live with sexual drives without being consumed by them? What does it mean to be a man? A woman? Many people always have sex on their minds, while others are in over their heads with sexual engagements.

Our homes, churches, and schools need to present a Christian approach to sexuality that does more than build barriers against temptation. What we need is understanding, hope, and healing from our shame and guilt.

What does God have to do with sexuality? He created us male and female (Gen. 1:27) and thus provided the most intricate and intense human experience—the sexual response.

What did God have in mind when He created us as sexual beings? Nathan Greene portrays in a painting that electric moment when God introduced Adam to Eve. We have the biblical account in Genesis 2:21-23, but it does not give details. How much time elapsed between the introduction and the wedding homily in Genesis 2:24, 25?

Why does Scripture include Genesis 2:25? What does “naked” and “not ashamed” mean? Who is the author of shame? How would our marriages be different if we still were “not ashamed”?

What God had in mind when He created us as sexual beings is answered, in part, by an understanding of the word dominion, or responsibility. Just as humanity was given dominion over the earth, we also were given dominion over our bodies. We can choose to abuse our bodies or to nurture them. With the power of choice comes accountability. We always must live with the consequences of the choices we make.

Every dominion in life bears a corresponding obligation. A Christian view of sexuality affirms that restraint is the scriptural obligation regarding sexual intercourse. Scripture teaches that this union is a sign of the commitment between a man and a woman. This commitment is called marriage. The whole of each person is involved in the sexual act. It is communication that is physical, emotional, and spiritual.

The gift of our sexuality was given to us for procreation and relational bonding and as a means of renewing the wedding vows. However, this is not the message of popular culture.

Fearing sexuality is often the root of being obsessed with it and the motivation behind joking about it. The scriptural picture of sexuality, however, provides freedom from this fear. God’s Word upholds the dignity of male and female sexuality, as it teaches restraint and a balanced stewardship of bodies and emotions. When
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.
we learn not to be afraid of sex and are better able to understand the biblical concept of it, we will be able to enjoy it for what God intended it to be.

How does restraint contribute to an understanding of sexuality? Christian sexual restraint demonstrates a respect for something that is very good. It is not that God does not want us to enjoy sex. He wants us to remain emotionally, physically, and spiritually healthy so we can enjoy the gift of sexual intercourse to the fullest within the protective commitment of marriage. Being responsible with one’s

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Text for Discovery: ** *Song of Solomon 1–8*

1. Sex must be an important part of human relationships, or else why would Satan so desperately try to pervert it? Yet, sexual intimacy is just one kind of intimacy that married couples share. What are other types? How do those other types of intimacy affect the sexual kind?

2. The notion that sex is a *necessary evil* has been propounded by religious people to the present day. What scriptural evidence can you present to show that God intended sexual relations to be part of a married couple’s total physical, emotional, and spiritual make-up?

3. What are the leading sources for society’s perception about romance and sex? Are they realistic? Or are they only products of some screenwriter’s fantasies? What dramatic portrayals about romance and sex have you seen or read about that were consistent with biblical values and principles? Describe them briefly.

4. The results of sexual infidelity are legion: unwanted pregnancies, divorce, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. People who have made mistakes in improper sexual situations hardly need well-meaning critics reminding them of their mistakes. What do they need? What Bible promises can you share with those who carry the guilt of inappropriate sexual relationships?

5. Jesus’ message to the church in Ephesus, “You have forsaken your first love,” may apply to some married couples (*Rev. 2:4, NIV*). What may have started out as a passionate, fiery romance has died down to a few smoldering embers in danger of becoming lumps of cold charcoal. How can you rekindle the flames of passion so that both you and your spouse are warmed? Or, have other forms of intimacy replaced sexual intimacy? Are they sufficient?
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?
sexuality will pay rich dividends in freedom from shame and guilt.

This is what God desires; but what does Satan want? He wants to trivialize sex, to make us afraid of it, to fill us with shame and guilt about it. Remember, Satan is a fallen angel, and perhaps this causes him to envy what humankind is able to experience in cooperation with God. After all, it was Lucifer’s envy of Christ’s position in the Godhead that caused him to be cast out of heaven.

Because of sin, sexuality often falls short of God’s ideal. When we sin sexually, the God who created us as sexual beings can heal our shame and guilt, our temptations and our confusion, and even our fears. Because of sin, there is often mistrust, disconnection, alienation, and rejection. These find expression in disorders relating to sexual desire. However, when we repent and ask forgiveness, we also are admitting that a part of our life has lost its way. We turn to the Lord of new beginnings for restoration. Regardless of what has happened in the past, God has promised the miracle of a

Witnessing

Solomon’s song testifies of a love stronger than death and far more deeply interfused with life and light and glory than mere fleshly passion ever could be. The kind of intimacy to be sought in marriage includes a deep appreciation for the hidden qualities of grace and the finer sensibilities of soul that none could be privy to but those who have become one flesh and one spirit through matrimony.

Physical intimacies outside marriage are a mutual violation of privacy, even if consensual. Physical intimacy is a gift that accompanies the fulfillment of the mutual obligations of married life—service, support, and protective regard for one another’s honor and well-being. Adultery is selfish and inconsiderate in the highest degree, because it breaks the sanctity of the home circle and severs the bands of trust, loyalty, and single-minded devotion to a relationship that God has commanded that no man shall put asunder. Adultery is comparable to murder, because it kills love and casts contempt on the value of the person who has the right to look to his or her spouse for loyalty and protection. Adultery is the slaying of a relationship.

Project: Read the Song of Solomon with a view to catching every ray of light it reveals on how to discover and bring out all that is best in your mate or fiancé(e). If you are a woman, project yourself into the heart and mind of the Shulamite woman. If you are a man, do the same exercise in relationship to the lovesmitten King Solomon. Besides all the opulently romantic aspects of love, what does the Song of Solomon reveal about love’s robust endurance, courage, and sacrifice? Of what value is love without these qualities?
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?
renewed mind (Rom. 12:1, 2), which is our most important sexual organ. Scripture teaches that God is eager to forgive and accept those who honestly repent of their sins, including sexual sins. His renewing power and love will enable any one of us to experience a transformation from sexual brokenness to fulfillment and peace.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** Swindoll tells of “a wife who went to lunch with eleven other women. . . . One rather bold type asked, ‘How many of you have been faithful throughout your marriage?’ Only one lady raised her hand. That evening one of the women related the incident to her husband. When she admitted she was not the one who raised her hand, her husband looked crestfallen.

“‘But I’ve been faithful to you,’ she quickly assured him.

“‘Then why didn’t you raise your hand?’

“‘I was ashamed.’”—Charles R. Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope*, pp. 67, 68.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Shame and guilt result from wrongdoing. However, worldly standards and social norms sometimes can shift biblical definitions of right and wrong. Read Psalm 143. How did the psalmist cope with the pressures to succumb to the ways of the world?

2. “In theory the Jew had the highest ideal of marriage. The Rabbis had their sayings. ‘Every Jew must surrender his life rather than commit idolatry, murder or adultery.’ . . . But the fact was that by Paul’s day, divorce had become tragically easy.”—Barclay, “The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians,” *The Daily Study Bible*, rev. ed., p. 168. Obviously, intimacy and fidelity are ancient dilemmas. What are the responsibility and the role of the church in dealing with these concerns in a member’s life?

**Application Question:**

Triadelphia Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the state of Maryland of the United States, has a strong Family Ministry department. One of the programs sponsored by the department was “Couple’s Night Out.” Several couples got together one Sabbath afternoon per month to study a topic relevant to marriage and relationships. After the study, each couple would go out on a date for some quality time together. The church offered free babysitting services for the evening. Can you think of similar programs that your church could participate in?

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:**

1. 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?

2. 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.
**Sabbath Afternoon**


**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?
Key Text: Psalm 133:1

Teachers Aims:
1. To show that unity in relationships can come only through Christ.
2. To explain the importance of submission to the Lord and to one another in our relationships.
3. To show how unity can be maintained by a heart committed to Christ.

Lesson Outline:

I. Unity Through Christ (John 17:20, 21)
   A. Jesus removed the barriers of separation at the Cross.
   B. As we draw nearer to Christ, we draw nearer to one another.
   C. Experiencing the love of God brings about unity in relationships.

II. Unity by Godly Submission (Eph. 5:21)
   A. The Bible teaches us to look out for the needs of others.
   B. We express love by meeting the needs of one another.
   C. Submission to Christ brings about harmony in the home.

III. Unity by Choice (1 Pet. 3:8, 9)
   A. Family members must be committed to maintaining unity in the home.
   B. Disharmony in the past can be changed by a willing surrender of self to Christ.

Summary: Unity can only come through a connection with Christ. As we draw nearer to Him, we will draw closer to one another. Harmony can be found when individuals, with a willing, submissive heart, look out for the needs of others.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

This week’s lesson looks at ways to draw family members together. When we seek to heal that which separates us, we can find the solutions by first seeking a relationship with God. His grace is what we need, first and foremost. His love will heal our woundedness. We (Don and Sue) are reminded of that truth by reading Amos 3:3, NIV, “Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?” Walking together implies intentionality and purpose. In relational terms, agreement precedes walking together. We do not experience unity just because we share the path. We experience unity because we are in agreement, and that makes the journey much more meaningful. Going the same direction and sharing the same purpose calls for commitment to growth and to development of communication and of conflict resolution skills.

For married couples, unity means a mutual and an intentional commitment that is renewed each day as long as you both shall
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?
For engaged couples, unity is a commitment to growth through premarital counseling and through enrichment activities that strengthen attachment bonds and spiritual connections. Ask your class for other examples of educational and of enrichment experiences that would benefit engaged couples.

If a couple builds on a solid foundation, their commitment to unity will be a lifelong journey. “However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the after years.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 359, 360.

### II. Keys to Unity

A. Building on the right foundation is vital to unity. Remember the biblical story of two men who each built a house (Matt. 7:24-27). One of them built on sand. When the storms came, his house was washed away. Ask your class to discuss how couples who are planning marriage or who are already married might build on sand.

The story labels one of the men as wise and the other as foolish. Responsible and irresponsible, or mature and immature, are other labels that might apply. The wise man built his house on a rock. When the storms came, winds and waves buffeted the house. The storms of life do not discriminate between wise and foolish builders. It is the foundation that makes the difference.

Note also that another distinguishing characteristic of the wise builder was his effort to implement the teachings of Jesus. The foolish builder heard the same life-giving words but did not heed them. Knowledge alone does not change behavior. Scripture states that “even the demons believe and tremble” (James 2:19). If we are to seek unity as couples, as families, we must intentionally know and implement Jesus’ teachings one step at a time until they become habits, significant parts of who we are.

B. Another key to unity is never to allow anyone or anything to build a barrier between family members, between husband and wife. Fred was married to Arnold’s sister, and there was already tension between the two men before the incident that broke the camel’s back. This incident began with a playful gesture at a family gathering. It was only a little bit of water that Arnold directed at Fred. That little bit of water, however, led to angry words and hurt feelings. Sadly, reconciliation never occurred between the brothers-in-law or their families. Both men died without ever having forgiven each other. Jesus’ teachings are clear: We must seek forgiveness from Him and others; and in return, we must be generous in forgiving others (Matt. 6:14, 15; Col. 3:13). As Jesus is willing to forgive us, so we must be willing to forgive others.

C. A third key to unity is learning to love in ways that are meaningful to specific family members. Every family member has
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?
individual needs and ways of receiving love. Learning what those needs and ways are, then filling them accordingly, shows each member that he or she is highly valued.

D. Yet another key vital to unity is sharing the fruit of the Spirit with one another. These are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal. 5:22, 23). Possession of these fruits is evidence that we are walking “with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25, NIV). Unity is nurtured and blessed by experiencing the fruit as we interact with one another. Paul adds to the

### Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** John 17:21-26, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Ephesians 2:11-22, Philippians 2:3-5, 1 John 3:16-18

1. One of the most fundamental concepts of Christianity is atonement, or reconciliation. According to Ephesians 2:11-22, how did Christ bring about reconciliation between God and us? Between us and one another? How is this reconciliation revealed in Christian families?

2. Many couples enter a marriage relationship not so much as givers but as takers. Where in the Bible is unselfishness specifically mentioned as an antidote for the heartaches caused by selfishness? What is the Bible’s supreme manifestation of unselfish love? In what ways can that same spirit be demonstrated in a family relationship?

3. Submission and respect cannot be demanded; they have to be earned. *(Read Eph. 5:21–6:9.)* How can husbands earn the respect of their wives? How can parents earn the respect of their children? How can children earn the respect of their parents? What is the motivating factor in all these relationships?

4. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the highest), rate the level of unity in your family. Then list the factors that fight against unity, as well as the factors that contribute to family unity. How can you build more unity into your family relationships? Mention at least five methods.

5. Ellen White wrote: “The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 179. Identify at least one story (preferably two) from the Gospels that reveals a characteristic about Christ that you most want to emulate in order to create unity in your family.
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.

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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.
Galatians list the fruits of “goodness, righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:9, NIV).

E. Next we have prayer and the study of Scripture. A family or couple who prays and studies Scripture together likely is to be united. A depth of intimacy will exist between them, an intimacy vitalized by a shared spiritual journey. Family worship becomes more meaningful in a home whose members desire and practice unity. Couples can build their relationship as they bring their individual and mutual burdens before the Lord.

F. The final key to unity we will discuss is grace. We are sinful in nature and in deed. Our best efforts to seek unity will, at times, be futile. Then we will need a special dose of grace to bridge the gap between our desires and our actions.

**Witnessing**

Tom and Nancy loved each other fervently. They married in the church, and both took an active part in its functions. Their zeal and dedication led to their appointment to influential offices in their local congregation. But after a few years of married life, Tom and Nancy’s love for each other began to wane. They noticed and commented on each other’s faults with increasing frequency. “If only people knew how cold and uncommunicative you are behind the scenes,” Nancy said to Tom, “you would never be asked to serve as an elder.” “If only people knew what a nag you are, they would hardly keep you as a leader in women’s ministries,” Tom retorted. Their love withered.

Then Nancy, tired of her bitterness and resentment, decided to relearn how to love Tom. She studied Christ’s life of forgiving love and His willing death at the hands of cruel and derisive blasphemers—the very people He came to save. Christ’s unfathomable love toward all sinners, including her, rekindled Nancy’s love for Tom. She felt an upwelling of desire to be a blessing to him, regardless of his response. Tom was moved. He gently sought to revive their devotional and prayer life together, which had dwindled to almost nothing. They both weaned themselves away from contention and became more affirming. In this emotional climate Tom and Nancy both had growing success in overcoming the traits that each had previously found so intolerable in the other.

Apply: What changes of attitude and behavior do you need to make in order to come into unity with family members and fellow believers?
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?

_______________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________
**Icebreaker:** “All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, vol. 2, p. 112.

**Thought Questions:**

1. As in the times of Nero, many places thrive today in which Christianity brings disruption, trouble, and chaos to families instead of peace and unity. In such places, when one member of the family accepts Jesus, he or she can expect a life of turmoil ahead. The church family is his or her family and the church a place of refuge. In the last days, this scenario will be true in more and more places. How can the church be prepared to play this *family* role?

2. “In 1978, Thomas Hansen of Boulder, Colorado, sued his parents for $350,000 on grounds of ‘malpractice of parenting.’ Mom and Dad had botched his upbringing so badly, he charged in his suit, that he would need years of costly psychiatric treatment.”—(author unknown (http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a_z/f/family.htm). What are possible settings of Hansen’s childhood? What is the explanation when such things happen in a household where Jesus was the center? How can the church comfort parents whose children have *strayed* in spite of their being good parents?

**Application Question:**

As of July 2004, there were over 13 million Seventh-day Adventists worldwide. As in the time after Jesus’ ascension to heaven, the job of increasing the church-family fold and of maintaining unity belongs not only to the administrators but to the members, as well. What can you and your Sabbath School class do as commissioners of the gospel?

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.
Lesson 9

February 25–March 3

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?
Key Text: Romans 12:18

Teachers Aims:
1. To show how maintaining peace in the home can bring about harmony.
2. To understand that anger is a natural emotion that can be controlled when surrendered to Christ.
3. To show that Christians should display emotions that are not abusive.

Lesson Outline:

I. Peace in the Home (Eph. 4:26, 27)
   A. Families can experience harmony by maintaining peace in the home.
   B. Anger must be surrendered to Christ and controlled in order to maintain peace and harmony.
   C. Resolving conflicts right away can allay anger.

II. A Home Atmosphere Free From Abuse (Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 13:4, 5)
   A. Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse should not be found in a Christian home.
   B. Destructive behaviors can be changed through forgiveness, a willing heart, and the power of God.
   C. Those who are motivated by love will seek to do no harm to others.

Summary: Harmony and peace can be found in the Christian home when family members express love and forgiveness. This can be done by controlling anger and by resolving conflicts immediately.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction
   While our homes should be homes of peace and healing, and while we desire to live by biblical principles, it is sometimes all too easy to let our selfishness, upbringing, gender differences, personal choices, and ignorance in dealing with conflict stand in our way.

II. The Best of Intentions
   Some believe that Christian couples and families should always get along; but even with the best of intentions, our humanity gets in the way. Scott Stanley suggests that “part of reaching Christian maturity is accepting the reality of our imperfection while striving to become holy. Truth is, we will never perfectly understand another person this side of heaven, even when we are doing all the right things. The important thing is to take responsibility for your own behavior, even when your partner doesn’t seem to want to get along.”—Scott Stanley, et al. A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 95.
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?

1. “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.

2. “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?

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Two concepts seem central to this topic, “Seek First to Understand and Then to Be Understood” and “Begin With the End in Mind.”—Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families, pp. 70, 201.

The lessons this quarter suggest that family life is like a seesaw. Life is more pleasant when people respect and care for others, but there also can be pain when a family member desires to dominate and control others in the relationship.

Most married couples report four main areas that cause problems. Ask your class what they think these four areas are. They are money, communication, children, and sex. Other things couples commonly argue about are in-laws, recreation, alcohol and drugs, religion, careers, and housework.

In considering the question at the end of Monday’s study, we should remember that we always do not know the reality behind some of these areas and that we all make assumptions. We may not know the whole story, because we have not openly discussed what really is taking place.

Anger often is not well-understood. Anger is a secondary emotion, meaning that it grows out of fear, hurt, or frustration. An angry outburst is a symptom of at least one of these underlying emotions.

Issues of abuse are addressed in this week’s lesson, as well as in next week’s, so you may want to use the following information this Sabbath or next Sabbath. For a child, sexual abuse is one of the most traumatic acts of betrayal. It is defined as “the engaging of a child in sexual activities the child does not understand, to which the child can’t give informed consent, which are developmentally inappropriate and/or which violate the laws or taboos of society” (http://www.andrews.edu/IPA/education/adolescent_health/Child_Abuse/sld002.htm). Sexual abuse says to children that they are not loved or valued for themselves.

It is also important to understand that when a person is sexually abused, he or she is emotionally and physically abused. There is practically nothing else that can do more harm to a child’s picture of God as a heavenly Father than being abused by an adult—especially an adult who is that child’s primary caregiver.

In discussing these issues this week and next, some in your class may want to draw a line, either yes or no, when it comes to physical punishment. In relation to Ellen White’s statement in Child Guidance (p. 250), read the entire chapter in preparation for class.

Appropriate forms of punishment are a sensitive subject for Christian parents. Those with adamant beliefs generally are not looking for someone to convince them otherwise. Valuable insights and time will be lost if your class debates what is right or wrong.

Forgiveness is rare, because our human hearts desire justice. Blinded by our own hurt, we typically flee or fight, both common human responses. R. T. Kendall suggests that “the ultimate proof of
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?
total forgiveness takes place when we sincerely petition to the Father to let those who have hurt us off the hook—even if they have hurt not only us, but also those close to us.”—Total Forgiveness (Lake Mary, Fl.: Charisma House, 2002), p. 4.

Kendall also believes that total forgiveness does not mean closing our eyes to those who will continue to harm others. “Just as God forgives people without approving of their sin, we also must learn that forgiving people does not imply an endorsement of their evil deeds”—Page 12.

“Totally forgiving someone doesn’t necessarily mean we will

Inductive Bible Study


1 The world is a cruel place where many live by the dictum “Survival of the fittest.” Christian homes should be sanctuaries, in the truest sense of the word, where spouses and parents, children and siblings, can find shelter from emotional and physical abuse. Yet, some Christian homes remain far from God’s ideal. List three reasons why God’s ideal for Christian families remains so elusive. List three strategies to help us get closer to God’s ideal.

2 In Colossians 3:12-15, Paul outlined the process by which God’s people can live out kingdom principles in their families and congregations. Notice the graces with which Christians are to clothe themselves (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience) and provide real-life examples of each as they would be lived out in the life of a typical Christian family.

3 Nearly every week news reports tell of some horrific examples of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by family members against one another. Fairly often religion is mentioned as a contributing factor in the situation. What Bible truths should be emphasized to counteract these terrible distortions?

4 Forgiveness will not undo the damage done by a thoughtless or deliberate act of cruelty against some member of the family. Jesus forgave the people who put Him on the cross—while they were in the act of doing it. Is that level of forgiveness possible in our family relationships? If so, how is it realized?

5 Honesty is vital to peace and healing in a Christian family. What practical methods do you use to make sure family problems are dealt with in a positive, frank, and Christlike way?
Twisting the Word

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

1. People who are abused should turn the other cheek.
2. Wives should be submissive, regardless of what their husbands do to them.
3. Violent behavior by a spouse or a parent is just a cross some people have to bear.
4. 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.
want to spend our vacation with them, but it does mean that we release the bitterness in our hearts concerning what they have done.”—Page 8. Punishment belongs to God alone.

Kendall continues, “Relinquishing bitterness is an open invitation for the Holy Spirit to give you His peace, His joy and the knowledge of His will.”—Page 30. Finally, 1 John 4:18 teaches us

Witnessing

Healing does not always come about, nor is peace always restored, by sidestepping issues of conflict and wrongdoing. God knew that Adam’s and Eve’s restoration could not be accomplished by leaving them in the Garden of Eden and excusing their transgression on the grounds that they had underestimated the seriousness of deviating from His instruction. “After all,” He might have said, “eating a piece of forbidden fruit is a relatively small matter. They meant no harm; they were just seeking for expanded consciousness and momentarily forgot their dependence on Me.” Such permissiveness would have been fatal to the destiny of our world, for all sin, from that time forward, would have been rationalized as an experiment in alternative approaches to the Creator’s instruction.

God’s penalties were corrective and designed to deliver Adam and Eve through the plan of redemption (and all their descendants) from ultimate ruin. This plan would involve infinite sacrifice for God and definite discipline and obedience on the part of believing humanity.

In the context of this understanding, how should the church deal with members who

(a) chronically gossip and criticize?
(b) embezzle money from the church?
(c) assail the doctrines of the church and demand an open hearing in Sabbath School and during worship service?
(d) commit adultery and insist that “the church has no business poking into a person’s private life”?
(e) sexually seduce young Sabbath School students?
(f) solicit money from members for their own independent ministry without approval from the church board?

Plainly, no single short answer is the one size that fits all. But does the church have a duty to forgive so unconditionally offenders and dividers that it never takes disciplinary or corrective measures, in order to avoid seeming judgmental and unchristlike? How does an atmosphere of permissiveness affect the witness and image of a church? How can discipline be restoratively applied in a manner consistent with the love Christ displayed on the cross?
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.


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?

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that “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.”

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “In the Bible the word for *peace, shalom*, never means simply the absence of trouble. It means everything which makes for our highest good. The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of conquest. No experience of life can ever take it from us and no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever make it less. It is independent of outward circumstances”—Barclay, “The Gospel of John,” *The Daily Study Bible*, rev. ed., vol. 2, p. 171.

**Thought Questions:**

1. The lesson says that the home is the single most violent place in society. It is easy to assume that families from such homes are not in your church. Unfortunately, violence in the family is a well-hidden phenomenon. Smiling, happy families, sitting together in church every Sabbath, are not proof of peace in the home. Shame, denial, and fear keep the abused from seeking help. Not many churches have a trained counselor on staff. What can your church do to provide confidential counseling services to your members?

2. “There can be no peace-making in the wrong atmosphere. If men have come together to hate, they will hate. If men have come together to refuse to understand, they will misunderstand. If men have come together to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other. But if men have come together, loving Christ and seeking to love each other, even those who are most widely separated can come together in him.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, pp. 140, 141.

**Application Question:**

Reread the icebreaker. Imagine the pain of being nailed alive to a cross. Translate that into the depth of involvement that the church needs to have concerning the burdens and problems of others. Identify people in your congregation with the gifts of empathy, counseling, listening, and servitude. Ask them to be the burden-bearers of the church and come up with specific strategies to be there for people who are suffering.

*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.
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.
Key Text: John 1:12

Teachers Aims:

1. To explain how cultural differences can influence Christian standards.
2. To discuss the importance of family and of community around the world.
3. To show how values and beliefs develop from personal experience.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christian Beliefs Transcend Cultural Differences (1 Cor. 12:13)
   A. Christian standards are challenged by different cultural practices around the world.
   B. Christians are to show no partiality when sharing the gospel with people of different nationalities.
   C. Christian beliefs should not be compromised to accommodate different cultural practices.

II. Family and Community (Josh. 24:14, 15)
   A. The importance of family and of community can be found in many parts of the world.
   B. Christian principles for family living are universal.
   C. Families must adjust to change while maintaining an appreciation for spiritual things.

III. Developing Personal Values (Isa. 54:13, Jeremiah 31, 33, 34)
   A. Christian standards are passed down from one generation to the next.
   B. Each individual must develop faith and personal values from his or her own experience.

Summary: The biblical principles for Christian living are universal. As Bible truths are shared around the world and passed down to each generation, Christian standards should not be compromised. However, each individual must learn to value these principles through his or her own personal experiences with the Lord.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

Families of Faith seek the way leading to emotional and spiritual wellness. They avoid the way leading to tragic consequences (Matt. 7:13). Ask your class to discuss how following God’s way has given meaning to their families and personal lives.

II. When a Family of Faith Has a Wayward Child

Some in your class may have children who have left the church. If the subject arises, respond with concern, kindness, and empathy.
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?
Everyone has his or her unique story. Avoid clichés—solutions or assigning blame.

Consider Jeremiah 6:16, 17 from The Living Bible: “Yet the Lord pleads with you still: Ask where the good road is, the godly paths you used to walk in, in the days of long ago. Travel there, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, ‘No, that is not the road we want!’ I set watchmen over you who warned you: ‘Listen for the sound of the trumpet! It will let you know when trouble comes.’ But you said, ‘No! We won’t pay any attention.’” God created us with the power of choice. He will not force His way on anyone. Neither must parents force their ways on their children.

Even though God will not force anyone to follow Him, He is eager to seek lost souls. If we believe that God desires the very best for our children, then let us trust Him to do His work.

Faithful families live in a world that is constantly buffeted by sin. The devil is determined to destroy families in the following areas:

A. Popular culture. Television, movies, and other diversions generally distort God’s ideal for marriage and families. Discuss some of these distortions in class.

B. Where do I belong? Seventh-day Adventist college students were asked to develop a list of what they perceived to be the problems they experience with the church. Then they were to prioritize their list. Their number one concern was that they believed the church neither needed nor wanted them. In many different ways they had been told to be quiet, to stay out of sight, that someday they would be the church, but not now. What are the results of this perception? How can the perception be changed?

C. Seasons of change come to every family. Does any Christian groom or bride really understand what his or her vows entail? Chronic illness, loss of a job, death of a child, false accusations against a spouse—if we could actually peer into the future, some weddings might not occur.

D. Faithful youth. Wednesday’s study may create negative remarks concerning Adventist young people. However, having worked with the church’s youth for many years, we (Sue and Don) are encouraged by the life of faith so many young Adventists are experiencing. For example: A young man, who worked for me (Don) for three years, ends every prayer with “We love You Lord, and we can’t wait for You to come back and take us home.” How many people do you know who express that same confidence in Jesus’ return?

E. Lessons to be learned. Ever since I (Don) first began hiring young men to be resident assistants in one of the dormitories on campus, I asked one question of each applicant: “What positive lessons or values, that are a vital part of who you are, did you learn from your parents?” The answers have been instructive, and they have not changed much over the years. The answers include: “God loves me!” “I can pray about everything.” “Truth will always rise to
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.
the surface eventually.” “Sacrifice is its own reward.” “I can determine how I act and feel.” “Life may be unfair, but that doesn’t give me permission to be unfair.” “Character is who you really are, and it will make the journey to heaven with you.” “Regardless of the consequences, tell the truth.” I could continue, but I believe these examples make the point that youth can learn great things from their parents. Furthermore, what wise young people appreciate is that their parents taught these lessons not only through their words but through their deeds in ways that helped them to meet Jesus.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Joshua 2:7-13, Acts 10:1-28, 15:5-11

1. The story of Jacob and Laban (Gen. 29:14-30) reveals something about marriages in that culture. Skim through the story and focus on both the similarities and the differences in the ways marriages are arranged in your society. What are the advantages, if any, to our marriage customs now as opposed to the ones observed back then? What drawbacks are part of each system?

2. What cultures, other than your own, do you have a working familiarity with? What are the things about that culture you admire when it comes to family relationships? Finally, what are the overriding biblical principles of family life that transcend the culture of every age? List at least five.

3. Some families melt under the pressure of traumatic changes, such as death, chronic illness, accident, loss of a job, relocation, and other disruptions in life. Other families, while just as traumatized, rally together to support one another as they work through the problems. What makes the difference? What Bible promises can all families claim to make survival more likely?

4. How did you or your family come to join the church? Tell the story in a few sentences. Have you ever wished your story was more exciting? Do your children or grandchildren appreciate the faith and courage it took for you to make your commitment to Christ and the church? What Bible text comes closest to reflecting your personal statement of belief?

5. Often the mere mention of a loved one’s name brings pleasant memories—Grandma’s enchiladas, Grandpa’s garden, Cousin Cindy’s love of dogs. What do people think about when they think of you? What do you wish they thought?
Toward a First-Generation Faith

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

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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.

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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?
It is hard to put a cap on the enthusiasm that comes from meeting Jesus for the first time. Fred was angry and disillusioned the first time I met him. He came to the academy already having been expelled from two others—and it was only October. In the space of a year his mother had been baptized, his father had been killed in Vietnam, and his mother had remarried an older man who was very unlike Fred’s hero-father.

Fred also smoked, so we arranged for a smoking-cessation program. In five days, Fred increased his habit from one pack a day to two packs a day. Eventually, his habits and attitudes became so destructive that we asked him to withdraw from our school.

Almost nine months later, however, he reappeared. He had been

**Witnessing**

As a witness for God, Abraham makes a fascinating case study and a model for all ages. Called from a culture immersed in idolatry (Genesis 12), Abram (whom God later renamed Abraham to denote his being the progenitor of the faithful in all ages) kept his spiritual discernment clear by adhering to God’s commandments and specified mode of worship (Gen. 26:5). Abraham’s fidelity to God was the fruit, and not the root, of his faith (Gen. 15:6; Neh. 9:7, 8). Thus, he is an exemplar of new-covenant faith from patriarchal times.

God called Abraham to nomadic living in order that he might circulate as light and salt to a dark and spiritually vitiated world. In many respects Abraham’s mode of life resembled that of surrounding peoples—he dwelt in tents, engaged in animal husbandry, ate simple foods, and wore the modest clothing of that era; but he never stooped to incorporating idolatrous practices in his life. Abraham stood noticeably above the ways of the world by his peaceableness (Gen. 13:5-13), high integrity, noble courage, unselfish conduct (Genesis 14), and purity of worship for the glory of God (Gen. 15:5-12; 17:1, 2). Abraham taught and spiritually guided his entire household (Gen. 18:19). His own reverence for God was a convincing example to them.

Further, he was a missionary to unbelievers. “Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 187.

**Consider this:** How would it have affected Abraham’s reputation if he had accepted the king of Sodom’s offered reward for rescuing the captives from that city? Might he not have been regarded henceforth as a mercenary rather than as a liberator?
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 that we have been called to share?**

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living in a hippie commune. There, a Jesus Freak shared the gospel with him. Now Fred was returning home to tell his mother about Jesus. He was not certain if she really had a solid relationship with Him. On his way, he stopped to visit me. He was concerned to know if I truly understood the gospel.

I have no fear about where the church is currently being led. God is at the helm; and He will use every means to confront us with His grace. That bodes well for His imperfect church and His imperfect children. The gospel message, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, can break down even the most stubborn resistance.

**Life-Application Approach**

**Icebreaker:** “It was faith which kept up John Knox when he was in despair. Once when he was a slave on the galleys, the ship came in sight of St. Andrews. He was so weak that he had to be lifted up bodily in order to see. They showed him the church steeple and asked if he knew it. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I know it well: and I am fully persuaded, how weak that ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify his godly name in the same place.’”—Barclay, “The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon,” The Daily Study Bible, revised edition, p. 52.

**Thought Questions:**

1. Knox’s passion to worship and praise God was proportionate to the amount of faith he had. What are the characteristics of families who, generation after generation, retain their level of commitment to the church and their passion for the Lord? What do they do differently?

2. What are the elements that comprise the line between a habitual spiritual life and an active, fruitful one? What role does the church play in determining on which side the members stand?

**Application Question:**

The family unit is the birthplace of many things that can be either negative or positive: creativity, attitude, perception of truth, priorities, and faith. Success depends on how much we allow the urgent to get in the way of the important. Parents often realize too late that time has slipped away. Think of creative ways to manage time within a family. Compile these ideas and share them with your congregation.

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.
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?
**Key Text:** Joshua 24:15

**Teachers Aims:**
1. To acknowledge that all that we are and all that we possess come from God.
2. To discuss our responsibility to share the gospel at home first.
3. To show how hospitality can be a tool for witnessing.

**Lesson Outline:**

I. **Giving God the Praise** *(Ps. 34:1, 2)*
   A. God’s people must not be self-sufficient and complacent.
   B. Material things are blessings from God to be used for His glory and praise.

II. **Sharing the Gospel at Home** *(Deut. 6:5-9)*
   A. As God’s witnesses we must first share the gospel with those in our own household.
   B. Special attention should be given to the spiritual growth of the children and of the youth.
   C. Young people can learn spiritual things even from imperfect parents.

III. **Sharing the Home With Others** *(Matt. 25:35, 45; Titus 2:7)*
   A. Hospitality is a way of expressing self-giving love.
   B. Social gatherings in the home are opportunities for witnessing to other individuals and families.

**Summary:** The first mission field is the home. Christians must share the gospel with family members. Hospitality in the home also can be an avenue for witnessing to visitors. When in view of others, God’s people must be careful to acknowledge Him as the Source of all their possessions and of all their accomplishments.

**COMMENTARY**

I. **Introduction**

Hezekiah received a wonderful opportunity to talk with visitors about the God who had healed him. Instead, he conducted a tour that showcased his wealth and military force. In commenting about these visitors, the prophet Isaiah asked Hezekiah, “‘What have they seen in your palace?’” *(Isa. 39:4, NIV).*

This is a question we need to ask ourselves. We may not have visitors from Babylon, but how we use the gift of hospitality may have eternal consequences. “If we will open hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing,* p. 355.

Isaiah’s question is about priorities. What do our homes say about our commitments, faith, hope, and love? Remember, the
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 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.
Christianity practiced in our homes also is seen in the workplace, at school, on the playing fields, everywhere we interact with others. Remember, also, that home is where we are most known and where the credibility of our work and of our deeds is most challenged.

II. The Ministry of the Home

Have you thought of your home as being a ministry? How about your marriage? Does your family have a written mission statement that incorporates a definition of ministry? Does it include who you are, your priorities, and how you will accomplish your goals?

“The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives.”—Ellen G. White, p. 352.

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.”—Page 358.

One of the ministries of many Christian homes is hospitality. What is the difference between entertaining and hospitality? Entertaining is about making an impression. What Hezekiah did for his guests from Babylon was entertainment.

Hospitality, however, emphasizes relationships. Guests are made to feel comfortable, welcomed, and included.

A home where we (Don and Sue) have been guests many times over the last 30 years defines hospitality. We always feel welcomed and at home. The food is wholesome and plentiful. Conversation flows, because the hosts ask open-ended questions that encourage interaction. They often have given up their own beds to accommodate guests.

Now consider the following stories:

*Story One.* A family lived at the edge of town, with only dirt roads extending beyond. This was desert country with jackrabbits, tumbleweeds, sagebrush, and rattlesnakes. During the summer it was usually unbearably hot.

One such day an older woman knocked at this family’s door. While walking to town, she had been overwhelmed by the heat. She needed a glass of water and an opportunity to rest.

However, a level of heat prostration had apparently set in, for the water she swallowed came right back up. So, the woman of the house laid the overheated visitor on the sofa and placed a cool cloth on her forehead.

The visitor proceeded with her trip when the typical desert cooldown of approaching nightfall made walking bearable. That was
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?*
hospitality!

_Story Two._ The night before his first day of classes, a college freshman received a call from a teenager whom he had met at work. She described a shouting match with her stepfather, followed by his declaration that she was no longer welcome in his home. In desperation she called the most stable person she knew. So, after checking with his father, this student drove to where she had been when she called. Sometime later he came home, but instead of one troubled teen, there were three, all dressed in black, with spiked multicolored hair and pierced navels.

**Inductive Bible Study**

**Texts for Discovery:** Isaiah 38:1-6, 39:1-4, John 1:40-42, 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, 1 Peter 2:9

1. Read 1 Peter 2:9. First, list the three metaphors that Peter used to describe the influence of Christians in first-century society. Then repackage each metaphor into a phrase or expression recognizable to modern audiences. What is the primary purpose of our Christian witness? How can our families help facilitate it?

2. List three of your most precious possessions (they need not have any value beyond what you place on them). What do these three items say about your values? How can these three things help you testify about God’s activity in your life?

3. Imagine someone in your family or extended family who seems unusually resistant to the gospel. As far as you can understand that person, what seems to be the primary obstacle to his or her acceptance of the gospel? What ways have you tried to overcome it? With the help of the others in your class, outline three creative strategies to break down this person’s prejudice and to allow him or her to hear, really hear, the gospel.

4. Contrary to popular belief, married couples do not have to be alike in every respect. There may be differences in likes and dislikes; there may even be differences in faith and commitment. What is more important than having a spouse “made in our own image”? What is implied in Paul’s counsel: “God has called us to live in peace” (1 Cor. 7:15, NIV)?

5. In Bible times hospitality was often a matter of life and death. Travelers were at the mercy of those who had food and water. How are modern _travelers_ starving for hospitality? List three ways Christian families can meet their needs.
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?
When they arrived at the freshman’s house, his mother made the teens chocolate-chip cookies, sandwiches, a salad, and a fruit drink. That night the girl slept in the guest bedroom, while the two boys slept on couches in the living room. Both parents had early morning appointments, so the son stayed home, missing his first college class to prepare breakfast for his guests. Then, after they expressed a desire to reconcile with their parents, he drove them to their homes. That was hospitality!

*Story Three.* Monday through Friday, Dave took the subway to work. Each of those days, he was confronted with homeless people begging for food, money, or a job. Over the course of time, he became acquainted with one of these people named Joe. One day he asked Joe what he really needed. “A hug!” Joe answered, as he opened his arms wide. Dave stepped into Joe’s embrace. Later Dave said he felt as if it were the embrace of God. That was hospitality!

This week’s study provides an opportunity to discuss practical Christianity. Matthew 25:34-40 helps us realize that it matters how we respond to the human needs around us. When we respond with compelling, selfless acts of service, we are actually serving Jesus Himself.

**Witnessing**

What factors do you believe are the most vital in forming a hospitable environment that properly represents God? In your estimation, is hospitality a minor or a major talent in service for God? Explain your view.

Are you afraid to have anyone over to your house to eat because you fear that your home is too messy, your cooking skills too limited, your space too small, your finances too tight? What can you do to remedy or compensate for these drawbacks? Does having a small domicile prevent one from extending hospitality to one or two guests at a time? Does poverty prevent one from offering a simple meal lovingly served? Might there not be people in our reach more hungry for friendship and sympathy than for food?

“So do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” *(Heb. 13:2; consider also Isa. 58:6, 7; Rom. 12:12; 16:1, 2; 1 Pet. 4:9, 10; 3 John 5-8.* Our Savior declares, “Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” *(Matt. 25:40, NKJV).*
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)

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____________________________________________________________________

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

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____________________________________________________________________

Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-9)

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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?

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**Icebreaker:** “It is told of J. P. Mahaffy . . . that when he was asked if he was a Christian, his answer was: ‘Yes, but not offensively so.’ He meant that he did not allow his Christianity to interfere with the society he kept and the pleasure he loved. Sometimes we say to other people, practically in so many words, that we are Church members, but not to worry about it too much; that we have no intention of being different; that we are prepared to take our full share in all the pleasures of the world; and that we do not expect people to take any special trouble to respect any vague principles that we may have.

“The Christian can never escape the duty of being different from the world. It is not our duty to be conformed to the world; it is our duty to be transformed from it.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible,* revised edition, vol. 1, p. 391.

**Thought Questions:**

1. “The church may at times disappoint us, and God’s servants on earth may disappoint us. But when we battle our way face to face with Jesus Christ, he never disappoints us.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible,* revised edition, p. 218. This quarter we have been learning about how important both the church and the human families are in the role of witnessing to the world. Yet, it is important to remember that both families are made up of human beings. We have a natural propensity to make bad judgments and mistakes. How can we pursue our call to share Jesus without feeling handicapped by our humanness?

2. Who are you when no one is looking, and what does this say about your faith? Is it necessary for us and our families to be the same inside and out? How far should one take this? Is it even feasible to be the same at all times, under all circumstances? Explain.

3. What is the practical implication of being a called-out people (1 Pet. 2:9)? Oftentimes we take being unique to the extreme and are the standing-out-and-being-oddly-different people! Are there disadvantages to being so different that people are cautious of us? Explain.

**Application Question:**

Make a list of the top priorities of your church. Then read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Compare the passage to your list. How well is your church doing? Read Acts 2:44, 46 and 4:32. What are the areas that need to be revamped? What else should you be doing?

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:

1. 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?

2. In what practical ways can you as a class minister to a family with an unbelieving spouse?

3. 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.
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?
Key Texts: Deuteronomy 30:2, Ephesians 4:32

Teachers Aims:
1. To reveal how broken family relationships can be restored through Christ.
2. To explain how repentance can lead to restored relationships.
3. To show that Christian families can be examples of restoration and of healing.

Lesson Outline:

I. Reconnecting With God and With Family (Mark 11:25)
   A. Broken family relationships can be restored through a reconnection with God.
   B. The physical healing of loved ones strengthens family ties and faith in God.
   C. Family worship is an avenue for loved ones to be renewed in Christ and to be reunited with one another.

II. Restoration Through Repentance (Ps. 51:10-12, Isa. 55:7)
   A. Repentance comes as a result of God’s urging us to examine our hearts and of His filling us with a genuine desire to change.
   B. True repentance can lead to restored relationships.
   C. Understanding the meaning of the Cross encourages true repentance.

   A. Christian families can show unselfish love and forgiveness in restoring family relationships.
   B. Christian families can serve as models of true repentance and devotion to God.

Summary: Broken family ties can be restored through a renewed commitment to God. Christ-centered individuals demonstrate unselfish love and forgiveness in their relationships to one another.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction
   Malachi 4:5, 6 set the stage for this week’s lesson. Known as the Elijah message, these verses have provided a launching pad for countless seminars, sermons, books, articles, and counseling sessions done in the name of “Family Life Ministries.” In fact, this quarter’s Bible study guide is a response to these verses.

II. The Elijah Message
   Elijah is perhaps best remembered for walking into Ahab’s palace to tell the king it was not going to rain for three years. Then three years later he set up a burnt-offering-altar duel in the foothills of Mount Carmel. Baal versus God! Elijah versus 450 prophets of Baal! Elijah’s short but powerful speech precedes one of the great moments of Scripture. “ ‘How long are you going to waver between
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.


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?
two opinions? . . . If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!” (1 Kings 18:21, TLB).

However, what does Elijah have to do with end-time families? Just before Jesus’ second coming, Malachi predicts a message and a movement that will reconcile and restore families (Mal. 4:5, 6). Malachi’s allusion to Elijah’s bold acts teaches us how we should respond to end-time conflicts.

This reminds us of one of our former students who went to Vietnam as a medic in the 1960s. Under heavy enemy fire he saved many lives while risking his own, and he returned home a decorated hero. When we met, I asked him how he had managed to be so brave. “Courage is not about being brave,” he responded. “It’s about just doing your duty.” Elijah’s confrontation with Ahab and the prophets of Baal was not so much about being brave. It was about doing his duty as God had given it to him. It was an act of faith.

Perhaps, at its core, the Elijah message is a call for us to do our duty in confronting the ruined relationships and dysfunctional family relationships in our churches and communities. Then those who are lovingly confronted perhaps will be more receptive to the Holy Spirit’s work, a work that calls them to duty while they wait for the Lord’s return. The purpose of Family Life Ministries is to prepare people to meet Jesus.

Perhaps the threatened “curse” of Malachi 4:6 is a reference to how bitterness and unforgiveness keep families from growing in Christ, thus distracting them from the Second Coming. Perhaps this “curse” is evident in the rising divorce rates and increasing reports of domestic violence, infidelity, and child abuse. If this is true, then bitterness and unforgiveness among colleagues, church members, friends, and even enemies also could be preventing us from growing in Christ and causing us to forget about Christ’s return.

Some years ago, Ken and Judy made a commitment that their family would be a priority and that they would use their marriage as a form of ministry. One day they heard that two friends from college days, living several states away, had filed for divorce. Ken and Judy made contact with these friends, agreed to meet at a neutral site, and spent three days talking, praying, listening, caring, and sharing with them. The marriage was saved, because old friends cared enough to confront and to help pick up the pieces. That is what heart turning is all about.

A young man was picked up in a drug-sweep not too far from the academy from which he had graduated the year before. During the sweep he refused to give his name and reacted angrily to the efforts of the police, who called me (Don) to see if I could identify him.

Many years later I received a letter from this young man. He shared a few details of what happened afterward. For the next fifteen years, he had remained on a drug-induced high. Then one day the drugs ran out. He went to a local community college where he had
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?

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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?
TEACHERS COMMENTS

purchased them before, but that day he could not find a pusher.

Angry and feeling the growing need for that high, Jim leaned against a cement wall for support. Suddenly, into his mind flashed a picture of his mother praying for him. Incensed, he shook his fist at God saying, “If You were any kind of God at all, You never would have allowed me to hurt my mother like I have.” In God’s sight, this apparently was a prayer, for as Jim relates the story, “Suddenly, the squarest looking square I had ever seen was standing before me inviting me to attend what turned out to be a Bible study. One

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: 1 Kings 17:8-24; Isaiah 58:6-12; Malachi 4:5, 6; John 1:23-27

1 To social institutions crumbling under the pressures of moral decay, the last words of the Old Testament offer a promise to be claimed by all: reconciliation between parents and children. Give three modern examples of the pressures being faced by today’s families. Give three biblical prescriptions to counteract these threats.

2 Elijah had a ministry to the Gentile woman of Zarephath as well as to God’s chosen people, the Israelites. What was the primary issue in Elijah’s ministry to the woman of Zarephath? What emerged as the primary issue in Elijah’s ministry on Mount Carmel? (Read Rev. 14:6, 7, 12.) How are trust and worship important in God’s last message to the world? How do they bridge the gap between believer and nonbeliever?

3 John the Baptist described the effect of his ministry with these words: “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30, NIV). How do these words describe the attitude that God’s people must adopt? How would our families be affected if we adopted them as our own personal motto? List at least three.

4 God’s ideal for the family is that it be a place of love, nurture, training, correction, and refuge. The same also can be said for the church. Share briefly an experience when your church fellowship became kind of a surrogate family.

5 Not everyone enjoys the love and support of a nuclear family. But everyone, no matter his or her social, economic, or educational levels, can be adopted into God’s family. What does your local congregation do to celebrate and affirm everyone’s connection to the family of God? What more could it do?
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?**
invitation made, one Scripture read, one prayer offered, one life saved.” Today, Jim is a building contractor. He loves the Lord and his family and is active in his church. That is what heart turning is all about!

The story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is really about two sons. One was lost, because he had left home after rejecting his spiritual heritage. The other was lost because he stayed for the wrong reasons. Heart turning was necessary for both of them.

If we and our families are going to be ready to meet Jesus some day soon, some of us will need to return home, and some will need to change our reasons for staying. Some will need to seek forgiveness and healing in certain relationships, while some will need to seek new ways of confronting. It is called the Elijah message; and it promises to revolutionize our denomination.

Witnessing

“Decided proclamations of truth are to be made. But in regard to this line of work I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message make no personal thrusts at other churches. . . . Let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the mysteries of iniquity. Upon these themes often silence is eloquence.

“Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving someone a thrust. That thrust may do much harm and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. . . .

“People cannot be expected to see at once the advantage of truth over the error they have cherished. The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present the evidence of truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness. . . .

“There are many souls to be saved. In words and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and goodwill to men. Wonderful are the results we shall see if we enter the work imbued with the Spirit of Christ. If we carry the Word forward, in righteousness, mercy, and love, help will come in our necessity. Truth will triumph and bear away the victory.”—Ellen G. White, Reflecting Christ, p. 240.

If we take these counsels to heart, our work will not be marred by harshness, arrogance, or incivility. Our work of proclaiming the three angels’ messages demands a high level of spiritual ambassadorship that honors its calling to a ministry of reconciliation for leading spiritually misled souls to God. (See 2 Cor. 5:18-20, 2 Tim. 2:23-26.)
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?

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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?


Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** A church was once built in the middle of farmland. Over the years, farm after farm was bought out and replaced by multimillion-dollar homes. The church took upon itself the task of reaching out to the affluent families in the neighborhood. Fifteen years went by, and there was no fruit to show for their efforts. Then one day, the mansion across from the church went up in flames. One of the first phone calls the family of the home made was to the church! And the church reached out. (Unfortunately, once the crisis was over, the family had no need for the church!)

**Thought Questions:**

1. Read God’s promise in Psalm 121:7, 8. How can you make yourself available to God? How can you be attuned to those around you? Ask God to help you aid someone in need. As in the icebreaker, how can we encourage ourselves when we feel used?

2. “Bernard Newman tells how once he stayed in a Bulgarian peasant’s house. All the time he was there the daughter was stitching away at a dress. He said to her, ‘Don’t you ever get tired of that eternal sewing?’ ‘Oh no!’ she said, ‘you see this is my wedding dress.’ Work done for love always has a glory.”—Barclay, “The Letters to the Philipians, Colossians, and Thessalonians,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 186. Expound on the benefits of focusing on the Second Coming while working in God’s vineyard.

3. Just as a tree is identified by its leaves and fruit, a person is identified by words and by deeds. As the Second Coming draws nearer, a true believer will be identified with the church, and this will not always be a positive identification. How can you fortify your spiritual life to enable you to defend your beliefs and your church?

**Application Question:**

“Your true value to society comes when someone says, ‘Let me see your work.’ Your glib tongue may open a door or two. . . . But the real test of your worth can be measured by the care you give to the job in front of you: A budget to plan; A solo to play; A report to draft; A leaky sink that needs fixing. Next time you write a memo, make sure you get all the facts straight. Pay attention to those details. Sweat the small stuff.”—Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope*, pp. 91, 92. What concrete steps can your church take to be noticed by its community?

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:

1. 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?

2. 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?

3. 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?

4. 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.