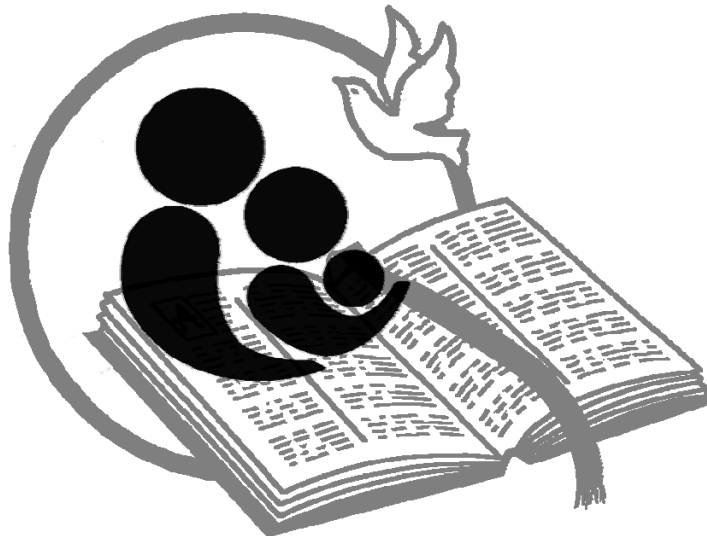


Families of Faith

*Biblical Foundations
for
Family Living*



Family Ministries Planbook

Karen and Ron Flowers

with

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Willie Oliver and Mary Wong



A Department of Family Ministries publication.

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Preface

The Bible is the primary source book for Christians in understanding the plan of God for marriage and family. We find the divine design for family fully embodied first in the perfection of the original creation. Again and again, throughout the Bible, God's word for close human relationships is articulated—in the Decalogue, in the urgings of the prophets and in the call of the gospel to “live a life of love” (Eph. 5:1). In the person of Christ, divine ideals were lived in human flesh. When this Jesus calls us to follow Him, it is a high calling.

Christian families face the challenge of understanding and stretching toward the divine design for life and relationships, even as they dwell in a world where hard reality finds us far short of God's plan for family living. The wonder of this faith we hold is the good news that God knows our frame and remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). He is no stranger to human frailty, imperfection and brokenness. Rather, He sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15), and is full of compassion and longsuffering (Ps. 86:15; Lam. 3:22).

Holy writers “spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21) as they composed the Scriptures. Yet the Word they penned is the record of God's relationship with people whose natures and circumstances are imprinted and shaped by the presence of sin. Coexisting together within the pages of the Word of God, therefore, are both the description of the way the world is and of the way it should be. When we adjust our viewing lens to bring into focus what the Bible says about families and family living, the same kind of panorama takes shape before our eyes. We see families the way they are, warts and all. But our eyes are also opened to see families as God sees them, made perfect in Christ, and to a vision of all that He wills for them to become through His empowering grace.

Diversity in family form and function is the byproduct of life-changing events, which may or may not be within the control of the individuals involved. Christians are called to treat people and families everywhere with respect and integrity, and to uphold and strengthen that which is good and in keeping with biblical principles in their family and cultural heritage. At the same time, families—and the cultures of which they are a part—can only mirror the fallenness of the people who comprise them. Thus Christian families are called to allow the overarching principles of Scripture to reshape their patterns of relating and their traditions in pursuit of God's original design for human relationships.

Through our family relationships, God wants to show His love to the world. As families learn to live together in accordance with the Word of God, His grace is diffused to all whose lives they touch, winsomely drawing others to Jesus through the family circle.

With a prayer that God will be glorified through our families and our ministry to families, we introduce this edition of the Family Ministries Planbook: *Families of Faith: Biblical Foundations for Family Living*.

Karen and Ron Flowers
Co-directors
General Conference Department of Family Ministries

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Making Your Marriage Work!

...Finding New Life in God's Grace

by Bryan Craig

Theme

The distinctive qualities of grace can empower and revitalize marital relationships.

Theme Texts

1 Peter 1; 2; 3:1-9.

Introduction

Every child has a dream . . . and I suppose that every child who has heard of Disneyland dreams of going there one day. Maybe, children hope, their parents will somehow win free tickets for the whole family to visit and they can have the time of their lives. Years ago, our family lived for a year and half in southern California and during that time our boys got to go to Disneyland. In fact, every time a relative or friend came from Australia to visit us, the first thing they wanted to do was to go to Disneyland. I thought I would never live to hear the day when my boys didn't want to go there, but on about the eighth occasion, both of them looked at my wife and I and pleaded, "Do we really have to go?" Well, I guess you can always get too much of a good thing!

At the end of Main Street in Disneyland, there is a beautiful castle surrounded by a moat with graceful swans swimming in it. Everybody associates this castle with the Disney television program. Inside, stairs lead to the top. Many dioramas depicting well-known fairy tales are found along the stairway, tales that I sometimes had read to our sons as bedtime stories. The particular diorama that interested us during one visit was the story of Sleeping Beauty, who was waiting for her prince charming to arrive. As we climbed the stairs, I paused to read the story lines found under each diorama window. At the top of the stairs, we came to the climax of the story. With great excitement, our younger son jumped ahead of me to the final display and exclaimed, "So, Dad, guess what happens next?" I said, "They lived happily ever after!" "No, Dad," he replied, "They got married!"

I guess my son didn't realize it, but he spoke a profound truth. Not everybody who gets married lives happily ever after.

Struggling To Make Marriage Work

Marriages can be marvelous; they can also be miserable. The differences and the uncertainties that marriages create frequently receive a lot of negative press these days. While

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marriage is still very popular—80% of the population will get married at some time or other in their lives—the issue today seems to be more about how to survive, how to live happily ever after, how to make your marriage work.

Recently, a couple came to me for marriage counseling. “We just can’t communicate,” they said. “Really?” I responded. “You just can’t talk to each other?” “We’ve discovered that when we talk,” they continued, “we end up arguing, so we decided that we would stop talking so that we wouldn’t argue with each other any more.”

Another couple told me they spent most of their time arguing and fighting with each other. Every sentence they uttered was designed to wound and hurt their partner. They had made arguing into an art form. Their marriage had become miserable. As we talked, she said to me, “I want you to understand, it’s not that I don’t love him, it’s just that I don’t like him, and I don’t want to live with him any more.”

Still another couple was experiencing a real marital crisis. He had been diagnosed with an incurable disease and she was finding the pressure of coping with his illness and mothering three little children more than she could handle. Clearly the marriage was in trouble. They had come seeking help. When I asked what she wanted from the relationship, she said, “I’d just like for him to take a little more responsibility. I know he has real difficulties dealing with his illness, but in his professional life he has never been focused on the family, and I am tired of being responsible for the kids and for this relationship, and I don’t think that I can cope with it any more.”

Couples frequently struggle to understand how and why things go wrong in their relationship. They want a marriage that is marvelous and fulfilling, but often have to settle for the misery that comes from misunderstanding and difference. Many never learn how to make their marriage work, and when things become unbearable, they divorce.

It is interesting that many people in the western world are now beginning to question the ease with which couples can divorce each other when their relationship goes sour. Some point to the failure of our divorce culture and the need for us to state positively the “Case for Marriage.” In the USA, a “marriage movement” has sprung up, seeking to reiterate and reinforce those values that are important to building healthy marital relationships. In Great Britain, efforts are being made to pass legislation that upholds marriage and family values. In Australia, there have been efforts to redefine family values and to focus on family strengths as a way of building strong healthy marriages and families within our society.

As Adventists we are right to be concerned about the breakdown of family relationships and the pressures that are being put on the marriage relationship. We, too, struggle to understand how and why things have gone so wrong. We struggle to know how to make marriages work!

God’s Intentions For Marriage

The Word of God is clear about God’s intention for marriages and families. The apostle Paul calls upon us all to “Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between a husband and wife” (Hebrews 13:4 *The Message*). Here Paul suggests that marriage should be

placed on a pedestal, in a position of honor. Marriage is to be something that we hold up high, a thing to be treated as special, to be looked up to, something that is safeguarded and protected as a special gift given to us from God.

It is clear from Genesis 2:18-24 that God had a blueprint or plan in mind for marriage from the very beginning. Here in these verses we see that marriage was to be a relationship based on companionship. Eve was created as a “suitable helper” (cf. Gen. 2:18 NIV), one designed to meet the needs of Adam. And Adam was to meet Eve’s needs, as together they formed a partnership based on mutuality and equality.

Three dynamics in marriage at creation. The dynamics in this pristine marital relationship, that was to be a pattern for all future marriages, was based on three things.

- Firstly, there were *desire and attraction*. There was clearly a passionate and emotional connection between these two individuals. They were to “leave” their father and mother and be joined together in such a way that they would become intimate partners.
- Secondly, this partnership was to be a *covenant commitment*, a relationship in which they exchanged promises and mutually enjoyed privileges and responsibilities. They were totally committed to each other and to the relationship.
- Thirdly, the goal of this partnership was for them to become *one flesh*. This “one fleshness” indicated mutual intimacy, the companionship of spirits that emerges when two people are truly connected and become soul mates.

This first marriage was a partnership in which there was a powerful physical, emotional and spiritual connectedness. It was a relationship in which each loved and valued the other, a relationship that was inspired and sustained by the goodness and grace of God. It was a partnership in which there was a sense of deep intimacy that grew out of sharing emotional and spiritual realities. It was a partnership that affirmed their individual identities and personal worth.

Created in the image of God, neither one was superior or inferior. They were submissive to each other. Both were equally endowed with a power of being that was complimentary, that enabled, empowered and sustained them in their relationship with each other, and helped them to achieve friendship and spiritual kinship. This was the companionship and partnership that God intended from the beginning should be the heart and soul of marriage.

Intimacy Lost In a Moment of Grasping

But in an act of self-gratification, in a moment of grasping, in the desire to know beyond the divine instructions, the harmony, beauty and joy of the relationship was disrupted and destroyed. The unity in the relationship, the beauty of their oneness, the joy that led them to celebrate their relationship together, all were lost. It’s interesting to contemplate how little acts have such big consequences.

I want to invite you to reflect with me on what it was that Adam and Eve lost there in the Garden of Eden. What did they lose that disrupted their sense of harmony and companionship?

Because of their error, because of their self-gratification, they lost their sense of innocence, their personal dignity and their sense of adequacy. With their loss came feelings of guilt and shame. They were overcome with feelings of alienation and isolation. They felt alone. What a tragedy! They had been made for each other in order that they would not feel alone!

In their moment of grasping they had lost their sense of self worth and esteem. By their very actions, they had devalued themselves and lost their ability to communicate with each other. They could no longer make connection; instead they ran off and hid, afraid to be too close. Gone was the sense of partnership and cohesion. No longer was there a feeling of wanting to cooperate. Feelings of jealousy quickly emerged as they found themselves separate and looking at each other with doubt and suspicion. Clearly they lost the sense of symmetry—that very delicate balance and rhythm that existed between them as husband and wife, as male and female. The sense of complementarity they once enjoyed had now become a source of contest and competition. The desire for mutual submission eluded them and the relationship was robbed of its genius and its power.

Adam and Eve also lost the feelings of desire. A sense of inadequacy led to a rejection of self and an avoidance of the other. Such feelings are so quickly connected to sexual desire and sexual performance. Instead of feeling close to each other, they now experience the feelings of fear and shame, of anger and guilt, and a consuming desire to control each other. This soon impacted their sexuality and lessened their desire for closeness, inhibiting the frequency of their sexual contact. This loss of symmetry and desire skewed their experience, so that their motivation to celebrate and enjoy each other was disrupted and their sense of sexual oneness and satisfaction destroyed. Rather than being a joy, their sexual relationship became associated with pain and disappointment.

Fighting For Control

There is a stark contrast in the story as it unfolds in Genesis 3. A significant change has occurred in the marital relationship between Adam and Eve as a result of their failure to uphold and maintain relationship. In Genesis 3:15, 16, God offers His grace and the promise of reconciliation, but we cannot miss the intense enmity that begins to develop between this once Edenic couple. A contentious spirit emerges; a power struggle develops as they seek to control each other. Verses 16, 17 say, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” Here, the Scripture emphasizes that Eve’s desire for her husband was demonstrated by (as the Hebrew suggests) “an inordinate desire to control him and to get him to satisfy her needs.” For Adam, it was a matter of wanting to “rule over her,” to dominate, to exploit, to abuse her, either aggressively or passively, in order to cover his own inadequacies and fulfill his need.

The disharmony, the disconnection and the inequality that follows robs the relationship of its inherent power and joy. Genesis 3 presents a picture of two people locked in a battle for power and control, driven by egocentric needs. Their attacking, their defensiveness, their shaming and blaming only lead them to seek control over the other by manipulation, by dominance and demands for submission. They seek to control each other by withdrawing their affections and by showing conditional acceptance. Love must now be earned. Dominated by their own rules and expectations of each other, they now set about unknowingly disabling each other. A sense of legalism develops, as they demand acceptable performance from one

another. It becomes a game and a dance. What had once been the dance *of* intimacy had now become a dance *for* intimacy, a sad and sorry picture of something that God intended to be a delight.

What we don't understand and cannot face about ourselves we often project onto our partner and blame him or her for our brokenness. "It's your fault," we say. We tend to transfer our infantile longings and our sense of woundedness onto our partner, hoping that the partner will help rescue us from our painful dilemma. But because our partner cannot accept our wounds, our narcissism, or our personal issues for us, the relationship inevitably becomes captive to issues of power, manipulation and control.

When you look at all of human history, you see what a sad history of fighting for control the human story is. Over time you see how our petty, self-absorbed, ungracious, ungenerous, rigid, distant and defensive behaviors and our use of manipulative tactics have led us into such miserable relationships. We begin to understand why we find it so hard to sustain passion, respect and trust in our intimate relationships.

A New Paradigm

In the New Testament, Jesus, along with the apostles Peter and Paul, suggests to us a new paradigm for successful relationships. This new paradigm points to a new way as well of finding satisfaction in marriage. It is a paradigm that is not based on conflict and contest, but on a radical new discipleship, a radical new life "in the grace of God." This paradigm shows us that the only way to change our misery, the only way to end our striving and strife is through the grace of God. The grace of God is the expression and motivation that undergirds all Christian discipleship. When we embrace God's grace and goodness, when we respond to His encouragement and support, we find ourselves living a new life filled with attitudes and behaviors that reveal graciousness, respect, mercy and forgiveness.

In Matthew 19:11, 12 (*The Message*), Jesus says that the maturity or "largeness of marriage" "requires a certain attitude and grace." It is only when God's love and grace inspire us to action that we have a radical new power that reconciles us to each other, heals our sense of woundedness, and causes us to behave in ways that influence and sustain relationships meaningfully.

Paul says that God wants us to be "woven into a tapestry of love" (Colossians 2:2 *The Message*). "So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it. Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other and in step with each other" (Colossians 3:12-15 *The Message*).

The apostle Peter gives some wonderful advice that spells out the new paradigm of grace. "Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in *the new life of God's grace*, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground" (1 Peter 3:7 *The Message*. Emphasis supplied). Here Peter suggests that in the radical new paradigm of grace, we are joint heirs

(RSV) of the gracious gift of life (NIV). In the new life of God's grace we are equals. Husbands should seek to honor and delight in their wives, treat them as equals, so that their prayers don't run aground. Grace certainly changes the way we experience marriage in the Christian faith.

It's astonishing to think that these words come from the apostle Peter, for he was a bold, aggressive man, a contentious and dominant leader who, by his sheer force of personality, made his presence felt. He was the one who slashed off the high priest's servant's ear, who sought in all boldness and courage to lead from the front. "Graciousness" was probably not a word that described the apostle Peter in those early days. However, Luke 22 records how Jesus prays for Peter's conversion and for his recovery after openly denying his Master. Later, we read in John 21 how Peter was graciously rehabilitated and recommissioned for service by Jesus Christ after His death. In Acts 1-12 we see Peter, a fearless leader, whose bold healing, ardent preaching and earnest prayers dominate the early Christian church and its outreach to the Jewish community.

What an enormous influence Peter was in the early Christian church. In his epistles we see how gracious, patient, and loving this apostle had become. Transformed by the grace of God, we sense his great ambition to share the grace of God as he moves from place to place. We are amazed when we read the story in Galatians 2 of how Paul openly rebukes Peter in front of the church at Antioch, no doubt embarrassing him before the congregation. The amazing thing, however, is that Peter graciously accepts Paul's rebuke. He never seems to defend his position or retaliate.

As probably the most powerful figure in the Christian church, Peter had become a man of grace. He was not contentious He was but a bridge-builder, a gracious, loving shepherd. J. D. G. Dunn in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (1977) says that it was Peter who became the focal point of unity in the church. "Peter was in fact and effect the bridge . . . who did more than any other to hold together the diversity of the first century Christian church" (p. 385). What a change the love and the grace of God had made in the life of this great leader, turning him into a gentle, humble man. Such a change occurs only when we embrace the grace with which God embraces us.

The New Life of God's Grace

Notice again how Peter presents this new paradigm for living. In 1 Peter 3:7 he says, "In the new life of God's grace, you're equals" (*The Message*), "heirs . . . of the gracious gift of life" (NIV). Husband and wife are partners in recovering God's intended blessing for marriage. Throughout the first few chapters of 1 Peter, the apostle develops his understanding of how this new paradigm for living works. In 1 Peter 1 he suggests that grace creates "a brand new life with everything to live for" (vs. 3 *The Message*). "As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. . . . Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. . . . Love one another as if your lives depended on it" (vss. 14, 15, 17, 22 *The Message*).

Peter encourages us to drink deeply of God's pure kindness and to grow up mature and whole. He talks about how God's grace influences every aspect of our relationships. He then comes in chapter 3 to talking specifically about husbands and wives and how they are joint heirs of the new life of God's grace, and how as equals they experience a whole new way of being,

like it was when God originally made marriage. Peter suggests that God's grace enables a marital couple to undertake the changes necessary to develop a spirit of mutual love and submission and avoid the spirit of control and contention.

For him grace is not about earning love through performance or the keeping of rules, it is about regaining a sense of companionship, where a couple mutually submit to each other and treat each other with equality, thus recovering their sense of dignity, esteem and worth. That is why Peter says, "Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground." (1 Peter 3:7 *The Message*). "Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their needs. . . . Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in" (1 Peter 3:1, 4 *The Message*). It is so true that, when couples risk receiving each other "as is," grace begins. By showing acceptance and submission, by honoring and respecting one another, they demonstrate the love and compassion of Christ.

Motivated By Grace

Throughout these early chapters of Peter's first epistle to the church, you get a sense of the kind of behaviors that are motivated by grace, behaviors that help individuals and couples to build a life that is vibrant, satisfying, and holy. Here is just a sample of the sorts of things the apostle Peter says:

- Get rid of malice, pretence, envy, and hurtful talk (1 Peter 2:1).
- Don't indulge your ego at the expense of your soul! (1 Peter 2:11)
- Treat everyone you meet with dignity (1 Peter 2:17)
- Don't be bossy, telling others what to do—be tender and show them the way (1 Peter 5:3).
- Be content with who you are—don't put on airs (1 Peter 5:6).
- Stay cool and alert (1 Peter 5:8).
- Keep a firm grip on the faith (1 Peter 5:9).

With all these thoughts about grace in mind he comes to the marriage relationship. In summary, Peter says, "Wives be responsive to your husbands, be loyal and caring, be non-anxious, be unintimidated, love with generosity and abandon." And to husbands he says, "Honor your wives, delight in them, be invested in them, accept differences and treat each other as equals."

Then, in 1 Peter 3:8, 9 he gives a wonderful summary of this new life of God's grace. He says "be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble . . . be a blessing . . . (*The Message*)." To my way of thinking, these six things summarize the Christian life of grace:

- Being agreeable and saying nothing hurtful is really the grace of submission and gentleness.
- Being sympathetic is the grace of encouragement and affirmation.
- Being loving is the grace of connectedness.
- Being compassionate is the grace of healing.

- Being humble demonstrates the grace of humility.
- Being a blessing and cultivating good demonstrates the grace of joy and celebration.

God's Call to Married Couples

What a wonderful call this is to all couples to take seriously their relationship—to give it time and energy, to revitalize their love for each other, and to accept responsibility for their relationship. By God's grace a couple can empower and revitalize their relationship. By developing a positive, supportive atmosphere in their relationship, they make it safe to be with each other. When they affirm and build each other up, and show unconditional acceptance and love for each other, when they are assertive and honestly communicate with one another, when they recognize and validate each other's feelings and take responsibility for their relationship, they build, by the grace of God, a relationship that is healthy, fulfilling and long lasting.

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Family Grace

by Mary Wong

Theme

The marriage of Hosea and Gomer and the experience of the family with the prodigal son offer lasting lessons for bringing grace to contemporary families.

Theme Texts

Hosea.

Introduction

He was a young man, a promising prophet in Israel. He was also an eligible bachelor. One day the word of the Lord came to him, instructing him to marry. Now one might think that, if God told him to get married, then God would have had an ideal partner in mind for him. But that was not the way it turned out. Instead, God directed him to take a wife who did not have a good moral reputation at all. “An adulterous wife” the Scripture describes her. Nevertheless, at the bidding of God, the prophet married her.

A world of problems soon developed. She continued her involvement with other men. She gave birth to three children, two of whom the young husband suspected were not his. Finally, she ran away from home, leaving him and the children. Despite the pain and hurt in his heart, he searched for her. His search did not end until he found her, some time later, sunk deep in degradation, on sale in a female slave market. He rescued her from that awful fate, buying her back for himself, and he took her home. There, in a profound gesture borne of deep love, they experienced together the process of forgiveness and the renewal of their marriage covenant. “You are to live with me many days;” he said to her, “you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you” (Hosea 3:3).

Marriage Grace: Hosea and Gomer (Hosea 3:1-5)

Someone has entitled the story of Hosea and his wayward wife, Gomer, “The Anguish of Steadfast Love.” For some, this Old Testament episode reads like a fairy tale, an impossible experience in the life of a man who had given himself to God and His service. However, Hosea’s experience was authentic. Through this real-life drama, God demonstrated how, despite the unfaithfulness of the Israelites, He continued to pour out His unconditional love upon his people. While Hosea and Gomer’s story illustrates the poignancy, pathos, and suffering that is often found in a difficult marriage, it also demonstrates how grace can prevail.

In the world today, people divorce for a wide variety of reasons, many of which appear to be relatively insignificant when compared with the experience of Hosea and Gomer. While we recognize that the world we live in is imperfect and that marriage is a relationship between two imperfect people, what can those of us who are married do to help maintain a lasting relationship with our spouse? What can we do to help others we know who are struggling in

marriage? An analysis of the Hosea-Gomer story reveals elements of grace that God would have us reflect on as we live with our marital partners.

- *Grace discerns that a spouse is an imperfect being with weaknesses, even serious weaknesses.*
- *Grace recognizes the importance of unconditional love of one's partner to the longevity of the marriage.*
- *Grace chooses to take a positive, affirming perception of the marriage partner, which capitalizes on strengths, rather than to take a negative view.*
- *Grace leads marital partners into processes of forgiveness and healing when mistakes are made, as well as change and growth so that the relationship is not subjected to the mistakes and wounds of the past.*

Parenting Grace: The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

In the biblical story he has no name, but I will call him Mr. Bendoran. Mr. Bendoran was a truly successful man in two respects. First, he was successful because he was a wealthy man who owned a great deal of property. Secondly, he had a good family, with not one, but two sons. For a Jewish family, this was a special blessing, assuring that the family name would be carried on and there would be successors to his rich inheritance.

Like many fathers, you can be sure that Mr. Bendoran doted on his two sons. However, as the children grew up, he noticed a distinct difference between them. While the older boy was one of the most obedient children ever, the younger son had a big streak of rebellion in him. When the boys had almost reached manhood, Mr. Bendoran was shocked one day as his younger son approached him with an unusual proposal. He asked his for his inheritance while his dad was still very much alive.

I guess a lot of fathers would have flown into a rage at such impudence, such an outrageous demand. In all appearance, his son could not wait for him to die before laying claim to his property. However, we see no picture of an angry father. Instead, he gave him his share of the inheritance, then watched with a broken heart as the son, money in hand, disappeared into a distant country, seemingly into oblivion.

Apparently, Mr. Bendoran had no news of the son after his departure, but, in spite of everything, this sad and disappointed parent never gave up hoping that his son would one day reappear. Thus, he was not caught off guard when his son finally did return. He may have been at the window watching out for him as usual. Imagine how his heart must have skipped when on the distant horizon he spotted a familiar figure approaching the house. Even though the person staggering closer was unkempt and in rags, Mr. Bendoran recognized him immediately as his long lost son! Waiting no longer for the younger man to get nearer, he raced down the path and wrapped him in one big fond embrace, giving him no time to explain his sudden reappearance or to apologize for his wretched condition. The younger Mr. Bendoran was then reinstated to the status of a son when his father placed upon him a robe and a ring. The father's big party celebrated his return.

Many have read this story and have been deeply touched by its contents. However, disturbing questions may be raised in the minds of some: First, why did the father give his son his share of his inheritance, thereby seemingly putting into his hands the very means by which he would destroy himself? He must have been aware of the weaknesses of his son when he put the money into his hands. Should not the father have asserted his authority and told his son that he was not entitled to what didn't belong to him yet; that he must stay home and abide by the rules of the house, rather than setting him free to be exposed to all the temptations of the outside world? Why did the father not give his son his just dues when he returned broke and broken? Why did he not reduce the younger man's status to that of a servant or even a slave in his house? What reason can we give for the celebration that followed?

It is difficult to respond to all these concerns until we put the story in the context of grace. This was what Christ was trying to demonstrate in describing the relationship between our heavenly Father and us—a relationship that He hopes we will emulate and implement in our own homes today, in our relationship with our children.

What elements of grace pertaining to the parent-child relationship are displayed in the story of the prodigal son?

- *Grace acknowledges human freedom.* The father gave his son his share of the inheritance even though he knew that he might squander it and lead a life of perdition.

Among the dictionary definitions for “parent” one finds such words as “guardian” and “protector.” Some well-meaning parents think that to guard or protect their children from the world and its influences means having complete control over their offspring. Such an idea can result in “drill sergeant” parenting or “helicopter” parenting. These are kinds of parenting styles in which parents exert strict control over their children and make all their decisions for them. This approach to parenting tends to rob children of the experience of learning through the decision-making process and leaves them ill-equipped to survive in a world filled with temptations.

Foster Cline and Jim Fay in *Parenting with Love and Logic; Teaching Children Responsibility* (1990) point out:

God gave all humans—His supreme creation—considerable freedom, and that includes the opportunity to goof up. Failure and success are two sides of the same coin. If there had been no forbidden tree in the Garden of Eden, humanity would have had no opportunity to make responsible or irresponsible choices. When Adam and Eve made the wrong choice, God allowed them to suffer the consequences. Although He did not approve of their disobedience, He loved them enough to let them make a decision and to live with the results. (p. 26)

Such parenting allows children to venture out, to learn from life's experiences even when there is risk involved. It follows the example of God Himself, who allowed humanity to make a choice because of freedom. Even though this led to sin and disastrous consequences, Christians recognize in His acts God's true wisdom and love. Similarly, parents who want their children to grow up as responsible individuals need to provide them with the opportunity to test

life on their own—to find out and experience the consequences of their responsible decisions and choices, as well as their irresponsible ones. From these experiences, children will better learn how to deal with the real problems of life and to survive in a world filled with challenges that involve decision-making.

Grace and consequences. Margaret was a young lady with a passion to drive and to speed. When she went to university, therefore, her parents were reluctant to give her a car even though she begged for one. They also gave her strict instructions not to drive anyone else's car. One day, however, she succumbed to temptation and drove a car that belonged to a college mate, with unfortunate consequences. While increasing her speed to overtake the car in front of her, she found herself facing a truck in the oncoming lane. To avoid imminent collision, she swerved across the road. She missed the truck, but headed for the river that ran alongside the road. In desperation, she cried out to God for help. The car did not plunge into the river, but instead hit a tree by the roadside. There it came to a stop, suspended over the river. On finding out about the incident, her parents did not rail at her nor censure her for her disobedience. Instead, they consoled her and offered her moral support that she needed. However, she had to pay for the damage done to the car. It took most of her summer's earnings. She learned an invaluable lesson in life and today, no doubt because of her experience, is one of the most careful of drivers.

Reflecting again on Jesus' parable, do you think that the son would be likely to return to his former way of life after what he had gone through and after he had experienced the grace of his father?

- *Grace never gives up.* In the story of the prodigal, even though he had not heard from his son nor knew where he was, the father never gave up on him. How do we know that he never gave up hope? Well, he was not caught off guard when his son finally did appear. We can suspect that the father kept a daily vigil by the window—waiting for his son to return. We do not know how long that wait was, but it could have been a long time. Praise God, he was not disappointed.

A mother's love. An attending nurse recalls how a physician called her aside one day and told her that the newly admitted patient, an elderly woman, would likely not live another day. Concerned, the nurse befriended the dying woman and in a few hours had won her confidence.

Motioning for the nurse to come near, the old woman said sorrowfully, "I have traveled all the way from California by myself, stopping at every city of importance between San Francisco and Boston. In each city I visited just two places: the police station and the hospital. You see, my boy ran away from home and I have no idea where he is. I've got to find him . . ."

The mother's eyes seemed to flash a ray of hope as she added, "Someday he may even come into this very hospital, and if he does, please promise me you'll tell him his two best friends never gave up on him."

Bending over the dying mother, the nurse whispered softly, "Tell me the names of those two friends so I can tell your son if I ever see him."

With trembling lips and eyes filled with tears, the mother responded, “Tell him those two friends were God and his mother.” She then closed her eyes and died.

In Jeremiah 31:3, the Lord said to Israel, “I have loved you, O my people, with an everlasting love; with loving-kindness I have drawn you to me.” In the same way, we parents will never give up on our children be they good or bad. We will love them with an “everlasting love.” This means that we are there for our children when they are on the straight path and especially when they have gone astray. One father often said to his daughter, “Remember that I am here for you no matter where you are or what you have done. I am just a phone call away.” He noticed that she would call when she was sick, when she was disappointed with a grade, or when she got into trouble. She took him at his word. He was thus able to provide guidance and help for her at some very critical times.

- *Grace keeps no scores of wrong.* In our humanness, it would not have been surprising to us if the father, on seeing the returning prodigal, had barked, “What are you doing here, you good-for-nothing son? Just look at you now! Get lost before any of my friends or servants see you!” For some fathers, that would be the natural reaction. But not so in this case. Despite all the heartaches this son had caused him, the father welcomed him with open arms and reinstated him in his place in the family by giving him a robe and a ring—a symbol of sonship.

What comfort it is to know that, because of Jesus, God keeps no score of our wrongs. No matter what we have done, God is there for us when we turn toward Him in repentance. In the same way, grace in the parent-child relationship means that we keep no score of wrongs when our children make mistakes, even serious ones, or hurt us terribly in the process. It is our privilege to pass on to our children the grace and forgiveness God has extended to us. In the process of forgiving them of their wrongs, grace helps drain away the hurt.

Forgiveness illustrated. The moving story “Don’t Let It End This Way” by Sue Kidd well illustrates how a parent can forgive even without being asked to forgive.

The hospital was unusually quiet one bleak January evening. The nurse on duty found the new patient, Mr. Williams, all alone. He had just suffered a heart attack a few hours earlier but seemed to be in stable condition. He looked up from his starched white bed. “Nurse,” he said with tears filling his eyes, “Would you call my daughter? Tell her I’ve had a heart attack. A slight one. You see, I live alone and she is the only family I have.”

“I’ll call her first thing,” the nurse assured him. Just before she left to make the call, however, Mr. Williams asked for a pencil and a piece of paper.

As promised, the nurse called the daughter. A soft voice answered. “Janie, this is Sue Kidd, a registered nurse at the hospital. I’m calling about your father. He was admitted today with a slight heart attack and”

Janie’s reaction startled Nurse Kidd. “No!” screamed the daughter. “He’s not dying is he?” “You must not let him die,” she pleaded. “My daddy and I haven’t spoken in almost a year. We had a terrible argument on my twenty-first birthday, over my boyfriend. I ran out of the

house. I . . . I haven't been back. All these months I've wanted to go to him for forgiveness. The last thing I said to him was, 'I hate you!'"

The daughter rushed to the hospital and her father's room, only to discover that he had just died. She cried heartbrokenly, "I never hated him, you know. I loved him." But it was too late. As Janie sobbed her sad good-bye to her father in the room, the nurse spied a scrap of yellow paper. On it was the message: "My dearest Janie, I forgive you. I pray you will also forgive me. I know that you love me. I love you, too. Daddy." (Adapted with permission from *Guideposts Magazine*. © 1979 by *Guideposts*, Carmel, NY 10512.)

- *Grace focuses on the positive.* The father of the prodigal focused on the positive rather than the negative when his son repented and returned home. In response to the angry protest of his older son, the father said: "It is right to celebrate. He was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and was found!" Instead of zeroing in on the faults and weaknesses of the younger son, as the older son did, the fond parent acknowledged his repentance and accepted him just as he was.

We practice grace in our interaction with our children when we acknowledge their positive contributions, their efforts to do what is right. When they have done wrong, we accept them just as they are. In this way we demonstrate our unconditional love for them and help build their self-confidence.

- *Grace rejoices in repentance and celebrates the reunion of family ties.* In the parable, the father affirmed the son's return home with a big celebration. Similarly we need to rejoice over each step upward taken by our children and let them know it through affirmation and celebration.

Conclusion

In sum, grace in the marital relationship means:

- Accepting our marital partners just as they are, faults and all.
- Forgiving our marital partners when they make mistakes, even serious ones.
- Focusing on their strengths rather than their weaknesses.
- Reaffirming each other in all situations.

Grace in the parent-child relationship means:

- Giving our children the opportunity to make choices and helping them to be responsible through experiencing the consequences of their choices.
- Never giving up on our children, even when they go astray.
- Always being there for them when they need us.

- Not keeping old scores of our children's mistakes, but forgiving them of their wrongs even when they do not ask for forgiveness.
- Focusing on the strengths of our children and showing compassion for their weaknesses.
- Accepting and recognizing their efforts to change; providing affirmation for their efforts.

When we practice grace with our marital partners and our children just as our heavenly Father does with us, we can believe that the bonds between husbands and wives and between parents and children will be the strongest they can be. May God help us to demonstrate grace in our families.

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Daybreak

Timeless answers for an old question . . .

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

The quality of our human relationships reflects the quality of our relationship with God.

Theme Text

1 John 4:7-11.

Introduction

A Rabbi once asked his students, “How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?”

One student suggested, “Is it when you can distinguish between a dog and a sheep in the distance?”

“No,” the Rabbi answered.

“Is it when you can distinguish between a fig tree and a grapevine?” asked a second student.

“No,” the Rabbi responded again.

“Please tell us the answer, then,” urged the students.

Said the wise teacher, “It is when you have enough light to look human beings in the face and recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Until then the darkness is still with us.”

Until we see ourselves as part of one family, the darkness is still with us. Dawn arrives, daybreak comes, only when we are able to look into the faces of all human beings around us and recognize them as our brothers and sisters.

Vertical and Horizontal Relationships

Our Lord recognized that we form relationships in two directions—with God and with humankind. The *vertical* if you will . . . and the *horizontal*. More importantly, He gave spiritual significance to human relationships. He elevated them to a moral plane parallel to our relationship with God.

In Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus summed up the law in two commands: “Love the Lord your God” and “Love your neighbor” Like two sides of one coin, love for God and love for

others are bound together. Christianity holds on to these two relationships at the same time. When one is emphasized to the exclusion or minimization of the other, religion is warped.

Overemphasis on the Vertical. If, in my experience, I over-emphasize my vertical relationship with God without allowing my spirituality to permeate the world around me through my relationships with fellow human beings, I have an unbalanced, mystical religion. Throughout history, such a view has led to the formation of so-called “spiritual centers,” where “the religious” have sought deeper spirituality in isolation from the world.

One such is the Shrine of La Verna in Italy. There, still today, monks endeavor by self-imposed exclusion from human contact to reach a state of perfect holiness. It is their quest to achieve such a high spiritual state that God will honor them by giving them in their bodies the stigmata of Jesus—the wound marks in his hands, feet and side—as church tradition records they were bestowed on their beloved patron saint Francis of Assisi. In order to achieve such holiness, they believe they must be totally separated from the world around them. In some cases, monks have imposed radical isolation upon themselves for over seven years, coming down out of their monastic cells twice a day—once for prayers and once to eat. At no time do they exchange even a word with another human being.

One is compelled to admire the resolve and determination of such individuals, the singular, intense focus which they exhibit. But if we hear what Jesus is saying, we must question whether or not—in their great desire to be attuned to God—they have not missed something equally important, namely their spiritual responsibility to their fellow human beings.

Overemphasis on the Horizontal. On the other hand, if my life is focused only on life in the here and now, even if I am involved with people, doing for people, but loving the “Lord’s work” more than the Lord of the work, neglecting to give attention to deepening my personal relationship with God, I run the risk of slipping into a kind of social religion. It is a religion that operates from a shallow pool of platitudes. It ebbs and flows with the waves of popular concern. But it lacks the depths of understanding and experience with God that undergirds warm loving relationships and compassionate caring ministry over the long haul. This too is an unbalanced experience.

Avoiding the Ditches. Clearly, there is the ditch on either side. In the New Testament, Paul and Peter call Gentiles from their preoccupation with life here, with the human side of the equation, to a relationship with God that will infuse relationships in the here and now with new meaning. For example, the book of Romans dedicates 11 chapters to clearly presenting the good news of the gospel. Then and only then, beginning in chapter 12, does the apostle turn to describe the transformation that belief in Jesus and a commitment to the principles of His kingdom will work in the human realm. At the same time, Matthew records his warnings on the ministry of Christ for a generation whose preoccupation with the *vertical* has led to legalistic hypocrisy in the human realm. In his gospel, the events and words of Christ impress this people with the importance of the human side of the equation (cf. Matt. 5:23, 24; 25:35-45). Perhaps the Jewish audience for whom Matthew was writing was more like many religious people today.

The story of Frank (a pseudonym) comes to mind. Frank was a thin little man who kept dried seaweed in his pockets instead of jelly beans. He had a widespread reputation for his

piety and sacrifice. When the congregation refinished the church basement, he gave a lot of money and worked scores of dawn-to-dusk Sundays until it was finished. He personally paid for and serviced the literature rack in the town laundromat. And when an evangelist set up his tent during off-season on the carnival grounds, he passed out more handbills than anyone. He was always present at prayer meeting and prayed most earnestly, and he could always say all his memory verses. Surely, if a man could love God, he did.

One has to wonder, though, about some other things. Frank didn't seem to have much of a relationship with his wife and children. He didn't bring the family into public view much. The wife was always busy taking care of the house and rearing the kids, and their house needed a lot of repair. Fellow church members can't remember ever seeing her in a new dress. A friend in the church gave her a flat of pansies once in the Spring. She cried.

Beloved, we need the vertical relationship, but we also need the horizontal. Hearts are starving for warmth and kindness. Often the hearts that are starving the most are those closest to us. They are starving while we are pursuing our relationship with the Lord. Hence there is much in the New Testament which details how true religion will live life in human clothes.

New Testament Emphasis on Human Relationships

Jesus. Jesus spoke in both general and specific terms about His intent for human relationships under the principles of His new kingdom. And a lofty intent it is!

- John 13:34 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”
- John 15:12 “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Apostles. Like Jesus, the apostles recognized the significance of human relationships.

- 1 John 4:21 “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.”
- Gal. 5:14 A most amazing verse, “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

There is something very important here. God is profoundly interested in how we do relationships with each other.

Why Love for Fellow Human Beings Is Important

- *Human beings need to know human love in order to comprehend God's love* (1 John 4:11, 12). Agape love is our greatest witness (John 13:35).

Dan (a pseudonym) once told a pastor his story. First, you should know that Dan was the head elder in his congregation. He was also the treasurer. And the personal ministries leader, and the Sabbath School teacher, and the caretaker of the property When the pastor and his family arrived, Dan's wife informed the new pastor's wife that it would be all right to have them around for awhile, but that her husband really was the shepherd of that congregation. He

had a saying of his own that conveyed the same sentiment: “Pastors come, and pastors go, but I stay on forever!”

It wasn't long into his pastorate in that place that the pastor began to receive reports from the members of the hardness of this man's preaching and teaching in their midst. “It's like he has the church in the palm of his hand and he's squeezing out all of its life juices,” one woman confided. “He says we aren't faithful with our tithes and offerings. We don't study our Bibles enough. We don't eat the right things or wear the right clothes. We never do anything right!”

Finally the pastor knew he had to confront the brother. With trepidation the young pastor made an appointment with the now old man. Expecting a mighty defense to his confrontation, the young pastor was totally taken by surprise by the great sobs that came from deep within the old man as he listened to the concerns of the pastor and the members of the church about his ministry in their midst.

Then, without fanfare, he wiped away his tears and began to tell a story of a little boy. A little boy who wanted so very much to please his father, but who never seemed to be able to do anything right. At first the pastor was puzzled, then the connection broke over him. The old man was the little boy. And now, in his dealings with the church, his own experience had come full circle. He was the hard father, and the congregation were his children. “I know they say God is a loving Father,” he concluded. “I preach about it, but I don't know what it means.”

Our experience with human love either sets us up to understand and respond to Scripture's familial metaphors of God as loving parent and marriage partner, or our human experience makes it virtually impossible, but for a miracle of grace, for us to understand God as Love.

The love of Christians for people. The love of Christian parents for their children. The love of Christian spouses for each other. The love of Christians extended freely into a needy world. Such agape love is our most powerful testimony and evangelistic witness. We have priceless opportunities in our human relationships. Hear Paul's plea for the radical transformation of the gospel to be worked in our lives that our witness might heard:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

- *By our love for each other, our love for God is manifested* (Matt 25:40). This is the second reason why God elevates human relationships to a spiritual plane. Our love for others is a tangible expression of our faith. Loving others is not our salvation, for that salvation was prepared for us long before we ever did anything good. But *it is the evidence* that we have laid hold of the salvation God has worked out for us in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:14 makes this very point: “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.” Our love for others is the surest evidence that we have understood the gospel. The quality of our human relationships is the best litmus test for the quality of our relationship with God.

The story is told of a young theology student who sought to deepen his spirituality through much time in prayer and Bible study with fellow theologians. Long days he was in class and at work, and late into the night he was absent from the home praying and studying with fellow students. One day when he came home for supper, his young son begged him to stay home for the evening. Seeing the father brush his son aside, his wife attempted to intervene. “He only wants to be with you,” she said. “He loves you so much.” Her intervention was met with an angry rebuff indicative of how little we understand the connectedness between our relationship with God and our relationship with our families. “That’s the trouble with you woman,” he said with disgust, “you don’t understand the things of God.”

This love for one another, of which the Bible writers speak, is not a love we generate in ourselves. 1 John 4:12 says, “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

Some time ago a remarkable story by Henri Nouwen appeared in the magazine, *Signs of the Times* (May 1989) called “Adam’s Peace”:

I live in a house with six handicapped people and four assistants. We live together as a family. We eat together, play together, pray together, and go out together. We all have our own preferences, and we all have our problems getting along with someone in the house, whether handicapped or not. We laugh a lot. We cry a lot too. Sometimes both at the same time.

Adam is the weakest person in our family. He is a 25-year-old man who cannot speak, cannot dress or undress himself, cannot walk alone, cannot eat without much help. He does not cry or laugh. Only occasionally does he make eye contact. His back is distorted. His arm and leg movements are twisted. He suffers from severe epilepsy and, despite heavy medication, sees few days without grand-mal seizures. Sometimes, as he grows suddenly rigid, he utters a howling groan. On a few occasions I’ve seen one big tear roll down his cheek.

It takes me about an hour and a half to wake Adam up, give him his medication, carry him into his bath, wash him, shave him, clean his teeth, dress him, walk him to the kitchen, give him his breakfast, put him in his wheelchair and bring him to the place where he spends most of the day with the therapeutic exercises.

After a month of working this way with Adam, something happened to me. This deeply handicapped young man, who is considered by many outsiders a vegetable, a distortion of humanity, a useless animal-like creature who shouldn’t have been born, started to become my dearest companion.

As my fears gradually lessened, a love emerged in me so full of tender affection that most of my other tasks seemed boring and superficial compared with the hours spent with Adam. Out of his broken body and broken mind emerged a most beautiful human being offering me a greater gift that I would ever offer him: Somehow Adam revealed to me who he is, and who I am, and how we can love each other.

Adam in his total vulnerability calls us together as a family. Adam. The most broken of us all, is without any doubt the strongest bond among us. Because of Adam there is always someone home. Because of Adam there is a quiet rhythm in the house. Because of Adam there are words of affection, gentleness, and tenderness. Because of Adam there is always space for mutual forgiveness and healing. Adam, the weakest among us, is our true peacemaker. How mysterious are God's ways!"

(First published as "The Peace That Is Not of This World", Weavings, March/April 1988. Published as "Adam's Peace", Signs of the Times, May 1989. Copied with permission of the Estate of Henri J. M. Nouwen.)

Conclusion

It's hard to know whether the wise old Rabbi who talked about the darkness and the dawn ever read the New Testament. Perhaps he did. In the first letter of John we find these words: "I am writing you a new command. . . . Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light" (2:8-10).

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Alive!

by Karen Flowers

Jt was a very hard time for families. You see, where the mother and her little boy in today's story lived, there had been no rain for three years. Not one single drop. The grass was all brown. The trees were dropping their leaves. The animals were dying. No food was growing in the fields. There was no food for sale in the markets. In fact, this mother—like all the other mothers and fathers around—was very worried about how she was going to find food for herself and her little boy one more day. It was hard to be a happy family with all these worries.

Then the most unbelievable thing happened. God's prophet Elijah showed up at their door and asked for food! The mother had a very hard choice to make. She had only enough food for one more meal for herself and her little boy, but she could see God's prophet needed food and she wanted to share. So she put a plate on the table for Elijah. And after that God worked a miracle to keep her little family and Elijah alive through the famine! Everyday, God put just enough food in her cupboard for that day. And the next day there was more. And the day after that, and the day after that. The mother was so happy she thanked God over and over for sending Elijah and providing food for her family every day. But most of all, she was so glad she was learning about the God in heaven who loves His children and takes care of them.

Then the worst possible thing happened. Her little boy got sick and died. And as quick as a flash, people around her said, "See, your God isn't so wonderful after all! You think He has been putting food in your

cupboard, but what good is that if your son dies anyway? He's not a loving God who cares for families. If He were, your son would not have died."

The mother was so sad she didn't know what to do. She said to Elijah, "I thought you said God loves us? How can He love us and let my son die? Now I have no family left."

Elijah didn't know what to say. He knew God loved the mother and her son. So the only thing he knew to do was pray. "I know you love this family that has been so kind to me and given me food and a place to stay during the famine," Elijah prayed. "And I know you did not want this little boy to die. Please bring him back to life so all the families will know you love and care for them." And can you believe it, the little boy started to breathe again! His eyes opened! His fever was gone! Elijah was so excited, he lifted the little boy high into the air and smiled. Then he ran down the stairs with him in his arms and shouted for all to hear: "Look, your son is alive!"

Can't you just see the little boy and his mother hugging each other and laughing and crying at the same time. "He's alive! He's alive! God really does love his children and care for them." The God of heaven loves families and brings them together, no matter what kind of troubles they face. He showed His love by sending Jesus to save us from all the bad things Satan and sin have brought into our world. One day soon, Jesus will make a new world where families can be together forever with Him. He promised He would, and He will keep His promise.

The End to the Big Fight

by Karen Flowers

[For this story, the children—and you may also choose to include the adults—will provide sound effects and actions. Practice the following sound effects associated with key words in the story before you begin. As you are telling the story, pause after saying each of the key words and give time for the children to respond with the appropriate sound effect and action. You may want to engage an adult helper to lead the children.]

Key words with sound effects/actions:

Jacob	stroke forearm and say “Y-e-h! Smooth!”
Esau	scratch fingernails over chest and say “Yeh! Hairy!”
firstborn	hold up index finger and say “I’m Number One!”
money	rub thumb over palm-side of fingers and say “money, money”
cows	squeeze fingers into palms as if milking and say “moo, moo”
horses	hit flat of hands against thighs to make galloping sound and say “dadadum, dadadum, dadadum”
sheep	hold nose and say “baa, baa”
hunt	pretend to shoot a bow and arrow and say “whish”
cook	pretend to stir in a bowl and say “Mmmm. Good!”

[Key words in the story are underlined. After each key word children respond with the appropriate gesture and sound effect.]

This story is about two brothers. One had skin as smooth as a rubber ball. His name was Jacob. The other had hair everywhere—on his head, on his arms, on his legs, and on his chest. His name was Esau. Jacob and Esau were not only brothers, they were twins. But Esau was the firstborn, and in that family, being the oldest child was very important! Who here is the oldest in your family? What’s good about being the oldest? The oldest usually gets to do things first. Sometimes the oldest gets to stay up later. Sometimes they can touch and hold things that younger brothers and sisters can’t touch and hold. What was even more special about being a firstborn in this Bible family is that the firstborn got twice as many of the family cows, twice as many of

the family horses, twice as many of the family sheep, and twice as much of the family money when he grew up and started a family of his own.

Esau was glad he was the firstborn. He liked to hunt and bring his father his favorite foods to eat. *He* wanted to be his daddy’s favorite. And everyday when Jacob was helping his mother cook, he wished and wished he was the firstborn. His mother wished Jacob was the firstborn too. So they made a plan.

One day Esau said, “I think I will go out for a hunt. I probably won’t be back for lunch.” “Hmmmm,” Jacob and his mother thought to themselves. “When Esau comes back, he’ll

be hungry. Perhaps Jacob should cook up a delicious pot of soup. Then, when Esau came back very hungry, Jacob could make a trade with Esau. He could trade the soup he had cooked for all of Esau's rights as the firstborn. Then Jacob would get twice as much of the family cows, and horses, and sheep, and money.

So Jacob cooked a delicious pot of soup and waited. When Esau returned from hunting, he smelled Jacob's good soup, and he was so hungry he wanted some more than anything else. So when Jacob said, "You can have some of my soup if you will let me be the firstborn, and give me twice as much of the family cows, and horses, and sheep, and money, Esau said "Yes! Just give me some of that delicious soup you have cooked and you can be the firstborn and have twice as much of the family cows, and horses, and sheep, and money."

But later . . . when Esau thought about how Jacob had tricked him when he was hungry, he was angry! He didn't want to trade twice as much of the family cows, and horses, and sheep, and money just for a bowl of soup! He was so angry, he decided to hunt his brother Jacob! And Jacob had to run away so Esau couldn't find him.

Have you ever had a fight with your brother or sister? The fight between Jacob and Esau was a BIG fight. It lasted until the two twin brothers were full grown men! But this

story has a happy ending. One day Jacob got tired of running from his brother. Jacob was sorry for what he had done on the day he tricked Esau into trading his rights as a firstborn for a bowl of soup. He just wanted to come home and see his family. He didn't know what Esau would do, but he sent his brother a message that he was sorry and wanted to come home. In the meantime, Esau had been thinking about all the years he had been hunting down his brother. He was sorry he had gotten so angry and kept his brother away from the family all these years. He just wished they could be friends.

So you know what happened? When Esau heard that his brother Jacob was nearing home with all his family, he got on his horse and rode out to meet him. And when the two brothers saw each other, they got down from their horses and ran to hug each other. And the big fight that had kept them apart for all these years was over. It was over because Esau and Jacob were ready now to say they were sorry for the things they had done to hurt each other. The big fight was over because Esau and Jacob were ready to be kind and loving to each other and to share the family cows, and horses, and sheep, and money. The big fight was over because God helped them to forgive one another and begin again. God wants to help us to stop fighting in our families and learn to love and be kind to one another and share. And He will too, if we will let Him!

Family Ties

by Karen Flowers

Advance preparation: For this object lesson you will need:

- a ball of yarn or string
- a pair of blunt scissors
- a small picture of Jesus
- an adult helper

Ask the children, “Who is in your family?”

[Draw out their responses, making comments like, “Yes, you have a daddy in your family...a mother...a sister...a brother....” Be careful to phrase your response so as not to imply that all families are alike, i.e. that all families have a father, mother, kids. In fact, it would be good to note along the way that families are different. It is important to keep your comments positive, i.e., “You and your grandma make up your family,” etc. It could be very hurtful to point out that a particular child does *not* have a father, etc. At some point you may have to help them think beyond the home in which they live to include extended family members, e.g., grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.]

[As you are soliciting answers, you will need an adult helper to create the object lesson. You want to create a network of strings between you and each of the children to represent family relationships. In the end, you will hold one end of all the pieces of string, and each child will hold the other end of one of the pieces of string in their hand. As the children think of various members of their families, have your helper cut an appropriate length of string to connect you

with each one of the children. Hold your ends of string under your thumb behind the picture of Jesus without letting the children see the picture, while your helper cuts off an appropriate length of string and puts the other end in a child's hand to represent a relationship with a family member. Use as many lengths of string as you need to represent sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. so that when you finish, every child is holding a string.]

Look! Everyone is connected! It doesn't matter how old you are, or what color you are, or whether you are rich or poor, tall or short, or whatever. The Bible says everyone is part of the family. God put us in families to love and take care of each other. He put us in families so we could have fun and learn how to treat each other with respect and kindness. He knew we would need someone to help us sometimes. He knew family is the best place to learn about God. And He wants our families to show His love to the world. That's why He made you part of a family at home, and part of His big family here at church.

Do you know who it is who holds all of us together? The Bible says Jesus is the One who holds families together. (Lift the picture of Jesus for the children to see, while continuing to hold all the strings behind it.) Jesus is the One who makes us all part of God's family too.

I'm glad I'm part of my family. I'm especially glad we're all part of God's big family because of Jesus. Aren't you?

The Intimate Marriage: Connecting With the One You Love

*by Karen and Ron Flowers
with Alberta Mazat*

Theme

How to enhance physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intimacy in marriage.

How to Use This Resource

The following marital growth experiences could be shared by a couple, a small group of couples, or as part of a larger marriage retreat.

Acknowledgement

This marital growth resource incorporates the marriage insights of well-known Seventh-day Adventist marriage and family therapist Dr. Alberta Mazat. Alberta and her late husband, Dr. Alfred Mazat, were a warm and loving Adventist Christian couple. Dr. Al was a cherished companion and father at home, as well as a respected physician. He was a great encourager of his family and particularly of his wife in her teaching, writing and counseling. Nothing gave him more pleasure than to watch her in action in ministry to families. Dr. Alberta is well known in Adventist family life circles as a wise Christian counselor with specialization in marriage and family and particularly in human sexuality. She was for 11 years the chair of the Department of Marriage and Family Therapy at Loma Linda University before her retirement. No marriage bore greater witness to the beauty of God's divine design for the marriage covenant and to the miracle of God's grace in human relationships.

We hope the couple reflections that follow will kindle marital growth experiences for all who use them. They are based on Dr. Alberta's most recent book, *The Intimate Marriage: Connecting with the One You Love* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001. Selections used by permission). We believe couples everywhere will benefit much from fulfilling the author's dream:

*"Once a book leaves the publishing house and enters the readers' hands, an author has little to say in how it will be used. **But if I did**, it would be an earnest plea for husbands and wives to read this book together—or if it is read*

separately, to discuss it together. It could bring a whole new dimension to your intimacy” (pp. 15-16).

Part 1 - Dialogue, not Discussion

*There are times when a theoretical discussion does not sufficiently provide all the information necessary for a workable knowledge of a matter (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 103).*

Theoretical discussion about marriage or one’s marital experience is limited in its ability to produce marital growth. Dialogue between marital partners which shares their thoughts and feelings regarding their relationship, however, vastly improves the likelihood that the couple will grow relationally. For most couples, dialogue is a skill to be learned, and learning to dialogue for marital growth is often better demonstrated than merely talked about.

The following skits highlight some of the most common barriers to couple dialogue. All couples will identify along the way. Have fun reading/enacting the parts and putting yourselves into the scenarios. A narrator may read or couples may read together the comments by Dr. Mazat at the end of each skit.

Talk together about ways you identify with each skit. What do you sense needs to happen to improve each couple’s communication dialogue? Celebrate the growth you have made on your personal couple journey toward communicating openly and caringly with one another. Talk about ways you can avoid the pitfalls demonstrated in the skits so that you open yourself and share more deeply with your partner.

Skit 1: Inattention (pp. 103, 104)

Alex: Oh, hi, honey. What a day! The freeway was like a parking lot. I was late getting to work, and the stacks on my desk kept piling higher all day long.

Andrea: Hi! *(She continues to read after looking up briefly.)*

Alex: I can’t believe how inefficient people can be at that office. You should have seen the mess we had about the middle of the afternoon.

Andrea: H’mmm. . . . Oh, really? *(Still reading.)*

Alex: The supervisor from the head office showed up unexpectedly and asked for some reports I couldn’t find.

Andrea: Uh-huh.

Alex: After he left, the boss was upset. He said that with business the way it is some of us might have to be laid off. And he seemed to look at me as he left the office in a huff—

Andrea: What was that last thing you said, honey?

Alex: Never mind. I think I'll mow the lawn.

This could have been Andrea coming home from work while Alex was watching a playoff game on TV. Without realizing it, the inattentive spouse is saying that the activity he or she is engaged in is more important than what the spouse is saying. If this pattern is repeated with any regularity, neither spouse will feel listened to and will quit trying to break through. Being listened to is a very important—and even precious—experience (p. 104).

Skit 2: Nothing Is Wrong! (pp. 104, 105)

Betsy enters the living room after finishing the kitchen cleanup. Ben is reading as she sits down beside him.

Betsy: You've really been quiet tonight. *(Ben doesn't reply.)*

Betsy: You didn't say more than two words all through dinner. Is something wrong?

Ben: Nothing's wrong.

Betsy: Things OK at work?

Ben: Look, I said nothing's wrong. Can't we just leave it there?

Betsy: You know, Ben, some couples talk things over when there is a problem.

Ben: I said *nothing is wrong!*

Betsy: Sure. Nothing is wrong. But it sure would be nice if you could trust me enough to talk about things when something is confusing or eating at you.

Ben: *Look, I—*

Betsy: Yes, I know. Nothing is wrong. *(Gets up to leave.)* I'm going to do some things in the kitchen.

Usually a vehement 'Nothing's wrong!' is shorthand for saying, 'Plenty is wrong, but I can't discuss it because I'm not good at putting things into words.' Or: 'You wouldn't understand.' Or: 'I'm not sure how you could handle the way I feel right now.' Or: 'I'll handle this alone; men shouldn't have to weigh their wives down with extra problems.' Or: 'If I do share this with you, it might make me look ineffective/stupid/wimpish.'

Good news is easy to respond to appropriately. It takes much more sensitivity, acceptance, empathy, and, yes, goodwill to accept unsettling news in a way that

makes the 'confider' feel that disclosing the problem was a good decision. We have to 'earn' the right to be the confidant of troubling news (pp. 105, 106).

Skit 3: Criticizing (pp. 119, 120)

Jed has just come back from a shopping task.

Judy: Well, did you get your money back?

Jed: No, I didn't, and I wish I had never listened to you and gone back to the store.

Judy: Why? What happened?

Jed: The clerk was really rude. She said that the sweater didn't even come from that store, and if it did, it must have been a special consignment sale, and I couldn't return it for a refund.

Judy: Are you sure you were listening right, or were you just not paying much attention, as you often do?

Jed: Of course I was listening!

Judy: Well, then, did you ask for the supervisor?

Jed: No, I didn't, and I don't plan to. *You* can take it back if you want to.

Judy: You are so passive! You just let people walk all over you. You need to stand your ground.

Jed: I hate shopping! And I especially hate returning things.

Judy: You're just too easy on people. Like at the restaurant last week when they brought the wrong order. Most people would have asked for their order to be done over, but not you! You went ahead and ate something you didn't like rather than ask.

Jed: The spaghetti wasn't so bad without tomato sauce.

Judy: I'm beginning to wonder if you'll ever . . . get some backbone.

We can imagine how Jed feels after this exchange. If Judy's criticism is directed toward changing him, it will certainly fall far from the mark. . . .

If Judy would let Jed be Jed, they could have a happy and intimate life. Jed probably has many other good qualities that more than make up for what Judy perceives as a deficit.

Sometimes it's important for husbands and wives to recall the list of wonderful attributes the other has—out loud. One of those times is when one is feeling critical of the other. Very few behaviors are changed for the better through criticism (pp. 120, 121).

Skit 4: Preaching (pp. 121, 122)

Kara and Ken are getting ready for bed on a Friday evening.

Kara: Be sure to set the alarm tonight, Ken. Last week we were late for Sabbath school. I like to be on time for Al's rousing song service.

Ken: Look, you go ahead tomorrow. I don't think I'll go to church.

Kara: Not go to church? What's the matter?

Ken: Nothing's wrong. I'm going to stay home and listen to the United Nations discussion. . . . This is pretty serious stuff.

Kara: Why, I never heard of such a thing. We've never allowed secular things to interfere with our Sabbath attendance.

Ken: Well, this time it will.

Kara: Aren't you getting a little careless about your spiritual commitment?

Ken: Oh, don't get carried away!

Kara: No, seriously! I've noticed other little signs that have concerned me, and I'm wondering about your spiritual direction.

Ken: Now that you bring it up, I'm in the middle of doing a lot of reevaluation of the church—and religion in general. I'd rather not discuss it at this point.

Kara: Well, I'm glad this came up right now. I've been looking up some references on becoming lukewarm . . . I have them right here; I think we should go through them together. Paul has some good exhortations. And Ellen White also brings some pertinent light to this topic. Here, let me show you—

Ken: Look, Kara, I really don't want to go into all this right now. Just leave it alone. OK? Don't make a federal case out of my staying home from church one Sabbath.

Kara: But Ken, sometimes you have to get at the little foxes before they spoil the vines.

Since most partners are concerned about the spiritual tone of their marriage, it's easy to want to be a positive force in that direction . . .

The good news is that our Holy Spirit is alive, well, and active as our comforter, counselor, and exhorter, leading us into all truth. He has had eternities of experience in these roles, so we can trust Him to do what we cannot. There is one thing the Holy Spirit cannot do for your spouse in the way that you can: love in a personal, hands-on way. Let that be the way you express your concerns for each other (pp. 122, 123).

Part 2 - The Essence of Intimacy

Couples who marry want more than a common address; they want total intimacy. They hope to find acceptance, understanding, and love. They look forward to an inner warmth, a closeness that distinguishes their relationship from every other relationship they have. But even though marriage provides the very best setting, intimacy is not the automatic, instantaneous, mystical result of marriage. It is the by-product of love, understanding, knowledge, and time.

It would be simpler, of course, if a guarantee of intimacy in its various dimensions came attached to the marriage certificate. But it would not be as appreciated or as growth-producing. . . .

*Some couples look to marriage to give them love, affection, and happiness. Actually, that is not the role of marriage. Each partner must bring into the marriage the ability to give love and affection—and the habit of happiness. When these elements join together in the advantageous setting that marriage can provide, a wondrous intimacy can result (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, pp. 18, 19).*

Reflect/write individually and then dialogue as a couple on the following:

- Expectations that I brought to our marriage which were realistic . . . unrealistic . . .

- Positive growth we have experienced together as a couple . . .

- Growth I would like to experience in myself in order to better bring “the ability to give love, affection and the habit of happiness” into our marriage . . .

Part 3 - Intimacy in Bible Relationships

*We tend to think of the persons in Scripture as “Bible characters from long, long ago” rather than flesh-and-blood persons such as we are. We find it difficult to picture them with emotions, minds, and hearts that worked the same as ours do now. But we have all been made in God’s image. In spite of differences in time, place, and culture, we should be able to identify with them as we read their stories, listen to their conversations, and observe their actions. They have something to reveal to us about the four [emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual] intimacies . . .(Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 22).*

Read, reflect and write individually, then dialogue as a couple on the following:

Emotional Intimacy: David and Jonathan

- Talk about the “windows” on the relationship between David and Jonathan that the Scripture opens. Read 1 Samuel 18:1 together, using several Bible versions if possible. What does this verse (“the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David” - NKJV; “there was an immediate bond of love between them” - TLB) teach us about emotional intimacy? In what ways can you relate as a couple to their story?
- A disclosure you made to me about yourself that made me want to discover who you are at deeper levels . . .
- Something about myself I would like to entrust to you as my dear friend . . .

Intellectual Intimacy: Paul and Barnabas

- Follow the relationship between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; 9:23-27; 11:19-26; 12:25—13:1-13; 15:36-40). What encouragement can you draw from the sharp conflict and separation of Paul and Barnabas and the appreciation Paul eventually developed for John Mark (see 2 Tim. 4:11)? What do you think is implied about reconciliation between Paul and Barnabas? How does their story touch real life where you live it in your marriage?

- Thoughts I have been wanting to share with you . . .
- New avenues of learning and growing together that I would like to explore with you . . .

Physical Intimacy: Solomon and Shulamith

- Scholars agree that Song of Solomon 4:16-5:1 represents the very heart of the message of the poem. In this scene the marriage of Solomon and Shulamith is consummated. In the imagery of the poem, the woman's body is symbolized by a lush garden, while her lover is compared to a gazelle. In this passage, Shulamith invites her husband into her "garden" to "taste its choice fruits." He responds, and their love and commitment is enjoyed at the deepest level known to husband and wife. Reflect together on the good news in this passage for your marriage and your sexual relationship as a couple.

- Do not miss that the Scripture cheers the couple on through the poetic refrain: "Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers" (Song of Solomon 5:1). Compare this verse with 1 Corinthians 7:4 and with Ellen White's words: "Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy vigils will hallow the marriage chamber" (*Adventist Home*, p. 94). Study these passages and reflect on your thoughts and feelings about your sexual experience together.

Spiritual Intimacy: God's Relationship with Moses, David, Enoch, Mary, Martha, and Paul

- Read John 15:12-17. How do God's intimate friendships with human beings across history expand our understanding of spiritual intimacy in the marriage relationship? How does God, in his relationship with human beings like Moses, David, Enoch, Mary, Martha, and Paul, "*provide a perfect model of engaging in intimacy with another*" and demonstrate "*so many of the qualities of which intimacy is built*"? In what ways is spiritual intimacy the intimacy "*that undergirds and indwells the others*" (p. 28)?

- Ways my relationship with you has helped me to grow spiritually. . .
- Ways I would like to be a source of encouragement and support to you as a Christian . . .

Part 4 - Developing Your Intimacy

. . . *Intimacy does not come ready-made. It's a process beginning with two persons who at one time didn't even know each other—and then move along a continuum [toward intimacy]. . . . We need to spend some time, then, exploring the development of intimacy in a relationship between a woman and a man (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 30).*

Think about where you are and where you have been on your “intimacy continuum” as a couple.

The Intimacy Continuum: Awareness

Share the first positive impression you had about your marriage partner. What were your feelings? What awareness did you have that this was/might be the first step in a process leading to marriage?

The Intimacy Continuum: Chitchat

Think about your early conversations. Can you recall some of the first things you talked about? Perhaps your memories will be very different. While one was concentrating on words, the other was perhaps more interested “*in the way her eyes sparkled or the cleft in his chin*”. One thing is for sure: “*You obviously enjoyed talking with your future spouse because you made more opportunities to do so*” (p. 32-33).

The Intimacy Continuum: Getting Acquainted

What were some of the first activities you enjoyed together? What did you do? What was your response to the experiences? What made you want to deepen the relationship?

The Intimacy Continuum: Deeper Sharing

As your relationship deepened, what can you remember talking about? *“What was it about your partner’s ability to talk that made you realize she or he would be a valuable part of your life? Is there an aspect of this ‘sharing time’ that you would like to see reactivated? Do you feel you were ‘better at it’ earlier in your relationship than you are now? If so, why?”* (p. 35). What would it take to reopen again the kind of dialogue you so enjoyed?

The Intimacy Continuum: Touching

As couples grow closer, *“there comes a desire to experience [the other person] in another dimension as well—the dimension of touching”* (p. 35). Now that you are married, *“Do you wish you would hold hands, hug, and kiss more often—not as a prelude for more intense lovemaking, but simply as freestanding demonstrations of affection?”* (p. 35). What gestures of warmth and touch that your partner extends do you enjoy most? Are there others you would like to initiate?

The Intimacy Continuum: Marriage

Make a list of all the memorabilia you have from your wedding—the announcements, photos, tapes, scrapbooks, etc. Plan a time soon to look through these things together. *“Recall the specialness of meeting each other at the altar, of looking into each other’s eyes during your vows. Parts of the wedding story will probably bring tears—and laughter (even though it might not have seemed funny at the time). Revel in your story”* (p. 37).

At a wedding in her home, Ellen White took the bride and groom by the hand and said, “Make God your counselor. Blend, blend together” (*Adventist Home*, p. 102). Renew your covenant with one another. Discuss how you can traverse the intimacy continuum again and again in your marriage, experiencing again the looks toward each other of admiration and interest, the touching, the thrill of hearing each other’s voice, the substantial blocks of time carved out for being together. Beginning again today, allow God’s grace to work its blending potential in your marriage.

Part 5 - Emotional Intimacy

*Emotional intimacy in marriage concerns how well a wife and husband feel connected, cared for, loved, listened to, accepted, and cherished. We have a need to share deeply with someone to whom we have entrusted our love and faithfulness. Marriage provides the best setting for the growth of emotional intimacy. . . (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 41).*

Read the following, reflect, write and then dialogue together as a couple about growth steps you would like to take toward emotional intimacy today.

- What practical lessons regarding the value God places on emotional intimacy can be drawn from the way Jesus and Paul related to those closest to them? (See John 15:15; 1 Thess. 2:8.) Why do you think emotional intimacy is so important to God's design for Christian marriage? Note the significance of self-disclosure to emotional intimacy.

- How will the Bible's overarching principles regarding Christian relationships guide our journey as a couple toward emotional intimacy in marriage? (See Prov. 15:1; Rom. 12:15; 14:13, 19; 1 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 6:2; Eph. 4:26, 29, 32; Phil. 2:4; 1 Thess. 5:11; James 5:16.) What additional insights from Scripture can you add that enhances our understanding of the path that leads to emotional intimacy in marriage?

- Ways I would like to open the door for deeper and deeper levels of emotional intimacy with you . . .

Part 6 - Intellectual Intimacy

Sometimes you can gauge the health of a marriage by finding out how much time couples do talk casually each day. One young woman admitted that talking was one of the main reasons she chose her husband. "We talked together so well!" she says, adding that the habit has continued. "When we get done in the kitchen after supper and the children are in bed, we often sit out on the porch swing and just talk about everything that happened during the day: something we read or heard on the radio, news from our friends and families, the weather, the phase of the moon, our plans for next year's vacation—and yes, some dreams and some memories too! And when we are doing this, I think, This is about as good as life can get!" When we decide to begin a new behavior pattern, we need to start with realistic expectations. You probably won't be the couple on the porch swing by tomorrow. Begin slowly and deliberately by setting aside just five minutes—maybe 10. Avoid things you know you disagree on. But do have at least a tiny agenda. Sitting down and saying, "Well, what do you want to talk about?" may not work.

*Spending time talking together gives importance to the relationship. It says, "I value our relationship and want to nurture it by talking/visiting/chatting together" (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, pp. 61, 62).*

Take this opportunity to contemplate some new behavior patterns to build intellectual intimacy in your relationship. Read, reflect and write individually, then dialogue as a couple on the following:

- Strengthen your intellectual intimacy by creating a climate for sharing ideas and thoughts. Look for opportunities to convey messages that build intellectual intimacy. What others can you add?
 - ♥ "I hadn't thought of it that way—tell me more about that."
 - ♥ "I've heard that the longer people live together, the more they think alike. I wonder if that will happen to us."
 - ♥ "It really makes me feel special when you confide in me."
 - ♥ "I really value your opinion."
 - ♥
 - ♥

- Express appreciation when your partner shares ideas and thoughts with you. Think of additional ways you can affirm your growth in intellectual intimacy.
 - ♥ "Thank you for sharing that with me."
 - ♥ "I'm glad you told me how you feel about that—it makes me feel closer to you."
 - ♥ "I'm not good at expressing myself. Thanks for your patience."
 - ♥ "I used to dream about being able to talk things over like this—it is so great that we are getting better and better at it."

- ♥ “When we share our ideas and thoughts like this, it makes me realize what intimacy means; it’s really a special ‘married’ feeling.”
- ♥ “I can tell that really means a lot to you.”
- ♥
- ♥
- Read/write and dialogue together about:
 - ♥ Times when sharing new thoughts and ideas with you have meant so much

 - ♥ Times when we do not share thoughts and ideas which give me some concern

 - ♥ Ways in which I commit myself to share my thoughts and ideas with you

Part 7 - Sexual Intimacy

*The act of this meeting of bodies has been described in the Bible in very descriptive words. Solomon in Proverbs 5:19 wishes that a man will always be “captivated” (NIV) by his wife’s love. This word has also been translated as ravished, delighted, transported, intoxicated, and transcended. . . . Again and again we are helped in understanding that God meant married sexuality to be no average gift—but then His gifts never are (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, pp. 74, 75).*

Read, reflect, write and dialogue together about your sexual relationship.

- Ponder the meaning the words of the wise man in Proverbs 5:15-19 for you as a couple. Think what could happen between you if you were to enthusiastically cooperate with God to reach your growth potential in this dimension of your marriage.

- Make plans to spend a very special time together reading the Song of Solomon. If available, use a Bible version that designates the dialogue belonging to Solomon and to Shulamith. Let the husband take the part of Solomon and the wife the part of Shulamith. How does this story of young love and early marriage inform couples today about God's good gifts of the senses and the sexual relationship in marriage? What does this story mean to you as a marriage partner? As a couple?

- Read/write and dialogue together about:
 - ♥ Times when your touch has meant so much . . .

 - ♥ Ways in which I am captivated by seeing you . . .

 - ♥ Delights I feel at the sound of your voice . . .

 - ♥ How my experience in love-making with you is enhanced by scents and fragrance . . .

 - ♥ Things I would like to do to more fully demonstrate my love for you . . .

Part 8 - Spiritual Intimacy

*Historically, God and marriage have been closely intertwined. God instituted it—and gave instructions for its protection and nurture. He performed the first ceremony, giving the principle—they will become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NIV)—still spoken to indicate the ultimate love relationship between partners. Jesus honored marriage by His presence at a festive wedding occasion and by performing His first miracle there. And He pays His church the honor of calling us His bride over whom He will rejoice! (see Isa. 62:4, 5). Marriage has a spiritual ancestry that should be guarded carefully (Mazat, *The Intimate Marriage*, p. 93).*

Read, reflect, write and dialogue together about being spiritually intimate.

- Study John 2:1-11. In the gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus are called “signs,” indicating that they convey a deeper meaning in addition to miraculously addressing the practical needs of the moment (healing the sick, feeding the hungry, providing drink at a wedding feast, raising the dead). In the “sign” of the loaves, Jesus introduced Himself as the Sustainer of Life—the Bread of Life (John 6:26, 27, 48, 51, 58). In the “sign” of the water being changed to wine at the Cana wedding, Jesus presented Himself as One who works radical transformations. He produces from common water the “best” wine (John 2:10). His words and teachings expand and transform like “new wine” in old wineskins (Luke 5:36-38; John 6:63). He will work transformation in marriage relationships as the principles of His kingdom of grace find their way into the hearts of husbands and wives.
- Read/write and dialogue together about:
 - ♥ Times in our couple experience when Mary’s statement, “They have no more wine” (John 2:3) was symbolic of our marriage relationship . . .

 - ♥ Times in our relationship when we have experienced God’s miracle of grace in such a way as open our eyes to even greater transformation Jesus would like to work in our marriage . . .

 - ♥ Ways I would like to be more supportive of your growth as a Christian . . .

 - ♥ Ways you can help me grow spiritually . . .

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Disciples Making Disciples

A Seminar for Parents

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Theme

Several major biblical passages address parent-child relationships and provide specific counsel for contemporary parents.

About This Resource

The following is a Bible study resource designed to assist pastors, family ministries directors and other church leaders in conducting several parenting education sessions. The content addresses the instruction to parents found in several biblical passages—Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25; Proverbs 22:6; 23:13, 14; and Ephesians 6:1-4 and provides parental and parent-child growth exercises suitable for each Bible study. The material may also be adapted for use in parent support groups or for distribution to individual parents in the absence of a seminar or support group.

Part 1 Keeping Covenant with God Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25

Following His creation of the first man and woman, God joined them in marriage (Gen. 2:24). He pronounced His blessing upon their procreative ability and told them to produce children (Gen. 1:26-28). So the Creator gave the first married couple and future married couples the responsibility of perpetuating in the earth human beings, the image-bearers of God.

Having children, however, is not an obligation laid upon every couple in order to please God. While it can be seen in the Bible that marriages generally produced children, some did not and some could not. For those who are able to choose to do so, the choice to bear children is to be undertaken responsibly, giving consideration to one's ability to provide for their needs (1 Tim. 5:8).

The bearing and rearing of children is to be purposeful and selfless, an endeavor that is constantly shaped by the awareness that parents are participating in the original creation blessing of God. Yet having children is not only a solemn responsibility, there is great delight to be found in the presence of new life. Scripture is absolutely exuberant about children: "Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them" (Ps. 127:3-5).

Jesus held a high view of children and the parent-child relationship. "He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:16). "Whoever welcomes one of

these little children in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37). He believed that children could teach older ones about faith. He spoke of children as “these little ones who believe in me” (Mark 9:42).

This seminar looks at four biblical passages—Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25; Proverbs 22:6; 23:13, 14; and Ephesians 6:1-4—that contain special instruction and teaching that is valuable to parents in fulfilling their responsibility toward their children.

Keeping Covenant with God

One of Moses’ final acts of leadership was to review for God’s people His plan for their way of life within their covenant relationship with Him. It is in Deuteronomy that these final words of Moses are recorded. Moses recognized that individual families played a crucial part in the maintenance of the nation’s purpose. So, at the outset of his instruction to parents are these words:

Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. (Deut. 4:9)

The devotional part of Moses’ instruction. Moses’ specific address to parents is in Deut. 6:4-9, 20-25. His address has two parts—a *devotional* part and an *instructional* part. First, Moses gives attention to the parents’ own relationship to God—their devotion to Him—which lays the foundation for their experience with their children. Parents are to *love* God with a thorough devotion that captures the whole being (Deut. 6:5). This response of love called for by Moses is rooted in God’s love in the past (Deut. 4:37; 7:8; 10:15), His love in the present (Deut. 23:5), and the promise of His love in the future (Deut. 7:13).

Elsewhere in the books of Moses, as throughout the Old Testament, this word for “love” (Heb. *’ahab*) is part of the vocabulary of family life. It is used of married love, e.g., Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24:67), of parent-child attachment, e.g., Isaac’s love for Esau, and Rebekah’s for Jacob (Gen. 25:28), and of friendship, e.g., David and Jonathan (1 Sam. 18:1). Here in Deuteronomy, it emphasizes as well the concepts of loyalty and faithfulness, “exclusive selection and loyalty to the chosen one” (Carr, 1984). These concepts of loyalty and faithfulness as a quality of love are present in the predominant New Testament word for love (*agape*). In fact, a form of *agape* is used when Jesus recalls Moses’ words: “Love the Lord your God Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:37-39. cf. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).

The first part of Moses’ presentation to parents is a call to the highest devotion to God, a devotion that includes reverence, loyalty and commitment as well as the warmth and feeling of intimate attachment. Before fathers and mothers can teach their children adequately, they must love God totally, exclusively, intimately, passionately, and reverently.

The instructional aspect of Moses’ presentation. The second dimension in Moses’ exhortation is *instructional*. Parents are to share their experience with God with their children. They are to impress the instruction of the Lord upon their offspring through everyday experiences and in practical ways. “Impress” (Deut. 6:7) is from a word that means to “whet” or

“sharpen.” The teaching of parents must be direct and clear, exposing children to key spiritual issues.

Spiritual instruction is to be a constant part of home life. “Sit—walk,” “lie down—get up” (Deut. 6:7) are opposites used for emphasis. The latter action verbs “lie down—get up” have been interpreted as the biblical basis for morning and evening family devotions (Youngberg, 1991). Spiritual emphasis and religious education in the home is to be diffused throughout all aspects of family life. “Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates” (vs. 9) imply the effect God’s words are to have on actions and attitudes. “Doorframes” and “gates” probably refer to the necessity of maintaining a godly lifestyle in both the private and public spheres. All family life becomes a classroom in which Godly parents instruct their children in spiritual things.

See Handout #1 *Keeping Covenant with God* for seminar exercises related to this part.

Part 2 **Winsome Witness to Your Child** **Proverbs 22:6**

One of the settings toward which the wisdom of Proverbs is directed is the home. The need for parents to get involved and how they should get involved in the training of youth is a common theme throughout Proverbs.

A well-known proverb on childrearing is: “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6). A variety of interpretations of “in the way he should go” have developed, largely centering around two possibilities: (1) the morally right way and (2) the manner of life for which the child is destined or suited by his or her unique characteristics. The second interpretation has become popular among a number of Christian parent educators, especially as they encourage parents to be more attentive to children’s needs and more flexible in their control over children. While this interpretation is appealing and attention to the child’s needs is critical, it is doubtful that this was the intent of Proverbs. “Way” in Proverbs generally signifies “way of life,” and is characterized as either wise or unwise, upright, moral, and righteous or unwise, evil, immoral, and unrighteous, e.g., “the ways of good men” (Prov. 2:20); “the way of the wicked” (Prov. 4:19). Says the Expositors Bible Commentary (1991), “In the Book of Proverbs there are only two “ways” a child can go, the way of the wise and righteous or the way of the fool and the wicked” (p. 1061).

Clifford’s commentary on Proverbs (1999) offers a novel, but unlikely interpretation. He thinks that the proverb is an ironic description of the danger of allowing a child to go its own way: “Let a boy do what he wants and he will become a self-willed adult incapable of change!” (p. 197).

The initial verb “train” is significant to understanding what follows in the verse. The original Hebrew root word is related to an ancient Arabic word for “initiate” or “make experienced” with the primary meaning of “rubbing the gums of a newborn child with the juice of dates or with oil (so as to create an initial sucking response).” This word study suggests a quite

plausible reading of Proverbs 22:6 that incorporates the typical use of “way” in Proverbs. It could read thus: “Accustom a child to savor life” or “Accustom a child to take delight in his way.”

In Proverbs, youth are encouraged to search for understanding “as for hidden treasure” (Prov. 2:4), to guard parental teachings “as the apple of your eye” (Prov. 7:2), to take delight in wisdom (Prov. 10:23) and to favor the moral path over the corrupt way: “He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers” (Prov. 19:8). Like the mid-wife luring the infant into suckling its mother’s breast, parenting children and adolescents is about making Godly values and the Christian way of life attractive, creating a thirst for spiritual things such that youth will find them irresistible and will seek after them as eagerly as a newborn turns to its mother’s milk.

The second part of the Proverb, “and when he is old he will not depart from it,” has the literal sense, “even when he has hairs on his chin he will not depart from it.” That is, attitudes developed in childhood linger into maturity. Proverbs 22:6 has typically been understood as a promise that the dedicated efforts of parents to rear children as Christians will be ultimately successful, i.e., even if adult children are spiritually wayward for a time, they will return to God at last. Some parents, finding a cause-effect linkage in the verse, are plagued with guilt. They understand the verse to mean that, because their children are spiritually wayward, this *effect* (the adult child’s wayward way of life) has been decided by the *cause* (the parents’ poor parenting).

Proverbs, however, deals in maxims and principles, popular truths, and practical wisdom. Probabilities, rather than promises, are expressed. The proverb does not intend to state categorically or imply that the future choices of children will *always* be in line with their upbringing, whether that upbringing was wholesome or unwholesome. It does express the influential nature of early childrearing and the likelihood that this influence will continue. Rather than taxing parents with the impossible weight of moral responsibility for their child’s future in this world and the world to come, the Scripture here presents a thought similar to that noted in the texts in Deuteronomy: passing on to the next generation a hunger and thirst for the ways of the Lord is central to the mission of parenting.

See Handout #2 *Winsome Witness* for seminar exercises related to this part.

Part 3

Wise Discipline

Proverbs 23:13, 14

The wisdom of the sages, collected in the Proverbs, recognized that children are morally immature. They believed they were inclined toward sin, toward making poor choices, and reckless behavior. Woodcock (1988), commenting on Proverbs 22:15, explains the thinking about children: “Children have a natural attraction to foolishness. For their folly has been tightly bound to them and is becoming part of them (22:15). They are not wise enough to avoid their sinful and foolish inclinations” (p. 174).

Throughout ancient Israelite, as well as other Near Eastern cultures, corporal punishment of children was taken for granted as an essential element in their education to address their sinful and foolish inclinations. Several verses speak of using the “rod” (Heb. *shebet*) in child discipline (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15).

The “Rod”

The “rod” (Heb. *shebet*) was one of several hand-held tools such as the shepherd’s “staff” (Ps. 23:4), the “branch” used by Jacob to stimulate conception among his sheep (Gen. 30:37-41), and the “staff” thrown down before Pharaoh by Aaron (Exod. 7:9-15). In Isa. 28:27 *shebet* is a threshing tool. The *shebet* was used for punishment—of slaves (Exod. 21:20), of fools who lack judgment (Prov. 10:13; 26:3), of a son (Prov. 13:24), of a child or youth (Prov. 22:15; 23:13, 14; 29:15). Figuratively, it appears as God’s means of chastening the royal heirs of David (2 Sam. 7:14) and of Messianic judgment on the nations (Ps. 2:9). Elsewhere, it refers literally or figuratively to an instrument of war or execution (Ps. 89:32; Lam. 3:1; Mic. 5:1). Among David’s mighty men was one Benaiah, who went up successfully in battle with a *shebet* (“club” -NIV) against a huge Egyptian (2 Sam. 23:21).

Understanding Proverbs on Child Discipline

In the context of the times, it was believed that the use of the rod in corporal punishment of youth would be corrective, sparing them from a worse fate. “The implication [of Proverbs 23:13, 14] . . . is that ill conduct brings physical death, by human and divine law; from this fate the child is saved by instruction, in which corporal chastisement is recognized as a universal and necessary means” (Toy, 1948, p. 433). As another proverb of the times states, “Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being” (Prov. 20:30).

However, the central message for parents in Proverbs is about the importance of intentional, responsible involvement with their children, being concerned about the total person and the well being of the child. A parent shows love when he or she disciplines as firmly as may be necessary to help the child in his or her development. In Proverbs 13:24, a parent shows love by disciplining the child; hate is shown by not disciplining the child. “Discipline expresses parents’ love for their child by showing that they care enough to take unpleasant action” (Woodcock, 1988, p. 174).

Ultimately, Proverbs is more about the importance of loving discipline than it is about the use of the rod per se. Writes Aitken (1986):

Discipline is first and foremost a matter of *instructing* a child and only thereafter of *punishing* him for his wrongdoings. Punishment which is not subject to the higher ends of instruction is at best arbitrary, and at worst abuses the child. Contrary to what many seem to think, the counsel Proverbs has to give on parental discipline has more to do with a listening ear than an upturned backside! (p. 145)

In Proverbs 13:24; 22:15; 29:15, “rod” may not be meant literally, but may designate firm, corrective discipline that does not involve the rod per se. 2 Sam. 7:14 provides an example of this figurative use. The prophet predicted that, should it be necessary, God would discipline the royal heir of David with the “rod (*shebet*) of men.” Years later, Solomon, King David’s heir,

was severely disciplined, but that discipline did not involve the use of a literal rod. Solomon reaped in the degeneration of his personal life and the deterioration of his kingdom the severe consequences of turning to other gods (1 Kings 11:2, 4, 6).

Biblical Restraints on the Use of the Rod

The extent of the practice in households in Bible times of using the rod in child discipline is not known. No actual biblical narrative exists describing the use of a rod to discipline a child. Toy (1948) notes regarding Prov. 13:24 that “the proverb simply commends bodily chastisement as a means of training; details are left to the judgment of parents” (p. 278). However, it is important to note the specific restraints around this type of discipline. Of utmost importance is the motive driving the correction. Correction is an expression of hope for change (Prov. 19:18). “The chief motive for correcting the young is their potential for change. Revenge and punishment are thus excluded as motives for correcting them” (Clifford, 1999, p. 178). Further, the rod is to be used upon the back (Prov. 10:13; 26:3) and not, for example, to strike the face, head, or extremities of the body. The rod is not to be used in a manner to endanger the child’s life (Prov. 23:13). Above all, the correction is to be consistent with the affection and covenantal commitment that characterizes love (Prov. 13:24).

One interpretation that has become popular in Christian parenting literature is based on Psalm 23:4. The rod was used by shepherds (Lev. 27:32; Mic. 7:14). Since the Heavenly Shepherd’s rod was a source of comfort for David (Ps. 23:4), the parental use of the rod intended by Proverbs should be like that of a caring herdsman who tends, guides, and cares for, rather than beats, his flock.

Alternative Methods of Discipline

Other scriptural references point to the importance of patient teaching and consistent modeling, good communication and close relationships for influencing change in children (Deut. 11:18, 19). Sometimes, offspring are best corrected by allowing them to experience the consequences of their choices, as was evidently the case in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Reflection by Christians on childrearing practices has brought many to an awareness of the high risk involved in physical correction. Physical correction, especially that which is done in the midst of heated anger, is likely to become something more than correction. It may well be interpreted by the child as directed toward him as a person, rather than toward his behavior. A physical encroachment upon a child’s body may result in compliance, but it typically generates negative emotions and adverse hostile reactions within the child.

Christ’s warning not to offend children (Mark 9:42) and Paul’s counsel not to exasperate them (Eph. 6:4) stand as counsel to parents to respect children. Garrett (1993) sees Prov. 23:13, 14 as being restrained by Eph. 6:4: “This text does not justify brutalizing children. Parents who find it only too easy to apply the rod, and especially those who lose their tempers when doing so, should consider Eph. 6:4” (p. 196). Loving correction of children will avoid treatment of them that results in unnecessary trauma and becomes counterproductive to the objective of instilling in children a love for God.

Ellen White makes several revealing comments in this regard:

Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she [mother] 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. (*Child Guidance*, p. 250)

A child is not a horse or a dog to be ordered about according to your imperious will, or to be controlled under all circumstances by a stick or whip, or by blows with the hand. Some children are so vicious in their tempers that the infliction of pain is necessary, but very many cases are made much worse by this manner of discipline. (*Child Guidance*, p. 252)

Frequently . . . [parents] cannot properly control their children because of their own impatience, neither can they teach them the right way. Perhaps they take hold of them roughly and give them an impatient blow. I have said that to shake a child would shake two evil spirits in, while it would shake one out. If a child is wrong, to shake it only makes it worse. It will not subdue it. (*2 Testimonies*, p. 365)

Osborne (1989) expresses the hope that parents will place the counsel to use the rod in proper perspective:

Since using the rod was the wisdom of the time, it was included in the collection of admonishments which the people of God treasured. But times change, and so does advice. . . . May each of us be granted the wisdom we need to develop many resources for rearing our children, so that we use the old method of physical punishment by the rod less and less. (pp. 207, 208)

See Handout #3 *Wise Discipline* for seminar exercises related to this part.

Part 4 **The Service of Parenting** **Ephesians 6:1-4**

Ephesians 6:1-4 represents a segment of the so-called “house rules,” “the table of household duties that exist in the mutual relationships of the family” (Sampley, 1971). This portion covers the child-parent relationship, the next most important pair of relationships in the home after marriage (Eph. 5:22-33). This portion on child-parent relationships continues the style begun with the treatment of the wife-husband relationship. As the wife was considered first in the discussion of the marital relationship, so the child, the socially weaker side of the parent-child relationship, is addressed first.

The mutual submission concept, introduced in Eph. 5:21 as an umbrella principle overarching all three pairs of common household relationships of that day—wife-husband, child-parent, and slave-master, is interpreted here for the child simply as obedience to and honor of parents. The use of *parents* in Eph. 6:1 indicates that the child has a relationship with both. It

also bespeaks a more equal partnership in Christian parenting than was common in pagan society where the father, the *paterfamilias*, had wide-ranging powers over his children, including some recorded instances where fathers allowed disobedient children to be sentenced to death (Dixon, 1992; Rawson, 1991). “In the Lord” qualifies the child’s submission so that the parents’ authority is not absolute. Provision is made for some reprieve for the child from the problem of commands or expectations being given by parents that are contrary to the Christian faith.

The socially powerful part of the parent-child relationship, the father, is next addressed (Eph. 6:4). The overall instruction of the verse surely applies to both parents, but the word “fathers” is used in the place of “parents” (vs. 1), perhaps because the government and discipline of the house typically rested with him (Westcott, 1950) or perhaps because the apostle is thinking of abuses of power by the *paterfamilias*, the Roman father whose ways could, and often did, exasperate or embitter their offspring.

“Exasperate” means “to rouse to wrath, to provoke, exasperate, anger.” The parental duty is first given negatively, as avoidance of all injustice, severity, unreasonable demands, petty rules, or favoritism which bring discouragement, resentment, and bitterness. Anderson (1988) sees a link between parental neglect of this instruction not to exasperate and modern adolescent rebellion. He interprets “exasperate” in contemporary terms as parental neglect, suspicion, not listening, suppression, harshness, criticism, lack of praise, lack of affection, and pressure. Parents must be sensitive to the individual emotional needs of their adolescent children and accompany their regulations by relationship building.

“Training” (Eph. 6:4) is “*upbringing, training, instruction . . . chiefly as it is attained by discipline, correction*” (Arndt & Gingrich, 1979). In addition, parenting includes “instruction” which “carries with it the sense of admonition and sometimes of warning . . .” (Bruce, 1984, p. 399). The apostle’s intent is for children to be reared in a disciplined and values-informed manner.

The training and instruction are “of the Lord.” The parenting process is Christian in nature, not pagan, and this means that the most significant task of parenting is helping children to have a relationship with God and an appreciation of eternal things. The teaching of Jesus that “whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matt. 20:27) shapes Christian parenting. There will be no lording over one’s children as the Gentiles do, but serving them as Christians do. Christian parenting, as described in these verses of Ephesians, is a service of love Christian mothers and fathers render to their children.

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Keeping Covenant with God

◆ Read and discuss:

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 prince of 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)*

In what ways did Jacob's testimony to Joseph serve to perpetuate the covenant with God? What value for his son did Jacob's personal experiences in faith-building have?

◆ Share with your spouse or one other parent a memory you have of when a personal testimony of faith—perhaps of your parents, of a close family member, or of some other significant person in your life—made a dramatic impact on you.

◆ Think about your personal experience with the good news of the gospel. What is your testimony of faith and your response to God's covenant with you in Jesus Christ that you would like your children to know about? (Writing down your testimony may be helpful.)

◆ Share your testimony with your spouse or one other parent. As part of your sharing, you may include (1) how you intend to shape your testimony to the spiritual level of your child or (2) a time when you sensed that your testimony of faith, or some aspect of it, had an impact on your child.

Winsome Witness to Your Child

◆ Bible study of Proverbs 22:6 shows a word correlation between the Hebrew word for “train” and the word used for the stimulation of an infant’s sucking response using some tasty substance such as the juice of stewed dates. This suggests that parents, teachers and other adults who work with children and youth are called to make Christian values as winsome before them as possible. List some of the values of the Christian faith that are sometimes challenging to young people (trust of Scripture, respect for ones body temple, sexual abstinence before marriage, respect for parents and authority figures, etc.). Discuss ways the adults in the lives of young people can make such values more alluring.

◆ It is said that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree,” meaning that children generally grow up to be a lot like their parents, or that the similarities between children and their parents are greater than the dissimilarities. What comfort can you find in this concept? What is unsettling about it? Discuss with your spouse or with another parent to what extent you think this saying can be trusted regarding the transmission of Christian faith from one generation to the next. What examples support your opinions?

◆ An elderly Adventist widow has much of her life and attention invested in her only son. She and her husband, who had spent his career as a church worker, had reared their boy as a Seventh-day Adventist, educated him in denominational schools, did everything they knew how to provide wholesome activities for him, and to support him in establishing wholesome friendships. Now, neither he nor his non-Adventist wife nor their children attend any church or pay any heed to the Adventist lifestyle. This sister blames herself and often cites Prov. 22:6, indicating that if she had done better, he would be in the church. How can this session’s study of Prov. 22:6 be helpful to her? In what ways can a gospel-based faith be instructive to parents about their parental responsibility? How might such a faith bring comfort to parents who are disappointed or who grieve over choices their adult children have made?

Wise Discipline

- ◆ Read, reflect and discuss with your spouse or another parent the following statement:

“Frequently . . . [parents] cannot properly control their children because of their own impatience . . . Perhaps they take hold of them roughly and give them an impatient blow” (2 *Testimonies*, p. 365).

What is the relationship between your feelings about your child’s misbehavior and your feelings about your child as a person? How do your emotions affect the way you discipline your child? When disciplinary mistakes are made, what happens between you and your child? What “atonement” process takes place? With what results?

- ◆ Read, reflect and discuss with your spouse or another parent the following statement:

“Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she [mother] 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” (*Child Guidance*, p. 250)

Write down a half-dozen or more principles regarding child discipline generally and physical correction specifically that can be drawn from this passage (milder measures preferred, discipline in love, etc.). Discuss your own attitude toward these principles. What changes would you like to make in your approach to your child? What first steps toward change can you take right away?

- ◆ Study Mark 9:42 and Eph. 6:4. Discuss with your spouse or another parent how your personal philosophy regarding the discipline of children is influenced by the concepts of Jesus and Paul. Writing this down may be helpful. How has the philosophy of discipline of your parents shaped your own thinking? How do you suppose your views will affect the way your children discipline any children of their own that they might one day have?

- ◆ Think about the interpretation of the rod based on Ps. 23:4. In what ways does your relationship with the Heavenly Shepherd influence your shepherding of your “flock”? Explain how the Psalmist could speak of the “rod” as a “comfort” and what implications this has for Christian parenting.

The Service of Parenting

◆ Study Ephesians 6:1-4, consulting several different Bible versions. Ponder the effect of this instruction to parents in the world of the first century. Is the relevance of this passage greater today? Less? About the same? What feelings are generated inside of you as a parent by contemplating Eph. 6:1-4?

◆ What do you think is the call to fathers that comes from Eph. 6:1-4? It was suggested in the Bible study that the notion of “mutual submission” (Eph. 5:21) is an umbrella principle overarching all three pairs of common household relationships—wife-husband, child-parents, slave-master. What are the implications of Christian submission for fathering?

◆ What view of the parent-child relationship underlies the apostle Paul’s restraining directive to parents to not “exasperate” their children (Eph. 6:4)? Why do you think the negative command is put forth first? Consider your relationship with your children. List any synonyms for “exasperate” you think your children might give if they had the opportunity. What changes can you make so that your children will not feel exasperated, but nurtured and cared for, brought up in the training and instruction of the Lord?

Creative Prayer

by Bernie and Karen Holford

Theme

The aim of this seminar is to help God's family of all ages connect with Him in prayer—personally, in the family, and as a community of faith.

How to Use This Resource

This seminar explores many ways of communicating with God, suggesting a variety of activities that can help us focus our minds on Him, open ourselves to Him, and listen for His response.

Introduction

Prayer has always been a very special connecting point for God and His family. Just as we get to know one another by communicating in many different ways, so we also grow in our relationship with God as we communicate with Him, opening our minds to His presence and what He has to say to us.

Human beings are all different, so we can expect that persons will respond differently to the various prayer activities. We will all have our preferences. Some will find a given prayer activity helpful. For others, the same prayer activity may not be particularly helpful at this moment. That's fine. There is plenty of room for individual expression here. As we take this creative journey into prayer together, we will simply ask the Holy Spirit to guide each one in our quest to deepen our communication with our loving and creative God.

Prayer

Dear God, we invite Your presence in the midst of this Your earthly family circle as we open our hearts to You and seek to hear Your voice. We ask for the Holy Spirit to be our Guide as we explore many ways to communicate with our Heavenly Family. In Jesus' name, Amen.

A Reality Check

Hands up everyone whose mind has ever wandered during a prayer! Hands up everyone who's ever thought—even once—that praying was a bit boring!

Yes, it happens! Even when we don't want it to, we may find our mind wandering. And when prayer becomes a ritual that is highly repetitious, it can lose its pleasure. Learning to pray

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in some new ways can help us to focus our minds on communicating with God and to find pleasure in being in His presence.

Dare to Dream

If you could make your dream come true, what would your prayer life be like? Think for a few moments about the following results. What would you like to experience? Indicate the result(s) that appeal to you. If you were to achieve one or more of these outcomes, what would be the end result?

- Feel God's presence with you.
- Find peace and assurance and rest.
- Enjoy God more as a friend.
- Feel free to talk to Him about all kinds of things.
- Talk to Him often, anywhere.
- Hear His voice more clearly.
- Discover new insights into His love.
- Build confidence that He hears and answers prayer.
- Experience personal answers to prayer.
- Strengthen your relationship with Him.

Prayer as Communication

How do we communicate every day? There are many ways:

- Fax
- Telephone
- E-mail
- Television
- Face to face talk
- Cell phone/mobile
- Gestures
- Facial expression
- Touch
- Pictures
- Action (when someone gives me flowers it communicates something: "I love you," "I'm sorry," "You're special," "Get well soon," etc.)

Communication with God in prayer can be as varied as communication in our human networks. Perhaps we haven't thought about it, but we can be as creative in our prayer experiences as we have become in our ways of communication with one another.

Prayer by Learning Style

People learn in different ways:

- Some people are visual learners who learn and understand best when they can see things with their eyes.
- Some are verbal learners and enjoy playing with words.
- Some need to touch and do things to maximize learning.

Our preferred learning style likely shapes the way we pray and may bias the choice of prayer experiences we offer our children, our families, our church community. What is your preferred learning style? An awareness of your learning style can help you understand why you pray as you do. That awareness can help expand your vision and enable you to be more appreciative of the learning styles of others. Providing a variety of prayer experiences that correspond with learning styles will help to make prayer more meaningful for everyone.

Alphabet Praise Prayer

Let's try a new way to pray a praise prayer. In this prayer experience, we are going to explore new aspects of God that we can praise. So often we get "stuck" praising God for only a few, oft-repeated characteristics or roles, such as saving us, blessing us, being good, loving us, etc. Now we're going to stretch our minds to think of many more aspects of God's character and actions in our lives. When invited to pray this praise prayer, children often come up with more than 100!

The alphabet prayer assigns one of the names of God, one of the aspects of His character, or one of His actions in our behalf corresponding to the letter or character of the alphabet. Here is how to develop a group alphabet prayer:

- Use a flip-chart or blank overhead transparency. Alternatively, you may want to put pieces of paper around the room on the wall, one letter to each page, and give each person a pen to write their ideas on the various pages. Be sure to pair children who cannot write yet with older ones who can help them record their ideas.
- Write the letters A-Z down the left hand side. It may be easier to divide the alphabet, with A-M on one sheet and N-Z on another.
- Invite the group to share suggestions for names of God, aspects of His character or His actions in our behalf.
- Let one person collect ideas from the group, one letter at a time, and another write the suggestions down next to the corresponding letter.
- If children call out ideas that don't match the current letter, encourage their participation by writing down their idea next to the appropriate letter.
- Find positive ways to accept all suggestions, even some unusual ones. Young people and children often offer contemporary words and it's important to affirm these suggestions that are meaningful to them, even if they seem unusual to us.
- It is easy to collect more than four words per letter, so by the end you'll have over 100 characteristics of God to help the group in their praise and worship language.
- Some letters may be tricky. It's okay to bend the rules to include words that sound like they begin with a letter, even if they don't.
 - Q – Quiet, Quick, Quintessential, Quality
 - X – Exalted, Exciting, Example, Extraordinary, Excellent (Ps. 8:9)
 - Y – Yahweh, You, Yes!, Yearning

Action Prayer

Some familiar prayers take on new meaning when we experience them in a new way. When we put our whole body into a prayer, using actions, we find our brains thinking again about the words. What follows is an action prayer, using the Lord's Prayer with hand and body movements incorporated.

Demonstrate the Lord's Prayer with the actions twice from the front, either leading by yourself or using a group that has practiced the prayer in advance. Then involve the whole group. Invite everyone to stand as you pray. The group may want to practice the actions through once and then offer the prayer a second time after the actions have been learned.

The Lord's Prayer with Actions

<i>Our</i>	Point both hands to the chest.
<i>Father,</i>	Hug own body.
<i>Who art in heaven,</i>	Raise both hands upwards.
<i>hallowed be thy name.</i>	Place hands together in prayer.
<i>Thy kingdom come,</i>	"Pull" heaven down out of the sky to your chest with both hands.
<i>Thy will be done,</i>	With elbows close to your sides, touch your shoulders with both hands at the same time—left hand to left shoulder, right to right. Then lower both hands down, as if offering them, stopping with your hands at a 90-degree angle in front of your body.
<i>on earth</i>	Spread hands palms down and move around, to indicate the earth.
<i>as it is in heaven.</i>	Indicate heaven by slowly turning hands palms up and lifting upward.
<i>Give us this day</i>	Start with hands out in a receiving position, then draw them inwards and close the fists at the same time.
<i>our daily bread.</i>	Using left hand as a piece of bread, use right index and middle fingers together to perform the action of spreading back and forth across the left hand.
<i>And forgive us our trespasses (debts),</i>	Motion with both hands as if flinging something away.
<i>as we</i>	Point to self with both hands.
<i>forgive those</i>	Repeat forgiving action above.

<i>who trespass against us (our debtors).</i>	Clench both fists, and bang the right one down on top of the left one, as if to hammer it once.
<i>And lead us not into temptation,</i>	Keeping fists closed, cross wrists as if they are tied together.
<i>but deliver us from evil,</i>	Pull wrists apart as if being suddenly freed.
<i>for Thine is the kingdom,</i>	Use both hands to make a crown for your head.
<i>the power,</i>	Use both hands to show biceps in a power action.
<i>and the glory,</i>	Lift arms together over head, and bring them down and out to each side to form a glorious circle.
<i>forever and ever.</i>	Arms move simultaneously, in two successive steps out to each side, as if drawing a rounded double “M” shape.
<i>Amen.</i>	Hands come together in prayer.

Exploring New Prayer Experiences

When you’re planning a prayer experience, think about how you can pray in a way that is appropriate to the subject of your prayer.

- *Prayer for help to follow Jesus.* Leader walks around while children follow, repeating the words the leader prays in rhythm as they walk.
- *Prayer for local issues.* Identify newspaper headlines and magazine articles and stories on current issues that you want to talk to God about. Post these around the room to remind you as you pray. Talk together later in small groups about some practical ways God might use you to help, perhaps to be part of His answering of your prayer.
- *Prayer requests.* Use pictures, symbols, movement, music, and references to experiences known to the group to help prayer come alive.
- *Prayer of thanks.* Pick items from a bag, such as a photo of a family member, plastic food, toy house, plastic money, something from a foreign country, etc. to help focus the prayer on tangible things for which you are thankful.

Prayer Visuals - Hand

A hand can help a child think of people to pray for.

- *Thumb* (sticks out away from others) reminds us to pray for those from whom we are apart.
- *Index finger* (points) reminds us to pray for those who show the way, e.g., parents, teachers, pastors, etc.
- *Middle finger* (tallest) reminds us to pray for those in leadership positions, in the church, government, world leadership, etc.

- *Third finger* reminds us to pray for those we love, especially our family members.
- *Little finger* reminds us to pray for those who are small, vulnerable, helpless, sick, etc. It can also provide a reminder to pray for ourselves.

Prayer Visuals - Teaspoon

A teaspoon can provide another means for structuring a prayer. Pass a spoon around to members of the prayer group. Use the letters for the English abbreviation for a teaspoon “tsp” (as found in a recipe book) as an acronym or “recipe” for prayer:

- T – Thank you, God...
- S – Sorry God...
- P – Please God...

Each person in the circle prays the *TSP* prayer and then passes the spoon to the next person. Alternatively, each person can pray a *T—Thank you . . .* prayer, until the spoon has passed around the entire circle, followed by a circle of *S—Sorry . . .* prayers, and finishing with a round of *P—Please God . . .* petitions.

Experiencing Prayer as a Child

Children need to feel loved and accepted when they pray. Some children like to be hugged during prayer. The hugging helps the child to feel loved by God as well as by their parent(s). Laying hands on children during the benediction can provide tangible evidence that the prayer blessing is also for them.

Children also need the assurance that they can pray anywhere, any time, in many different ways, and God will listen. For example, kneeling is often associated with prayer in children’s minds. Many times it is good to kneel for prayer, but there are times when kneeling is not possible or appropriate. At other times, we simply choose to participate in a different kind of prayer experience.

Parents should take care not to criticize their children’s prayers as they are learning to pray. God understands their childish ways and accepts them unconditionally. He takes great delight in their transparent honesty and openness. God affords plenty of time for growth into maturity in prayer, as in every other aspect of their spiritual lives.

Ellen White on Family Prayer Time

Prayer time is to be positive and enjoyable. It is not a time for thinly-veiled correction. Ellen White says our family devotional periods should be:

- Short and spirited (*Child Guidance*, p. 521).
- Pleasant and interesting (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 5, p. 335).
- Intensely interesting (*Child Guidance*, p. 521).
- The most enjoyable time of the day (*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 7, p. 43).
- Brief and full of life (*Education*, p. 186).

Prayer Stations

An enjoyable time of prayer for families or small groups can be had through participation in a variety of prayer experiences at “prayer stations.” Below are ideas for nine such sites and instructions for conducting an experiential program on prayer.

Preparation

The special requirements for each prayer station and materials needed for set-up are described with each station listed below. Families, including children, can be involved in the preparations, decorating each station sign attractively with artwork and designs. Make attractive signs to designate each station. If possible, mount or laminate the signs for sturdiness and protection. For large groups, several signs per prayer station will lead people to them from different parts of the room or hall.

At each station a small card will guide individuals and families in the prayer experience. Make enough copies of these cards for each person to use at the station and to take home.

Instructing the Group

As you begin the program, identify for the group the different prayer stations around the room and explain the parts of the program—prayer at the various stations, group sharing and closing prayer. Tell the participants how much time they will have to explore the room and participate in the various prayer experiences. Encourage them to be active participants rather than just observers.

If the seminar is designed for natural family groups, encourage families to stay together and experience the prayer stations as a family group. If the group includes a wider spectrum of the church membership or community visitors, you may wish to create family groupings or “super-families” that include persons of various ages, singles, etc. The goal is to make sure everyone is included.

Ask participants to maintain a reverent spirit of prayer in the room. Encourage them to keep the talk among themselves focused on prayer and to keep noise to a minimum to allow for the many different kinds of prayer experiences occurring in the room simultaneously. In this way, everyone will be able to more fully appreciate this time with God as they experience prayer through different media. It can also be helpful to have soft, meditative music or children’s prayer songs playing in the background.

Sharing Time

After allowing the group time to explore and experience the prayer stations, come together again to share special experiences and thoughts.

- What prayer experience did you enjoy most?
- What made it so meaningful to you?
- Which experiences would you like to try again?
- Who would you like to draw into your family or “super-family” circle for these prayer times?
- What new ideas for prayer experiences come to your mind?

New ideas give birth to more new ideas. Once you begin to think about prayer in a creative way, you will find yourself thinking of other ways to connect with God and with each other in prayer.

Closing Prayer

Try a circle prayer:

- Hold hands in large circle, facing inwards.
- Leader prays for the entire group.
- All turn to look at the person on their left and pray silently for that person.
- Repeat for persons to the right.
- Let hands drop and turn to face outwards. Hold hands again and leader prays for the world beyond the group and the witness and influence for good of the participants in the wider circles of their lives.

► Station 1 - PrayDough Sculpturing

Preparation

- Cover a table with smooth plastic cloth—preferably not too patterned, so as to minimize distractions.
- Make a large batch of cooked, uncolored PrayDough (see recipe) and place in the middle of the table.
- Prepare enough *PrayDough Prayer Cards* for each participant.

PrayDough recipe

Combine in large pan:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 4 teaspoons cream of tartar (not optional)
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 2 cups water

Stir continuously over low-medium heat until mixture pulls away from the sides of the pan (3-4 minutes). (Over-cooking will make the PrayDough too hard for easy molding.) Turn out on counter and knead like bread dough for 8-10 minutes. Allow PrayDough to cool.

PrayDough Prayer Card

Break off a lump of dough in your hands. Squeeze it. Break it into pieces. Push the pieces back together again. Roll the dough into a long snake. Coil the snake up into a circle. Roll it into a ball again. Let your hands create a new shape. Read the following prayer or invite one of your group to read it (replacing the pronoun “I” with “we”) for all as you mold your PrayDough.

Prayer

Father God, I want to come to You like a piece of clay. I want to give You all that I am and hold nothing back, but sometimes that’s hard to do. Help me to put all of my life into Your hands and watch as You make me into something beautiful for Your service. Help me to be willing to take on any shape You want to give me. I want you to be my Potter. Take all of my clay and use it for Your glory. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

We are the clay; You are the potter. Isaiah 64:8

► Station 2 - Healing Leaves**Preparation**

- Cover a table with a pretty tablecloth.
- Prepare a large vase with stones or sand as weight in the bottom.
- Arrange a bunch of leafless twigs in the vase to form the branches of a “tree.”
- Cut leaf shapes from colored construction paper.
- Punch a hole at the base of each leaf which can later accommodate the string for fixing it to the tree.
- Provide short lengths of yarn or string for tying leaves to the tree.
- Supply felt pens for writing on the leaves.
- Prepare enough *Healing Leaves Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Healing Leaves Prayer Card

Take a leaf shape and write the first name of someone you know who needs physical, spiritual, or emotional healing. Maybe it is a family member, a friend, or neighbour. Maybe you want to pray for yourself. Tie the leaf to a branch.

Prayer

Offer silent prayer for their or your healing.

*And the leaves of the tree are for the healing
of the nations. Revelation 22:2*

► Station 3 - Seed Sowing**Preparation**

- Cover a table with burlap or some type of hessian cloth (made with jute) as available.
- Place unpopped popcorn or other large seeds into a small cloth bag and let the seeds spill out onto the table.
- Make an attractive centrepiece for the table with small garden tools, seed packets, flower pots, a watering can, etc.
- Make enough *Seeds Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Seeds Prayer Card

Read and reflect on this parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop — a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear" (Matthew 13:1-9).

What seeds are you trying to sow at the moment? If you were to condense your testimony—your "seed"—into a sentence or two, what would it be? What outreach projects are you involved in? Who in your circle needs the good news you have about Jesus? Take a seed for your pocket or purse.

Prayer

As you hold the seed in your hand, pray for your testimony and witness in the world where you live. Each time you feel the seed in your pocket or purse, remember to pray for the projects or persons with whom you are involved. Pray that the seeds you are sowing will bear fruit, even a hundred-fold.

*And other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop –
a hundred times what was sown. Matthew 13:8*

► Station 4 - Anointing for Mission**Preparation**

- Cover a table with a simple tablecloth, adding a thick towel swathed across the table to protect the tablecloth as necessary from spilled oil.
- Arrange a collection of perfume bottles, a small vase of flowers, and some scented candles as a centerpiece on the table.
- Pour sweet almond oil or baby oil into some decorative bowls.
- Add a few drops of various fragrant essential oils to each bowl.
- Label the oils according to fragrance, including information to alert those who may be allergic to certain oils.
- Provide a basket of cotton balls, in case people prefer to use the balls rather than their own fingertips to anoint their friends.
- Make enough *Anointing for Mission Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Anointing for Mission Prayer Card

We are all anointed by God to serve Him. Share the experience two by two, making sure no one in your “family” is left out. Dip your finger (or a cotton ball) into the perfumed oil, and place a drop of perfumed oil onto each of the palms of your friend’s hands. As you do so say:

As Samuel anointed David to be king,
So I anoint you
to use your power in servanthood.

As Moses anointed Aaron to be a priest of God,
So I anoint you
to show others the way to Him.

As Mary perfumed the feet of Jesus to show Him her love,
So I perfume you
to share His love and your testimony of His grace working
in you.

Prayer

May His fragrance fill your life, now and always, Amen.

*How beautiful are the feet of those
Who bring good news! Romans 10:15*

► Station 5 - Button Memories**Preparation**

- Cover a table with a plain tablecloth.
- Provide an assortment of buttons—large and small, simple and ornate, shaped and plain—and several shallow bowls to hold the buttons.
- A centerpiece of needlework materials, or a work basket, just for decoration.
- Make enough *Button Memories Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Button Memories Prayer Card

Buttons are only little things, but they mean a lot. We only have to lose one button and we soon realize how important they are. Are there people in your life who may have seemed insignificant at the time, and yet they made a big impact on your life? A teacher who gave you a vision . . . A pastor who preached a moving sermon . . . A friend who cheered your heart . . . Choose a button that reminds you of that person in some way, and tell someone else in your group why.

Prayer

Hold the button as you pray for that person. Thank God for them today. Thank Him for using them to make a difference in your life. Ask God to show you someone He needs you to impact significantly. A teen, a lonely person, someone who is ready to give up, someone who needs a vision.

Take the button you chose. Keep it to remind you to pray that God will show you where you can make a difference today.

► Station 6 - God Bless Our World**Preparation**

- Purchase an inflatable globe from a toy store. If unavailable, draw the outline of the continents on a large ball with a felt pen.
- Prepare adequate *God Bless Our World Prayer Cards* for everyone.

God Bless Our World Prayer Card

This prayer gives you a chance to “expand the territory” for which you pray. Think of all the people groups, language groups, religious groups, nations, and families that make up our rainbow world. Form a circle as a family or as a “super-family.” As you hold the globe, turn it to a country or region other than your own. Toss the “globe” gently to someone else.

Prayer

As you toss the globe, say a sentence prayer for the people who live in that place. Even if you don’t know anything about the country, you can still pray for its leadership, for the Christians already living there, and for those who still need to learn of God’s love.

► Station 7 - Balloon Praise Prayers**Preparation**

You will need:

- An assortment of colorful, good-quality balloons (enough for all participants).
- A tank filled with helium. If helium is not available, a balloon inflator which fills balloons with air may be used. In this case you will also need a basket tree frame, a coat tree, or something suitable from which clusters of praise balloons can be hung.
- Several permanent marker pens.
- Lengths of string or ribbon for tying off balloons.
- Adequate *Balloon Praise Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Balloon Praise Prayer Card

Fill balloons with helium. Write words and phrases of praise to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit onto the balloons with a permanent marker pen. You may wish to create your own Psalm of Praise. David may provide some ideas. Share what you have written with your family or group. Helium balloons can then be taken outside and released—or they may be tied together in a bunch and hung from a basket tree frame as the group sings the Doxology together.

*Let everything that has breath
praise the Lord. Psalm 150:6*

► Station 8 - Petal Blessings**Preparation**

You will need:

- A small table with a nice table cloth.
- A bouquet of roses (can be real or artificial).
- A basket of scented rose petals, enough for each participant to use a small handful. (Scented fabric petals can often be found in home décor stores, or perfume may be added to real or silk petals. Scented petal wedding confetti may also be available.)
- Enough *Petal Blessings Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Petal Blessings Prayer Card

Take a handful of petals and sprinkle them over a friend. Make sure no one is left out. Let your friend feel the softness of the petals and smell their gentle fragrance.

Prayer

As you sprinkle the petals pray:

May the Lord bless you and keep you,
May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you,
May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. Now,
and forevermore. Amen.

*Let all who take refuge in you be glad; . . .
for surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor
as a shield. Ps. 5:11, 12*

► Station 9 - Thank You Parcel**Preparation**

You will need:

- A table with a holiday tablecloth.
- A large box wrapped as a beautiful gift.
- Pads of holiday labels or sticky notes.
- Colored pens.
- Enough *Thank You Parcel Prayer Cards* for each participant.

Thank You Parcel Prayer Card: My Thank You Gift!

God has given us so many wonderful gifts! Let's say thank You to Him for some of the things He has given us.

Prayer

Write several "Thank You" notes to God. Add your "prayer notes" of thanks to those of others on the Thank You parcel for God to enjoy.

*Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything,
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:20*

Useful Resources:

Merrell, J. (1995). *One hundred and one ideas for creative prayer*. Bletchley, England: Scripture Union. ISBN 0-86201-954-0.

Wallace, S. (2000). *Multi-sensory prayer*. Bletchley, England: Scripture Union. ISBN 185999465-2

The New Testament Meaning of Family

by Willie Oliver

Theme Texts

Matt. 1:1-17; Mark 3:31-35; John 11:5; 19:25-27.

Thesis

No one, because they are not married, should be alone. The New Testament meaning of family goes beyond blood relations to a notion of family that includes all those who belong to the family of God.

Introduction

It is the morning of September 11, 2001. I have just returned home from an early morning meeting at Julian's (my son's) school. Before leaving for my office at the General Conference World Headquarters complex in Silver Spring, Maryland, only three miles away, I turn on the television set in our family room to catch the last few minutes of the *NBC Today Show*, a daily morning news magazine. The time is about 8:54 a.m., when Katie Couric and Matt Lauer, anchorpersons of the program, suddenly declare that there is late-breaking news in Manhattan somewhere outside their mid-town studio. The next several minutes change my world and that of millions of Americans and non-Americans around the world forever. You know the rest of the story.

The culture that emerged across the United States of America during the days just after the horrific terrorist attacks on that fateful Tuesday morning of September 11, 2001 is what is most relevant to the message I am sharing with you today. Writing in the September 13, 2001 issue of the newspaper *USA Today*, Craig Wilson states:

One day after the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil, Americans began dealing with the horror, often with quiet acts of patriotism and humanity. . . . The Church of Christ on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington, DC, put a sign out front Wednesday morning: "Church open for prayer." It was a scene repeated across the country." (*USA Today*, pp. D1, 2)

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Individuals hugged, cried, and prayed with people and for people they didn't know. To be sure, a few terrorist acts had instantly converted all Americans and many around the world into a de facto family.

My topic today is "The New Testament Meaning of Family." As we study from God's word, my hope is that we will come to a clearer understanding of what it means to be family. It is my desire that we will come to believe, without a doubt, that we can be family to each other in our communities of faith locally and around the world, without the need of a catastrophic event.

The New Testament Meaning of Family

The genealogy of Jesus. How does the genealogy of Jesus found in Matthew 1:1-17 inform our understanding of the true meaning of family? The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary on Matt. 1:16 notes, "Matthew carefully avoids stating that Joseph 'begat' Jesus. Joseph was related to Jesus, says Matthew, not as His father, but as the husband of His mother" (SDABC, Vol. 5, 1980, p. 280). While there has been a good bit of debate in theological circles on the matter of the accuracy of the genealogy of Jesus recorded in Matthew, as compared to the record of Luke, biblical scholars have reached a striking conclusion about the Matthean record:

The line is brought down, not to Mary the mother of our Lord, but to Joseph the husband of Mary (v. 16); for the Jews always reckoned their genealogies by the males: yet Mary was of the same tribe and family with Joseph, so that, both by his mother and by his supposed father, he was of the house of David; yet his interest in that dignity is derived by Joseph, to whom really according to the flesh he had no relation, to show that the kingdom of the Messiah is not founded in a natural descent from David. (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Electronic version – Matthew 1:1-17)

By establishing the lineage of Jesus through Joseph, Jesus' foster father, Matthew's account conveys an understanding of *family*, shared elsewhere in the New Testament, which transcends the narrow definition of blood relations. *Family* means support, concern, and the sharing of values. Indeed, there are at least two reasons for Matthew's presentation of this view of family in this context. First, the gospel writer makes clear that God's kingdom is neither based on nor obligated to the rules of humans; second, the concept of family exceeds that which is defined by blood ties.

Jesus' family in Bethany. John 11:5 states, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."

What a picture! One that in every age has attracted the admiration of the whole Christian Church. No wonder that those skeptics who have so pitifully carped at the ethical system of the Gospel, as not embracing private friendships in the list of its virtues, have been referred to the Saviour's special regard for this family, as a triumphant refutation—if such were needed. (*Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, Electronic Database – John 11:5)

Ellen White characterizes the relationship of Jesus and His friends in Bethany in the following words:

At the home of Lazarus, Jesus had often found rest. The Saviour had no home of His own; He was dependent on the hospitality of His friends and disciples, and often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household, away from the suspicion and jealousy of the angry Pharisees. Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, holy friendship. Here He could speak with simplicity and perfect freedom, knowing that His words would be understood and treasured" (White, 1940, p. 524).

Jesus' family—a spiritual family. Mark 3:31-35 provides an important insight into Jesus understanding of family. Vss. 34, 35 state, "Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Reading Mark 3:20, 21, one quickly understands what is truly going on. Ellen White elucidates by saying that the sons of Joseph, Jesus' foster father, were concerned because of rumors they had heard about Jesus. He was spending His nights in prayer, and His days teaching the crowds, and was, in their view, absolutely burning Himself out. The Pharisees had also recently accused Jesus of healing a possessed man, blind and dumb, through the power of Satan. The brothers of Jesus simply could not stand to have their reputations soiled in the neighborhood and at the synagogue because their younger brother was out of control. They believed that if they engaged Mary, the mother of Jesus, to help them speak to Him, Jesus would probably listen (See White, 1940, pp. 321, 322).

Mark 3:35 is Jesus' response to the ridiculous scene His brothers and mother made. Jesus teaches that, more important than biological or other familial ties, are His ties to those who do the will of God. While in no way suggesting that biological ties are unimportant (see 1 Timothy 5:8), Jesus develops a hierarchy of family in which spiritual relationships and concerns supersede carnal (human) relationships and concerns.

Jesus' family at the cross. (Read John 19:25-27). New Testament scholars suggest that:

Three women, all named Mary, took their station near the cross, sorrowfully contemplating the one who was so dear to them. The Greek text, however, is rather favorable to the mention of four, the mother's sister (Salome, the mother of John) being noted but left unnamed. If so, these four may be intended to present a sort of contrast to the Roman soldiers. Solicitous for his mother, Jesus gave her into the care of the "beloved disciple." His own brethren were not believers at this time. The unity of the Church, which the Lord was bringing into being, was to be spiritual rather than natural (cf. Matt 12:50). His own (home). If John had a residence in Jerusalem, his acquaintance with the high priest is more readily explained (John 18:16). (*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database—John 19:25-27)

Other scholars suggest, trying to clarify the matter, that when John takes Mary home, he takes her to his own home—since his father Zebedee, and his mother, Salome, were both still alive—the latter being one of those at the foot of the cross. (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database—John 19:25-27).

Indeed, it is useful to note that even while John's mother (Salome) is standing at the cross—one of the five who have not abandoned Jesus—her son is accepting and taking on the responsibility for another woman as his mother. This act, to be sure, is consistent with the values of the kingdom of God, of sharing with those in need (Hebrews 13:16).

Community vs. Individualism in American History

Puritan vision of society based on biblical principles of community. The United States of America, like much of the developed world and, in many cases, the developing world as well, has evolved from a simpler to a more complex society. Taking a look at early American history, Robert Bellah and his colleagues note, "Most historians have recognized the importance of biblical religion in American culture from the earliest colonization to the present" (Bellah et al, 1985, p. 28). As one of the earliest Puritans to land on the North American continent, John Winthrop (1588 - 1649) emphasized biblical religion in that earliest colonization. Many prominent commentators on American civilization from Cotton Mather to Alexis de Tocqueville have perceived him as a model of that which symbolized the initiation of American culture. The words of a sermon Winthrop preached on board a ship in Salem harbor just before landing in 1630 have remained representative of what life in America should be like: "We must delight in each other, make others conditions our own, rejoyce [sic] together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body" (Bellah et al, 1985, p. 28).

Though Puritans were not uninterested in material prosperity and often viewed such as a sign of God's affirmation, Bellah summarizes their spiritual focus: "Their fundamental criterion of success was not material wealth but the creation of a community in which a genuinely ethical and spiritual life could be lived" (p. 29).

Rise of individualism. As American society and societies like that of America have evolved into more affluent, complex, differentiated, and secular societies, the value of individualism has become a stronger and more prominent reality. Through transitions involving rapid spacial, social, and religious mobility, from less rural to more urban living, from working class to middle and upper middle class, and from generally churchd to generally unchurchd, Americans have become less community and family oriented and unquestionably more individualistic and secular.

Sociologists believe that the radical individualism of present American society—often also found in other westernized nations—is a justifiable response to the narrow and irrational restrictions of societal arrangements of the past. After all, "Modern individualism emerged out of the struggle against monarchical and aristocratic authority that seemed arbitrary and oppressive to citizens prepared to assert the right to govern themselves" (Bellah et al, 1985, p. 142). However, the problem with modern individualism has been that, while it underscores the dignity and autonomy of the individual, it has done so in a context of waning religious values. Given this danger, notes Bellah, "perhaps only the civic and biblical forms of individualism—forms that see

the individual in relation to a larger whole, a community and a tradition—are capable of sustaining genuine individuality and nurturing both public and private life” (p. 143).

Expanding our American history perspective on the notion of community vs. individualism, scholars like E. Franklin Frazier and others state, “As a result of the manner in which the Negro was enslaved, the Negro’s African cultural heritage has had practically no effect on the evolution of his family life in the United States. The slave traders along the coast of Africa . . . had no regard for family relationships” (Frazier, 1971, p. 17).

A scholarly voice dissenting with Frazier’s basic analyses of the Black family in American society is that of noted historian Hebert G. Gutman. Employing census data for several cities from 1880 and 1925, Gutman discovered that most Blacks, regardless of class, were members of nuclear families. Taking plantation records into consideration, Gutman also ascertains that the two-parent family was normative during slavery. Further, Gutman points out that “Black Americans were almost all poor in the period covered by this study. . . . But poverty did not entail household disorganization. . . The data nevertheless disprove conventional beliefs about the lower class black family. It did not disintegrate following emancipation” (Gutman, 1976, pp. 432-433).

Distinguished historian John Hope Franklin also adds his voice to the chorus of scholars who believe that slavery, as heinous as it was, did not obliterate the importance of family to African slaves in America. To be sure, the efforts of slave owners to encourage a fortuitous disposition about the notion of family among African slaves did not have successful results (Franklin, 1997).

Evidence about runaway slaves is replete in the history of American slavery literature. And the reason for running away is almost always the same—to join relatives that had been sold to other plantations, or to return to locations to have access to relatives. In fact, Franklin proposes that, “The family was important to the slave community, if for no other reason than the lack of other institutions to which slaves could openly be committed. In the quiet and intimacy of the family, slaves could provide the mutual support so necessary to withstand the abuses and cruelties of slavery” (p. 6). Franklin also joins other historians and social theorists who reference the well-known and well-documented reality at the end of the Civil War, that “freedmen searched frantically for family members separated by slavery. Some wrote the Freedmen’s Bureau seeking assistance in locating loved ones” (p. 6).

From these accounts one can make the case that historically, despite often having very imperfect arrangements, Americans have had a long history of community orientation. While it is true that we have clearly moved steadily toward individualism, we have done so to our peril, unless strongly influenced by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Community vs. Individualism in Classical Social Theory

Integration and social solidarity in human societies. The son of a Jewish Rabbi—French sociologist, Emile Durkheim—was among the most prominent classical social theorists of the nineteenth century. Durkheim spent his life and career trying to answer “one fundamental question: what is the basis for integration and solidarity in human societies” (Turner, 1998, p.

251)? In essence, his question was: What makes people feel that they belong, that they are an integral part of a community or society?

Durkheim's work was influenced by "the prevailing views on individualism, prominent in the last quarter of the nineteenth century" (Morrison 1995, p. 123). To be sure, "In France, the concept of individualism had become full-blown by the time of the French Revolution" (p. 124). Durkheim developed a typology of societies predicated on the kind of solidarity evident in a particular society. One type he called *mechanical solidarity*, and the other *organic solidarity* (Turner, 1998, p. 253).

Mechanical solidarity is the typology used to describe societies where people lived their lives based on similar values—essentially religious values. These communities were characterized by a strong relationship of solidarity (unity/oneness) between the individual and her community. This solidarity was based on a strong collective conscience regulating the behavior of individuals, based on the values of the community (Turner, 1998, pp. 253, 254). In this kind of society, individuals experienced a high connection with their community and experienced low levels of suicide. It is also important to note in Durkheim's analysis, unlike the biblical ideal, societies based on *mechanical solidarity* had low levels of individual freedom, choice and autonomy.

On the other hand, in more modern societies—which would characterize our present reality—Durkheim employed the notion of *organic solidarity*. These societies are typified by large populations, distributed in specialized roles in many diverse structural units, where the collective conscience is enfeebled or weakened and individualism is the highest value. These societies are characterized by strong feelings of alienation by individuals who often feel no solidarity with their communities, and consequently experience higher levels of suicide (p. 254). In essence, they have lost a sense of community and family.

In the light of Durkheim's analyses, we should ask ourselves if we are making choices on the values of the gospel of Jesus Christ, which in some ways can be akin to *mechanical solidarity*, or on a secular and individualistic continuum of life based on our own selfish feelings, akin to *organic solidarity*.

Conclusion

No doubt, there is a heightened sense of community and family in the United States of America today because a common enemy (the terrorists) have brought us to the point of interpreting our collective reality based on similar values of fear from an invisible enemy and to the point of concern for the safety of our communities.

I propose to you that despite the need to come together in our country today, as children of God our need to come together should be based on our common values of faith in God, and confidence in His word that He will never leave us alone. There is a need for us as 21st century Christians to re-embrace the New Testament notion of family in each of our congregations around the world. It is imperative that, despite no blood ties or ties by marriage, we can sense a *conscience collective*, because we are children of the King. For if God is our Father, then we must be brothers and sisters. And that, brothers and sisters, is more family than anyone should need.

No one, because they are not married, should be alone, certainly not if he or she is a member of God's church. We are all family—single, married, divorced, widowed, separated, infants, toddlers, preteens, teens, young adults, middle aged, senior citizens, or whatever our individual statuses might be. God made us sociable beings. And while it is true that God made marriage as an ideal for companionship, it is also true that we have traveled far away from that ideal. Not everyone will be or needs to be married to enjoy the sense of family so well dramatized in the narratives of the New Testament, and in a special way in the life of Jesus Christ.

Jesus found family with Joseph, a foster parent. Jesus enjoyed family with Martha, Mary and Lazarus in Bethany. Jesus acknowledged as family those who came thirsting for the fountain of living water on His itineraries through Galilee, Judea and Samaria. Jesus embraced the notion of family with John, a disciple, and made him a foster brother when he left His mother in John's care. Today we must learn from Jesus and revive a real sense of family among people in our congregations.

Appeal. Let us become family in the highest sense of the word. Let us care for one another, support one another, look out for one another, pray for one another. And the peace of God which passes all understanding, will keep our minds and hearts until the day of His coming. Jesus is coming. More importantly, however, while we wait for Jesus to come, let us remember to love one another, as He has loved us. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 3:35).

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Biblical Foundations of Family Ministries

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Introduction

Family Ministries is a ministry of grace which acknowledges as normative the biblical teachings relating to the family and holds high God's ideals for family living. At the same time, it brings an understanding of the brokenness experienced by individuals and families in a fallen world. Thus Family Ministries seeks to enable families to stretch toward divine ideals, while at the same time extending the good news of God's saving grace and the promise of growth possible through the indwelling Spirit.

- *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, Revised 2000

The Bible as a Textbook on Family Relationships

Family ministry helps the church to take a fresh look at Scripture, to put on what we might call "family glasses" and to see in the word of God its profound teachings about family relationships. This new look will not restrict or impair our theological vision, but it will cast a relational hue over familiar passages upon which we may not have focused in this way.

Relational directives. Scripture presents its view of human relationships in a variety of ways. The first example of scriptural teaching on family can be found in what are called *relational directives*. Relational directives are commands intended to create a basic framework for living in relationship with fellow human beings. These are scattered throughout Scripture and can be grouped into several categories. Some are very generic and apply broadly to all relationships. Others are more specifically directed toward people in particular relationships—married couples, parents, children, neighbors, friends. A good example of a *generic* relational directive is the golden rule, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12). "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:40), "Love your enemies" (Luke 6:27), "In humility consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3), "Live at peace with everyone" (Rom. 12:18), "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21) are just a few of many others.

There are specific relational directives for families. Consider these references to *marriage*: "Rejoice in the wife of your youth" (Prov. 5:18); "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her . . ." (Eph. 5:22-25); "Husbands, . . . be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life . . ." (1 Peter 3:7). Several directives address *parents*, for example: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them . . ." (Deut. 6:6, 7); "Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"

(Eph. 6:4). *Children* also receive directives: “Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding” (Prov. 4:1); “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col. 3:20). At least three of the Decalogue directives, the ten commandments, are specifically intended to protect, preserve and enhance life in the family: “Honor your father and your mother . . .” (Ex. 20:12); “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14); “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (Deut. 5:21).

All of the biblical directives regarding our relationships presuppose that the good news of God’s love and grace has been received in our hearts. God’s directives are set within the context of life in the redeemed community of His people. They are intended to be a response to the salvation which is ours in Christ (Ex. 20:2). “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).

Relational laws and probabilities. A very different category of scriptural instruction about relationships, including relationships in the family, is found in the Bible’s presentation of *relational laws* and *probabilities*. The book of Proverbs is the greatest collection of this material. Here are unfolded universal psychological principles, insights into the laws implanted within human beings by the Creator which govern emotional and social responses. Ellen G. White has noted that all parts of the human organism including “the senses, the faculties of the mind . . . were placed under law” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415). Here are a few samples of this kind of scriptural teaching:

- “An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up” (Prov. 12:25).
- “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).
- “Gossip separates close friends” (Prov. 16:28).
- “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Many of these statements are not so much promises or guaranteed responses as they are *probabilities*. It’s as if we’re being told, “Given the complexity of the human mind and emotions, this is what is likely to occur when such-and-such happens.” To understand and apply the insights we can gain from these relational laws and probabilities is to discover the divinely revealed keys to improved relationships in our families.

Narratives. The *narratives* or stories of Scripture are one of the primary ways truth about family relationships is conveyed. Stories and parables are universally appreciated as a means of conveying lessons to people of all ages. The actual historical stories of individuals and families are intended to instruct and inspire us (Rom. 15:4), to rebuke, correct and train us in right living (2 Tim. 3:16). We find ourselves in these stories and parables; we take comfort that our life experience is not unique. Somehow, hearing very forthrightly about the human weaknesses and mistakes of others, our minds become receptive and we learn how we can avoid some pitfalls. Thus we grow from the errors and failures portrayed in the family lives of Bible characters. And not only this, we recognize their good qualities and seek to model our lives after them. We marvel at the longsuffering of God with them and take courage that He will do the same with us.

The book of Ruth is an example of a biblical story that reveals much about family living and the needs of individuals in families. From it we can also learn something about ministry to families. A summary of the issues that emerge from the study of the Book of Ruth might include:

- The realities of change and adjustment following emigration of a family.
- Impact of financial reverses on families.
- Family crises, including grief and loss recovery following the deaths of family members.
- Spiritual issues, crises of faith resulting from significant losses.
- Challenges of widowhood.
- Single parenting.
- Adoption of local cultural values by offspring.
- In-law relationships.
- The personal experience of low self-worth; how self-worth can be encouraged.
- Effect of temperament and personality differences on family coping skills.
- Cultural influences on marriage and family patterns.
- The evangelistic and pastoral impact of a ministry of caring and acceptance.
- The transforming effects of the gospel on the well-being of a family.

Family concepts in God’s relationship with His people. God’s relationship with His people provides a model for Christian family life. His people are called a *family* (Eph. 3:15) or a *household* (Eph. 2:19). His relationship with them is covenant-based (Gen. 17:7; Isa. 55:3; Jer. 32:40; Heb. 10:16) and is often described using familial terms:

- The relationship between God and His people is a *marriage* (Jer. 3:14).
- His people are His *bride* (Isa. 49:18; 62:5; Rev. 21:2, 9).
- He is the *bridegroom* (Isa. 62:5; Cf. Matt. 25:1-10; Mark 2:19, 20).
- God is called *husband* (Isa. 54:5; Jer. 31:32; Cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).
- Unfaithfulness to God is spoken of as *adultery* (Jer. 3:8, 9) or *prostitution* (Hos. 2:5-13; Cf. Rev. 17:1).
- God is like a *father* (2 Sam. 7:14; Jer. 31:9; Matt. 6:9; Luke 23:34; Eph. 3:14; Rev. 1:6).
- Several verses also describe God as like a *mother* (Deut. 32:11; Isa. 49:15; 66:12ff; Hos. 11:1-4; Matt. 23:37).
- Believers are *children* of God (Matt 5:9; Rom. 8:14-16).
- Unfaithful people are *disobedient children* (Eph. 2:2; 5:6).
- The language of *parental discipline of children* is used for God’s spiritual correction of His people (Deut. 8:5; Heb. 12:6, 7).

Analogies can be drawn in two directions from the family images used to describe the relationship of God and His people: God is better understood as individuals think of Him in family terms. By pondering how God functions as a husband and parent, we learn about our responsibilities and relationships as marital partners, parents and family members. (Anderson & Guernsey, 1985; Balswick & Balswick, 1991; Kovacs, 1986; Strauss, 1975).

By examining his Word and learning how he functions as a parent, we can learn what kind of parents we should be. Then when we commit ourselves completely to him and let him control our lives, he is free to express through us his wisdom and strength as the Model Parent. He provides both the example and the encouragement, both the direction and the dynamic for us to be successful parents” (Strauss, 1975, p. 23).

Church as a model for family living. Church life in the New Testament, often likened to that of a family (Eph. 3:15), teaches us about home and family life. Family terms—*household* (Eph. 2:19), *father* (1 Cor. 4:14, 15), *mother*, *sister* (1 Tim. 5:2), *brother* (Rom. 14:10)—help describe the

community of faith. Again, instruction evidently is intended to go in two directions. It is expected that one will bring one's family experience along to church and thus be better able to relate as members of the household of faith. Also, participating in a church community makes a difference in one's life at home (Yarbrough, 1995). Ellen G. White helps us understand family life by comparing it with the church: "Every family is a church, over which the parents preside. The first consideration of the parents should be to work for the salvation of their children" (*Child Guidance*, p. 549).

Church relationship concepts are instructive for family living. For example, Paul taught that every believer is to be valued as an individual, yet all are connected together and may function under the blessing of God in as integrated a fashion as the parts of the human body (1 Cor. 12:14-26). This body metaphor of the apostle Paul applies equally well to individual families, where we understand much more about attitudes and behavior as we think of the family as a system. "The functioning of each separate part affects the body as a whole, and the body as a whole has an impact on the way the separate parts function" (Blevins, 1993, p. 13). Elsewhere, the instructions to the church about its assembling together (Heb. 10:25) and the characteristics that should be present in its fellowship are fitting for families also. One might perhaps assume that the passage in Romans 12:9-21 was carried over to the church from the brotherly love or affection (vs. 10) known in families. Experience would indicate, however, that these several qualities mentioned here, if prevalent in Paul's time, are increasingly rare in homes today. The gospel call to relationships which are affectionate (vs. 10), which honor each member (vs. 10), which are empathic (vs. 15), and peaceful rather than violent (vss. 18-21) is equally valid for home life as for church.

The Song of Solomon. One whole Bible book is devoted to unfolding the mysteries of human bonding and the delights of conjugal love in marriage. Some of Scripture's best insights on how we form and maintain close relationships, especially in marriage, are found in this special piece of divinely inspired Hebrew poetry. In the Song of Solomon we discover that the God who created human sexuality in the beginning and declared it to be very good (Gen. 1:31) has not changed His mind about the unitive purpose of the conjugal relationship.

The delights of love in marriage. Though the Song has frequently been treated allegorically as a symbol of the relationship of God and His people or of Christ and the Church, it is first of all a collection of poetic reflections on the love found in the very real human relationship of man and woman, King Solomon and a woman whom he calls Shulamite or Shulamith (6:13), who perhaps was his leading queen. Symbols represent them: he is a gazelle (2:9) and she is described as a lush garden filled with fragrant plants and shrubs, exotic flowers, fruits and refreshing fountains (4:12-5:1). He "feeds . . . among the lilies" (2:16) and frolics on her "perfumed slopes" (2:17 Moffat). Solomon and Shulamith court (2:8-14), wed (3:6-11), consummate their marriage (4:12-5:1) and continue to enjoy each other's charms (5:10-16; 7:1-9). Within the Song can be found a portrayal of male-female differences in emotional and sexual response. We find also examples of communication that facilitates intimacy. Some of the anxieties that accompany marital difficulties and conflict are also portrayed (1:7; 3:2, 3; 5:6, 7).

Compelling evidence for premarital chastity. Some of Scripture's most compelling evidence for God's plan that we remain sexually chaste until marriage is found in the Song of Solomon. We find references to Shulamith's childhood when her brothers wondered whether she would be a "wall" or a "door" (8:8, 9), i.e., whether she would remain chaste until marriage or be promiscuous. As an

adult woman, she affirms that she has maintained her chastity and comes unspoiled to her husband: “I am a wall . . .” (8:10). Her husband asserts on their wedding night that she is “a garden enclosed . . . , a spring shut up, a fountain sealed” (4:12), i.e., a virgin. On three occasions in the Song, when the couple have been sexually intimate, a poetic device is used whereby Shulamith addresses a group of women called the “daughters of Jerusalem.” In these instances she counsels them to not arouse the intense passion of love until the appropriate time (2:7; 3:5; 8:4), i.e., until they find themselves safely within the intimate covenant of marriage as is she.

The structural key to understanding the Song. It is helpful to understand that the Song of Solomon does not unfold the relationship of the couple chronologically. Rather, this remarkable piece of biblical literature is fashioned according to a unique poetic structure called a *chiasm* (See Figure #1 *The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Solomon*). Rhythm in Hebrew poetry is achieved through parallelism. One kind of parallelism arranges parallel thoughts in reverse order. This kind of parallelism has been called *chiastic*, from the Greek letter X (*chi*) with its crossing lines. The poetic form has a point of intersection around which the material is organized. The segments on one side of the chiasm’s intersection are generally arranged in reverse order to those of the opposite side. Corresponding sections show similarity in content or contain parallel ideas. The intersecting point of the chiasm represents the hub or central statement and serves as a key to understanding the meaning of the whole. The mid-point in the Song of Solomon comes at 4:16-5:1. Exactly 111 lines of Hebrew poetry precede 4:16 and 111 lines of Hebrew poetry follow 5:1. In this passage the marriage of Solomon and Shulamith is consummated.

The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Solomon

	<p>SONG 1:2-2:2 Wife's desire for her husband (1:2) Solomon named (1:5) "My own vineyard" (1:6) Silver (1:11) "My breasts" (1:13) Evaluation of her (favorable) (1:15, 16) Cedar (1:17)</p>	
(A)		(A)
	<p>SONG 2:3-17 The apple tree (2:3-5) Charge to the Jerusalem girls (2:6, 7) The beloved visits her home (2:8, 9) His invitation to an outing (2:10-15) Marriage covenant formula (2:16)</p>	
(B)		(B)
	<p>SONG 3:1-4:15 Dream I, search-encounter (3:1-4) Charge to Jerusalem girls (3:5) Praise of Solomon's procession (3:6-10) Wedding scene (3:11) Praise of bride's beauty (4:1-7) Praise of bride's character (4:8-15)</p>	
(C)		(C)
	<p>SONG 4:16 Her invitation (4:16)</p>	
(D)		(D)
	<p>SONG 5:1 His response (5:1)</p>	
(D ¹)		(D ¹)
	<p>SONG 5:2-7:9 Dream II, encounter-search (5:2-7) Charge to Jerusalem girls (5:8) Praise of Solomon's person (5:9--6:3) Praise of bride's character (6:4-10) Dance of Mahanaim (6:11-13) Praise of bride's beauty (7:1-9)</p>	
(C ¹)		(C ¹)
	<p>SONG 7:10-8:5 Marriage covenant formula (7:10) Her invitation to an outing (7:11-13) A wish that he might visit her home (8:1, 2) Charge to Jerusalem girls (8:3, 4) The apple tree (8:5)</p>	
(B ¹)		(B ¹)
	<p>SONG 8:6-14 Cedar (8:8, 9) Evaluation of her (unfavorable) (8:8, 9) "My breasts" (8:10) Silver (8:11) "My own vineyard" (8:12) Solomon named (8:12) Wife's desire for her husband (8:14)</p>	
(A ¹)		(A ¹)

* Adapted from William H. Shea, "The Chiastic Structure of the Song of Songs," *ZAW* 92, 1980. Note: Variations within the chiasm exist. The overall order of segments in C1, for example, are not the reverse of C, as is the case with the other segments.

Figure #1

Developing a Biblical Theology of the Family

As we consider the Bible as our source for a framework to understand God's plan for marriage and family, it will be important to remember that the Bible is the combined product of a special divine-human interaction: "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." In the Scriptures the divine mind and will are combined with the human mind and will. The utterances of man are the word of God. The writers were "holy," used by God for a special purpose, yet were fallen human beings "with a nature like ours" (cf. James 5:17; 1 Tim. 1:15). The very Bible they penned is the record of God's relationship with people whose natures and circumstances were shaped by the presence of sin. Coexisting together within the pages of the Word of God are both the way the world is and the way it should be.

First and second messages. Scripture reveals God's creation intent for family living. That is the *first message* of Scripture. But the Bible also tells the tale of family relationships gone sour. It tells of a God who is longsuffering with imperfection and preserves in His Word the saga of less-than-ideal family relationships. It tells of a God whose absolute love for human beings and His redemptive intent are as unchangeable as His creation intent. This is Scripture's *second message*. In Jesus Christ, God's creation intent and His redemptive intent are bound together (Ps. 85:10; 1 John 2:1, 2). Scripture ever holds in tension the divine ideals on the one hand and the divine reaching down to human frailty and brokenness on the other. There is compassion for the frailty and yet commitment to the ideals. Our ministry to families must cope with the same tension. We must minister to families where they are, yet always with an awareness of the loftiness of their calling in Christ, a goal that is shaped by the continual searching for and unfolding of the divine ideals.

Christ's ministry our pattern. In the redemptive ministry of Jesus we find our pattern for holding ideals and realities together in an appropriate tension. Christ constantly elevated the divine ideals, as for example in the Sermon on the Mount sequence of Matthew 5:21-48 when He repeats, "You have heard it said . . . but I say . . ." Yet in His ministry to people, He was often misunderstood as setting ideals aside for compassion and fellowship. He was able to take a woman caught in the very act of adultery and say, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more." He mingled (dare we say "partied") with the gluttonous and the wine drinkers (Matt. 11:19). He was often found discussing and teaching in the midst of the "problem" people of his time—tax collectors, adulterers, outcasts, lepers, and demoniacs. Of such ministry He once said, "Wisdom is justified by her offspring" (Matt. 11:19). Perhaps He meant that the wisdom of His course of action would be borne out by the response of those to whom He brought hope and healing. He ministered to people in all walks of life—a couple on their wedding day, a disconsolate mother who had lost her only son, two grieving sisters, a five-time divorcee, a learned Rabbi struggling in secret with great internal upheaval. No doubt Jesus wished to bring people into a full understanding of His message and God's ideals. However, He seemed content to lead them as far as they could go at the time and to trust that the seed thus planted would yield an abundant harvest.

Family: human expression of the relational nature of God. If we excavate to the foundations of the Biblical understanding of family, we find that it is an expression of the self-giving love and relational nature of God. "God is love" declares the apostle John (1 John 4:8, 16), that is, His nature is that of *agape*—self-giving love. In His Word God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This perfectly harmonious and loving Trinity exemplifies the essence of self-giving love which finds expression through the fellowship of persons in relationship.

In the beginning, at Creation, the triune God speaks: “Let us make mankind in Our image, according to our likeness . . .” (Gen. 1:26). Humanity is thus fashioned with the capacity and need for harmonious and loving relationships integral to their very being, reflecting the Creator’s own relational nature and thus bringing glory to Him. Scripture affirms that human beings were not created for isolation, but for intimately satisfying interpersonal relationships. “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). Elsewhere the Bible tells us, “God sets the lonely in families” (Ps. 68:5, 6). “Family” is the word which Scripture uses to describe such human fellowship. “I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named . . .” says Paul (Eph. 3:15). Whether in this macro, cosmic sense or in the micro relationships of our individual families, the ideal of Scripture that these relationships be characterized by companionship and self-giving love is the same. The safeguard and surety of these relationships was a sustained, loving relationship with the Creator (1 John 4:7-12).

Broken relationships between the Creator and humankind and among human beings were the tragic outcome of the Fall into sin. “Your iniquities have separated you from your God,” states Isaiah 59:2. Mistrust, hostility and estrangement marked family living from the time sin entered human hearts. Genesis 3 records the blaming, defensiveness and struggle for power that emerged between the first husband and wife. A few verses later, Genesis 4 records the tragedy of the murder of Abel by his older brother Cain.

Jesus’ mission to earth was one of restoring *agape*-love relationships. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind,” He taught. “This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 22:37-40). Elsewhere He said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Christ established His Church as an ongoing extension of His work in healing and restoring broken relationships. The New Testament repeatedly calls believers to recover through faith in Christ the original creation ideals (Col. 3:1, 2, 8-10). Family Ministries exists to extend the ministry of Christ and to empower families to this end.

Toward a theology of family. Several major assumptions drawn from biblical study and theological reflection undergird Christian family relationships.

1. God is a relational being who has made human beings for relationships (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18; Eph. 1:4-6; Rev. 4:11). God often reveals Himself to us in family terms. From Him we learn of marriage (Is. 54:5) and the parent-child relationship (Deut. 1:31; John 20:17).

2. The family was instituted by the Creator as His primary setting for human development and nurturance (Gen. 2:18-25; Ps. 68:5, 6). Since family is the primary place where the capacity for love and intimacy with God and other human beings is developed and where spiritual values are extended across generations, it is central to the disciple making process (Matt. 28:19; John 8:31; 13:35).

3. The image of God is expressed in human beings as male and female. The Creator’s act of bringing the two together as equals in a monogamous, heterosexual union established the pattern for marriage. This union provides for companionship, fulfillment and the perpetuation of the human

family (Gen. 1:26-28; 2:18, 21-25). The relationship of the sexes in marriage has been distorted by sin (Gen. 3:16), but redeemed by Christ (Matt. 20:26, 27; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:21-31). Christ makes a difference in the marriage of Christians. A mutuality prevails that restores the Edenic ideal. Husbands and wives are “heirs together of the grace of life” (1 Peter 3:7).

4. The covenant of marriage rests on principles of love, loyalty, exclusivity, trust and support upheld by both partners (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 5:21-29; 1 Thess. 4:1-7). When these principles are violated through abuse, abandonment or other instances of unfaithfulness to the marriage vow, the essence of the marriage covenant is endangered. Despite the high biblical ideals for marriage and the divine power that is available to enable marital commitment to endure, some individuals will not survive in marriage. At times, irretrievable breakdown of the marriage occurs. Scripture acknowledges that tragic circumstances may destroy the marriage covenant. Jesus taught that the marriage covenant may be irreparably broken through sexual immorality (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). Paul indicated that death brings the marriage covenant to an end (Rom. 7:2, 3), as does desertion by an unbelieving partner no longer willing to be married (1 Cor. 7:15). The above do not exhaust the destructive factors that may lead to brokenness and divorce. Despite the heartbreak, loss, disruption and long term consequences of divorce, within the context of redemption, divorce and marriage to another that may follow are not viewed as unpardonable sins beyond which there is no spiritual life and fellowship. Through repentance, confession, and the appropriate bearing of responsibility, grace can bring assurance of pardon, healing and new beginnings (1 John 1:9; 2:1).

5. While marriage is God’s general plan, singleness is within the divine design as well. It may be in the best interest of certain individual Christians to live singly (1 Cor. 7:7). God’s special acceptance and protection are over those who by choice or circumstances face life alone (Ps. 68:5, 6; James. 1:27). Friendship is a source of intimacy and of experiencing family. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state (1 John 1:3).

6. Our sexuality lies at the heart of our essence as human beings (Gen. 1:27). Our gender qualities find expression in many arenas of our existence. Sexual intimacy, however, is reserved for marriage (1 Cor. 7:2-6). Outside of marriage, a sexual relationship is contrary to the divine purpose (Gen. 2:24; Prov. 5:1-18; 1 Cor. 6:15, 16). Sexuality serves a unitive function in marriage which is distinguishable from the procreative function. Joy, pleasure and delight are God’s intent for married sexuality (Ecc. 9:9; Prov. 5:18, 19; Song of Songs 4:16-5:1). God intends that couples have ongoing sexual communion apart from procreation (1 Cor. 7:3-5). This strengthens and protects marriage from inappropriate bonding with one other than one’s spouse (Prov. 5:15-20; Song of Songs 8:6, 7).

7. Bearing children is an option through which couples who are able and choose to do so participate in the blessing God intended children to be (Ps. 127:3-5). While marriages generally yield offspring (Gen. 1:28), procreation is not viewed as an obligation incumbent upon every couple in order to please God. God values children (Matt. 19:14). Children help parents understand about loving and trusting God (Ps. 103:13). They encourage the development of sympathy, caring, humility, and unselfishness in families (Ps. 127:3-5; Lk. 11:13). Parents are to provide, teach, and correct their children so they may come to know God, choose biblical values and be prepared for responsible interdependence with others (Deut. 6:6-25; Prov. 22:6).

8. God's covenant love with His people is the basic principle which undergirds and serves as an illustration for Christian family life. In God's covenant we experience love, forgiveness, commitment, acceptance, intimacy, and even sacrifice, that our deepest needs might be met. As we experience the gospel and seek to reflect it in our families, our relationships with each other are fashioned after the likeness of the divine relationship with humanity. Christian family members are called to love, to serve one another, and to forgive—just as God loves, serves and forgives us. Strength and grace from God are promised to enable us to grow toward the ideals to which God calls us (Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 20:26-28; Eph. 4:32; Heb. 8:10-12; 1 John 3:16).

9. Broken relationships with God and with fellow humans were the tragic outcome of the Fall (Is. 59:2). Jesus' mission restored *agape-love* relationships (Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:35; 15:12). His Church is an extension of His work in maintaining strong relationships and restoring those that have been damaged (John 20:21). As part of its mission, the Church seeks to be an active agent in building and maintaining *agape-love* relationships and in healing and restoring relationships that have been broken (John 10:10; 20:21; Gal. 6:2; James 5:15).

Pillars Undergirding Family Ministries: The Spiritual Significance of Relationships

A rabbi once asked his students, "How can you tell the moment of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins?" His students pondered the question. One replied, "Is it when you can tell the difference between a vine and a fig tree?" "No," replied the rabbi. Said another, "Is it when you can tell a dog from a sheep?" "No," said their teacher. "Then we do not know," chimed the students, "Please tell us." "It is when you are able to look into the face of another human being and recognize him as your brother," responded the rabbi. "Until then, the darkness is still with us."

Whether this discerning rabbi had read 1 John 2:10, 11 we do not know, but he echoed its profound truth: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. Whoever loves his brother lives in the light . . ." The first foundational pillar for family ministry is the biblical injunction that we love one another (John 15:12). It has been said that Bible is the custodian of the Church's relational theology. Ministry to families focuses on the building of close family relationships, especially in the home, but also in the church family.

Jesus elevated human relationships to a high moral plane. Jesus elevated human relationships to a moral plane parallel with our relationship to God (Matt. 22:37-40). As was true in the time of Christ, religious convictions and customs today can often stand in the way of basic human caring and compassion (Mark 3:1-5; 7:10-13; Luke 13:10-17). In some religious systems, the human connection with the divine becomes all important, often to the minimization or exclusion of human to human relationships. Jesus taught that the way we relate to one another has deep moral significance in the eyes of God (Matt. 5:23, 24; 25:34-40). As prophets of old had done and apostles later would do, He focused upon human relationships as integral to spiritual life.

In doing this, He affirmed what God had revealed to prophets of old (Is. 1:17; Micah 6:8; Zech. 7:10) and would again reveal to the writers of the New Testament (Rom. 12:10; Eph. 4:32; 1 John 3:23; 4:21). At one point, Paul summed up the whole law as being fulfilled in love for our fellow humans (Gal. 5:14). He understood that this is the true evidence of whether we love God. Love for one another presupposes a loving relationship with God, in which He pours His love into our hearts enabling us to love others (Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:7-11).

We are to be courteous toward all men, tenderhearted and sympathetic; for this was the character Christ manifested when on earth. The more closely we are united with Jesus Christ, the more tender and affectionate will be our conduct toward one another. (*Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 377)

Jesus reaffirmed the family as an institution. Marriage and family are primary structures for human relationships which were instituted in Eden for the benefit of humanity. Jesus, by His reference to families and family members, reaffirmed the institution of the family.

- *Marriage.* When discussing marriage, Jesus affirmed God's plan by pointing His hearers back to the creation of this institution and God's commandments regarding it (Matt. 5:27-32; 19:4, 5; Mark 10:11, 12; Luke 16:18; 18:20. Cf. Gen. 1:27; 2:24). At Cana, Jesus announced that His ministry would endorse and uphold marriage as it was meant to be (John 2:1-12). "He who gave Eve to Adam as a helpmeet, performed His first miracle at a marriage festival. . . . Thus He sanctioned marriage, recognizing it as an institution that He Himself had established" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 356). "Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to restore its purity and beauty" (*Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 64).
- *Children.* Jesus loves children. While on earth He identified closely with them, bade them come to Him, elevated their faith as the standard for entrance into His kingdom, and issued a severe warning to anyone who would cause their feet to stumble. His statements indicate that their families are extremely important to them. There they are to be treated with dignity, respect, and love (Matt. 18:3; Mark 9:37, 42; 10:14, 15). "Children are the heritage of the Lord, and we are answerable to Him for our management of His property" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 159). "Christ placed such a high estimate upon your children that He gave His life for them. Treat them as the purchase of His blood. Patiently and firmly train them for Him. Discipline with love and forbearance" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 279).
- *Family life.* Jesus affirmed the responsibility of adult children toward their parents by citing the fifth commandment as He rebuked the Pharisees for the practice of *corban*, an offering which enabled adult children to skirt their appropriate financial duty toward parents (Mark 7:9-13). Touched by the death of the widow's son and recognizing that she would be all alone in the world with no male family member to care for her in her old age, Jesus showed compassion on her by raising her son from the dead (Luke 7:11-17). Later, He made arrangements for the care of His own mother at the time of His crucifixion by commending her into the care of John and commending him to her (John 19:26, 27).

The "difficult sayings." It should be noted that there are several references by Jesus to family relationships which have been called "difficult sayings" (Garland and Pancoast, 1990). Some verses seem to imply that Jesus "cared little for the relations of kinship" of His own family (Mark 3:33-35; Luke 11:27, 28; John 2:4) or the families of others (Matt. 10:35-38; Luke 9:59-62; 14:26; 18:29, 30; 20:34-36). David Garland discusses each of the difficult sayings of Jesus regarding the family and concludes that Jesus did not hold a view of family that was subversive, nor did He see the family as a petty concern or an impediment to commitment to God. Far from undercutting the valuable nurture, support and strength to be gained from membership in families, Jesus addressed the exclusive attitudes of those who trusted implicitly in biological kinship. He redefined family loyalties,

putting them in perspective against the higher loyalty to God. He opened the way for service to God to be done, not only within the structure of the biological family, but also in the wider circle of the church, the family of God.

"New Testament One Anotherings"

1. Love one another - 1 Thessalonians 3:12
2. Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you - Romans 15:7
3. Greet one another - 2 Corinthians 13:12
4. Have the same care for one another - 1 Corinthians 11:33
5. Submit to one another - Ephesians 5:21
6. Bear with one another in love - Ephesians 4:2
7. Confess your sins to one another - James 5:16
8. Forgive one another - Ephesians 4:32
9. Build one another - Ephesians 4:29
10. Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom - Colossians 3:16
11. Exhort one another - Hebrews 10:25
12. Instruct one another - Romans 15:14
13. Speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, always giving thanks - Ephesians 5:19
14. Comfort one another - 1 Thessalonians 4:18
15. Serve one another in love - Galatians 5:13
16. Bear one another's burdens - Colossians 3:13
17. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling - 1 Peter 4:9
18. Be kind to one another - 1 Thessalonians 5:15
19. Pray for one another - James 5:16
20. Do not judge one another - Romans 14:13
21. Do not speak evil of one another - James 4:11
22. Do not murmur against one another - James 5:9
23. Do not bite and devour one another - Galatians 5:15
24. Do not provoke and envy each other - Galatians 5:26
25. Do not lie to one another - Colossians 3:9

Pillars Undergirding Family Ministries: The Elijah Message

A heart-turning message for the time of the end. At the close of the Old Testament writings we find the prediction that before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord," which we believe to be the second coming of Christ, the Lord will send His people a message which will "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers," i.e., it will be a reviving, reconciling message which will draw families together across generations (Mal. 4:5, 6). Here is a prophetic message that undergirds family ministry.

The original message of Elijah. A study of the first Elijah and his ministry can help us understand what the final Elijah message is about. Beginning with his very name, which means in Hebrew "Jehovah is my God," everything about Elijah and his work was a foundational attack on the pagan worship of Baal. The pagan worship of Baal, the Canaanite rain god, skewed the religious focus of the people toward the myths behind the phenomena of nature and fertility. It held a sensuous fascination for its followers. Sexual sin of all kinds, including incest, prostitution, sodomy and homosexuality, were practiced as part of its rites. It seemed modern, in tune with the times, in contrast to the archaic worship of Jehovah. It seemed liberating and freeing, whereas Jehovah

worship appeared closely proscribed and restrictive. The values of Jehovah, including marriage, family and sexuality, were lost among Baal worshippers.

The withholding of rain (1 Kings 17:1) was a visible, tangible assault on the false religion of the rain god Baal. The religion was thereby unsettled and disrupted and the people's faith in the pagan god shown to be unfounded. During the ensuing drought, two experiences of Elijah highlight the special focus of his ministry and help us to understand his message.

Resurrection at Zarephath. The first experience is recounted in 1 Kings 17:17-24 while Elijah stayed in the home of the widow of Zarephath. We can imagine that Elijah taught her about the true God. However, when her son died, she became distraught. Her cry in vs. 18 reflects a belief rampant among the heathen that sin on the part of parents required sacrifice. From time to time children were even taken from their parents and offered as living sacrifices (Jer. 19:5, Micah 6:7). Even if children died prematurely, it was believed that Baal had taken them as a propitiation to himself.

Vss. 21-23 exalts Jehovah as the true Life-giver, the Life-restorer, the One who brings the family together again. In vs. 24, 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. While Baal worship wrenches families apart, the resurrection of this child and his restoration to his mother illustrates the power of the true God. This episode anticipates the power of the resurrection of Christ and its meaning in the lives of believers (cf. Eph. 1:19-2:9).

Turning hearts to the heavenly Father. In the episode depicted in 1 Kings 18:20-45, there is a striking similarity to the parable of the prodigal son which Jesus told (Luke 15:11-32). The Israelites have departed from the worship and values of the true God. They have experienced what is the inevitable result of following faulty, self-centered, materialistic values. But this story, like the story of the prodigal son, is not so much one of a wayward child or a wayward people, but of a waiting Father. The great burden on Elijah's heart is that Jehovah may again be lifted up, that Israel might be drawn to Him. He yearns for the conversion of His people, for reformation, for a renewal of their relationship with Jehovah, a turning back to the faith of their fathers which would bring healing to their homes and to their land.

It is not accidental that Elijah speaks at the hour of the evening sacrifice (vs. 29). To do so now centers attention on God's redemptive plan. The invitation, "Come here to me (vs. 30)," comes directly from the heart of God. It is the entreaty of One who longs for fellowship, for the companionship of His children. He is a God who opens His arms to embrace us, prodigal children that we are. He loves, accepts and saves us unconditionally. He cares for our wayward children. When we reach our extremity with them, we may release them to His care, knowing that He works unceasingly to draw them to Himself.

Jehovah's altar must again be given its central place. It is the place where God himself has appointed that Israel shall know and understand her salvation. To restore the altar is the Israelite equivalent of our putting the gospel of Jesus Christ into central place—to pray to Him, to speak often of Him in our homes and to our children, to worship Him and to allow our lives to be changed by the salvation He freely offers. Elijah helps them remember their salvation history. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except we forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history" (*Life Sketches*, p. 196).

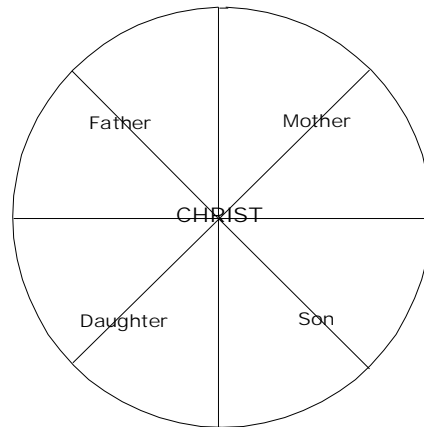
Elijah recalls the fathers of the nation to whom God had made known His covenant. His prayer is that the people will know that God has turned their hearts back to Him and recognize God's mighty act of salvation as being for them also. Then the fire falls. It does not consume the guilty sinners, but consumes the sacrifice. We are reminded that the wrath of God fell upon Christ, God making Him "to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (1 Cor. 5:21). Igniting the wood under the offering would have been adequate to demonstrate that Jehovah was God, but no. The works of God are more than adequate. Everything is taken in one grand, glorious moment. Then the people made their confession of faith, turned from their false religious leaders, and soon the rains came again.

Family ministry and the Elijah message. Family ministry builds upon the foundation of the Elijah message and conveys this message to families. That message is first of all the good news of God's reconciliation with humankind through Christ (compare 2 Cor. 5:19), followed by the heart-turning in our homes that the acceptance of the gospel brings.

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.

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. Thus it is in the Christian life. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. (*The Adventist Home*, p. 179).

THE MEDIATOR



“In the most intimate relationships of life, in our kinship with father and mother, brothers and sisters, in married love, and in our duty to the community, direct relationships are impossible. Since the coming of Christ, his followers have no more immediate realities of their own, not in their family relationships. . . nor in the relationships formed in the process of living. 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.

“The same mediator who makes us individuals is also the founder of a new fellowship. He stands in the centre between my neighbor and myself. He divides, but he also unites. Thus although the direct way to our neighbor is barred, we now find the new and only real way to him—the way which passes through the Mediator.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* quoted in Anderson and Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family*)

Pillars Undergirding Family Ministries: The Gospel Commission to Make Disciples

Another look at the Gospel Commission. Ministry to families is central to the mission of the Church. In His great and final commission, Jesus directed His followers: “Go and make disciples . . . (Matt. 28:19). God intended the family to be a natural setting for carrying out this directive. “As workers for God, our work is to begin with those nearest. It is to begin in our own home. There is no more important missionary field than this” (*Child Guidance*, p. 476).

Disciples hold to the teachings of Jesus. In at least two instances our Lord was specific about what He meant by *disciples*. First, a disciple is one who adopts his teacher’s values and lifestyle as his own. Jesus explained, “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples” (John 8:31). Family is the primary place where values are caught. Families need the support of the Church and the Christian school, but the single most significant factor in the transmission of values and faith development remains the quality of family relationships. In the family the foundations of a person’s value system are laid. It is in the family that these values are tested and tried and shaped by the challenges of life. It is the family that is best equipped to pass these values from one generation to the next.

God intends for families to instruct one another and to model His values and principles within the household (Deut. 6:4-25). Family ministry helps families to fulfill the biblical mandate to make disciples of their members.

Disciples know how to love. Elsewhere, disciples are presented as those who love God and others. Jesus cultivated a loving relationship with His followers. Theirs was a close, intimate fellowship, the kind known only to the dearest of friends. It was a relationship that reached the deepest levels of trust and openness. “I have called you friends,” He said, “for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15). The disciples could risk being fully known, because with Jesus there was ready acceptance and complete assurance that, strengths and weaknesses together, they were fully loved. It was in this intimacy that the yearning to forsake all and follow Him in the founding of His Church, the larger family of God, was born (Matt. 19:27; John 6:68). What happened in the lives of these earliest followers of Jesus gives us our most complete definition of discipleship, for a disciple in the fullest sense is someone who knows how to be intimate with Jesus Christ.

Love for others is the earthward expression of this love for God and intimacy with Jesus Christ. “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12). “All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another,” said Jesus (John 13:35). Family again takes center stage as the primary place where, for better or worse, the capacity for warm, loving, close relationships with God and with others is developed.

The family is key in its significance because it is the place where [relational] skills are learned well or learned poorly. . . . If the family is the social organization in which these skills are learned first, and thus most essentially, then the family becomes central to the process of disciple making. It is a place where disciplelike relational skills are learned, and it is a primary group in which disciple making takes place. (Guernsey, 1982, p. 11).

Upbringing affects religious experience. Ideally, everyone should be *discipled*, i.e., invited to be a disciple of Christ and encouraged to grow in discipleship, within his or her own family. Family

ministry works to increase the number of families where discipleship takes place, where children grow up to become responsible adults who enjoy warm loving relationships with God and others and internalize Christian beliefs. Out of a joyful, vibrant relationship with parents or marriage partner most naturally grows the same kind of Christianity in children and adults. Family members who experience affirmation, encouragement, gentle touch, focused attention, loving discipline and satisfying relationships at home will themselves likely continue in their discipleship. They will likely be successful in discipling their own children and mates, and they will likely be able to form those close friendships in the community around them that most naturally lead to fruitful witnessing.

Sometimes, however, despite the greatest efforts, it just doesn't work out this way. For some, family experience leads comfortably to faith. For others it creates a huge stumbling block surmountable only by a miracle of grace.

A person's image of God is often patterned after his image of his own parents, especially his father. If his parents were happy, loving, accepting and forgiving, he finds it easier to experience a positive and satisfying relationship with God. But if his parents were cold and indifferent, he may feel that God is far away and disinterested in him personally. If his parents were angry, hostile and rejecting, he often feels that God can never accept him. If his parents were hard to please, he usually has the nagging notion that God is not very happy with him either. (Strauss, 1975, pp. 23, 24).

Our relational experiences at home profoundly influence our relationships with God. Ellen White sums it all up in one pithy sentence: "Their whole religious experience is affected by their bringing up in childhood" (*Child Guidance*, p. 473).

Families are not alone. What of the parents whose souls ache for wayward children and often ask, "What did we do wrong?" What of the spouses who have prayed so long for their partners, but with no response? The good news is that families aren't alone in their disciple making tasks, nor are they given a one-time chance, one at which they either succeed or fail by the time adulthood is reached. The good news is that while on-going relationships may be painful—for rejection of one's values often seems to be rejection of ourselves—the hope of an on-going opportunity to disciple can ease the load and make it worth the pain. The good news is that as long as there is life there is hope, for only death ends the discipling process. And warm close relationships will always offer the best hope that a dear one will one day yet be disciplined by Jesus Christ.

Family ministry addresses the issues of disciple making in the home and seeks to help parents grow in their personal faith and relationship with Jesus and to learn how through their family relationships to extend the invitation to their children to follow Him also.

Conclusion

There is much in psychological and sociological literature than can and must inform our ministry to families. However, it is our firm grasp of Scripture and our connection with the biblical authority that provides our unique identity. Scripture forms the canon for our faith and practice in family living and in our ministry to families. A continuing task for Family Ministries leaders will be to stand firmly on the biblical foundation while speaking clearly and relevantly to each generation of families.

The scriptures are handed on to us as a confession of faith and as a witness to the quality and mode of life when it is lived in faithfulness to the Father who has made himself known to us in his Son through the Spirit. Our whole task as preachers [and family ministries leaders], then, is to pass on the confession and the witness. Our task is to preach not ourselves, or our society's ways, but Jesus Christ as Lord, that hearing him our people may trust and, trusting, may be given the power to live abundant and joyful lives of faithfulness to their God. (Achtemeier, 1987, p. 16)

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Marriage as a Covenant

Biblical law and ethics as developed from Malachi

by Gordon P Hugenberger

Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994

Reviewed by Bryan Craig

During the last forty years, societal expectations and beliefs about marriage have undergone significant changes. A growing number of people, especially in the western world, no longer experience marriage as a lifelong commitment. More and more men and women are choosing to live together without getting married. Many others perceive marriage as merely a contractual arrangement between two people which can be disposed of, if and when the terms of the agreement are not fulfilled.

Christians have long believed that marriage is more than a contract. Based on the words of Scripture they have consistently upheld that marriage is best understood not as a contract but as a “covenant relationship” in which a husband and wife solemnly vow to love and emotionally support each other. They also promise to remain faithfully committed to maintaining and preserving the relationship which they believe is divinely sanctioned and protected.

However, while the subject of marriage in both the Old and New Testament has been extensively researched and studied, biblical scholars still remain uncertain and divided over whether the concept of “covenant” can or cannot be legitimately related to our understanding of the nature of biblical marriage. Opinions clearly differ, and the issue has been largely left unresolved. This is not surprising, since the biblical concept of covenant, especially as it relates to marriage, is extremely problematical.

Hugenberger’s enlightening and scholarly book *Marriage as a Covenant* revisits this issue by focusing on the writings of the prophet Malachi. This last book in the Old Testament has, he says, been traditionally identified as the main source of the argument that marriage is a “covenant” (Malachi 2:14), and that this covenant should not be confused or equated with the “covenant of our fathers” made with the House of Israel. Clearly “covenant” as it is used here in Malachi, he suggests, refers literally to the marriage relationship.

Hugenberger, who teaches Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, presents his thesis that marriage is a covenantal relationship with great competence and clarity. He consults a wide range of scholarly opinion on Malachi, pays careful attention to the Hebrew grammar of the text, and, as a way of informing the discussion, explores the concept of covenant and marriage in the Ancient Near East. His main purpose in this book is to establish, clearly, that Malachi is one of several biblical writers including Ezekiel (Ezek. 16:8) and Solomon

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(Proverbs 2:17), who clearly identify marriage as a covenant, and that the implications of such are not contradicted by other biblical texts, even when the term “covenant” does not happen to appear.

Hugenberger states three reasons for his present study. Firstly, it provides new solutions to some of the difficulties encountered in understanding the biblical ethics and practice of marriage, such as the legal status of premarital sexual unions and the dissolubility of marriage. Secondly, it helps to clarify the confusion that exists over several sticking points, such as who the “covenant partners” really are within marriage, what actually ratifies the marriage covenant, and what constitutes the basis of “covenant breaking.” Thirdly, he believes we need to more thoroughly study the assumption being made that “marriage in the Old Testament is covenantal in nature.” Hugenberger notes that others have proposed significant arguments against marriage as a covenant suggesting that the word “covenant” is not synonymous for “relationship,” that no “oath” as required in a covenant relationship is required in Scripture for marriage, that adultery is nowhere declared to be a breach of an oath, and that the term “covenant” is never applied to marriage in the New Testament period. Furthermore, those dissenting against the view of marriage as a covenant claim that the covenant in Malachi 2:14 is not between a husband and his wife, but between the husband and the bride’s father, and that the divorce which “God hates” is not the dissolution of marriage but the repudiation of the covenant made with the House of Israel. These arguments, in the author’s view, need further examination.

Some of the issues that Hugenberger comments on that I found most helpful in this whole discussion were:

1. The current uncertainty among Old Testament scholars about the nature of “covenant” need not affect our identification of marriage as a covenant.

2. Consensus already exists about what the major elements are that comprise a “covenant.” It is “an elected relationship of obligation under oath” (which “ratifies the covenant”). This oath indicates “a commitment to maintain the relationship and follow a stipulated course of action.”

3. Based on the internal evidence in the book of Malachi, there are no arguments that can be used to overturn the belief that the covenant mentioned in the expression “the wife of your covenant” refers to a literal marital covenant between husband and wife.

4. If Malachi 2:14 refers to a literal marriage relationship, then Malachi 2:16 refers to a literal (not symbolical) divorce. Furthermore, Malachi says nothing to imply that such divorces are illegal, rather he condemns divorce because it is ethically reprehensible, and an instance of infidelity or “covenant breaking” and therefore susceptible to divine judgment.

5. Malachi 2:10-16 carries no support for the practice of polygamy but upholds the actual marital practice of monogamy in the post-exilic period.

6. Malachi is full of allusions to the Pentateuch, and the “allusions to the ‘one-flesh’ view of marriage are consciously derived from, or at least supported by the paradigmatic marriage of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:24). This identification of the original purpose of marriage, which parallels that of “covenant” (i.e. the creation of a unity between unrelated persons) is further suggested by the vocabulary and content of the husband’s obligation to “leave” and “cleave,” terms frequently associated with covenant contexts. Furthermore, the words of Genesis 2:23 “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” clearly parallel texts that employ these words as declarations made in the process of ratifying a covenant (cf. 2 Samuel 5:1; 1 Chronicles 11:1).

7. That extra-biblical evidence from the period clearly indicates that “covenant-ratifying oaths,” that consisted of solemn verbal declarations or the sexual union of two people, were used to solemnize marriages. Elsewhere in the Old Testament, the view of marriage as a divinely protected, sanctioned-sealed covenant commitment between a husband and wife is emphasized by the fact that:

- (i) Yahweh is identified as a “witness between” husband and wife.
- (ii) Marriage offences are identified as an “oath violation” and as infidelity against one’s spouse.
- (iii) The implications of the marriage metaphor in Hosea 2:18-22; Proverbs 2:17; Ezekiel 16 and 1 Samuel 18-20 imply that marriage is a covenant.
- (iv) Proverbs 5:15-23; Job 31:1 and Hosea 4:14 make it clear that a husband has a moral (and legal) obligation to maintain exclusive sexual fidelity to his wife.

Hugenberger’s research presents a persuasive and compelling argument in favor of marriage as a covenant. His book is a thing of substance that is not lightly read but certainly worthy of the effort. It is full of rich meaning and of great benefit to pastors, theologians, family ministries leaders or anyone involved in family life education.

The Adventist Family: An Incubator for Faith

by Karen and Ron Flowers

Jt's not easy to reduce what it means to be family to a bottom line. As we write, the temptation is to produce a selective piece on the joys of family living, something akin to the Christmas letters we send and receive every year. But there is something about the reality around us that begs for honesty and more than an overdose of platitudes.

The kids left yesterday to go back to school after a break. It's a time when folks take stock. Both the refrigerator and (at last!) the laundry room are empty. There's a wide ring in the tub; even the dog needs a bath. It was good to have them home, but waving goodbye also has its measure of relief.

Having them home makes it harder to push concerns about them out of our minds. They're old enough now to make most of their own decisions. Some are really big decisions that will affect them for a lifetime. Have we said enough? too much? I lie awake sometimes rehearsing the things I'd like to say. Wishing I could know what they're thinking, and wishing at the same time I could write their response. Sorry we've said and done things over the years that block openness and vulnerability.

Marriage has at best been on hold for a few weeks. We completed a test today to evaluate the strengths and struggles of our relationship. I wonder as I filled out my computer score card how my companion

responded, on a scale of one to five, to questions like "My partner is often critical and makes comments that put me down" or "I do not share some things with my partner because I am afraid he/she will get angry."

I talked an hour long-distance to my "little" brother last night. We laughed about my pushing 50 and his pushing 40, and how neither landmark seems so old anymore. I can't remember the last time we said, "I love you." Deep down we always have, but it felt good to say so; it was nice to hear. My brother doesn't worship in an Adventist church right now. Some things are harder to talk about.

Hurting people have moved in and out of my days this week. People I care about. People who are struggling with relationships. People who have personal issues to unravel because of hard experiences at the hands of those who they were supposed to be able to trust to love them. Family.

No, there's a depth to the meaning of family, that defies a hasty "everybody knows that" brush-off. There's more to be probed than the vague assertion that of course family is something we all believe in, like we're all for motherhood and apple pie. To wrestle that elusive something concretely to the mat is the challenge of this AnchorPoint.

Many answers to the question "What is a family?" could be given that would be good

and worth thinking about. But the answer we seek as Adventists securing anchor points, is one that constitutes bedrock, the very essence of this thing called "family" that has spiritual significance. Does family belong among fundamental beliefs because Scripture has more to say about it than some other subjects? Is its long history as an institution its only title to lasting significance? Is our basic purpose to carefully define "family" as a noun, to delineate the proper players and their precise roles? Are family relationships primarily of concern to a remnant people because they are perceived to mark the last frontier of personal holiness to be conquered along the sanctification trail?

Or is there fundamental belief bedrock about the meaning and purpose of family to be found beneath the surface shale, bedrock that lies at the foundation of all that it means to be fully human, created in the image of God, born for intimacy both with Him and with one another? Bedrock that forms the indispensable underpinnings for both discipleship and discipling. The answer to this last question is yes, and would have been yes even if earth were still Eden. Like all pristine truth, this family bedrock embodies the ideals toward which we stretch, all that Christians will want to know about God's "very good" design. Reason enough for a place among the 27.

But in a treatise on family ideals, there will be one crucial factor that remains unaccounted for. This bedrock has been violently disrupted, viciously turned on end, savagely altered by one cataclysmic element—sin. Where once family had been a lavish wellspring of wholeness, intimacy, joy, in sin's ironic twist family has become a tainted well whose waters can no longer be counted on to run clear and clean, where to draw water at all is to risk brokenness, disconnectedness, and pain. Even among

Adventists who smile in their pews on Sabbath morning, family for many is synonymous with abuse, dysfunction, turmoil, and despair. For some, the personal devastation linked with family experience has been so withering there can be no smiles, pews may be empty, and even the healing cascade of God's grace seems beyond reach.

The good news is that Scripture on family is no stranger to brokenness. Circumscribed in its pages are both the way the world is and the way it should be. There are ideals like stars to steer by, unchanging in their courses, steady, sure sources of light and bearing. But there are also real people who have sailed the rough seas of life where we sail, that we might have hope.¹ There is a first message that upholds all that God wants for His children, but there is also a second message of healing grace and new beginnings. The Adventist family anchor must always be cast with two ropes if it is to steady the ship in the storm—one securely fastened to the ideals, the other in firm touch with the reality of the full spectrum of human life on a broken planet and God's grace, which alone can make it bearable.

We believe there are at least three significant truths integral to a Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief about family:

1. Family is central to health and happiness for human beings because we were created for relationships. Our Creator is a personal being who seeks fellowship with His creation, and from the beginning He implanted a desire for companionship at the core of our being as well. Marriage and children are integral to God's general plan for family. It is the setting provided by God for the meeting of our deepest intimacy needs and the perpetuation of the human race. But knowing that even at best no single family

unit can meet all the intimacy needs of its members, and that at worst many families would never know intimacy at all, our all-wise God provided for friendship and support in the larger family circle of the church.

On a planet growing ever more densely populated and crowded, it seems a paradox that many feel lonely and isolated. The great tragedy comes when the church begins to simulate the world at large. For even as sin creates enormous barriers to intimacy between us, the fact does not change that we need each other, that none of us is so strong and independent as not to need love, intimacy, and dialogue in community. And God has given us a responsibility for one another. Remembering we are family both at home and in the church must keep us trying to find ways to get gut-level real with each other. Knowing we are family must keep us seeking to learn how to mediate healing grace to one another before any more of us are tempted to try going it alone because going it together seems so far out of our grasp.

2. Family is for every human being born—the incubator for faith. James Fowler, in his classic work on faith development *Stages of Faith*, asserts that all human beings develop faith. But faith is not a term simply synonymous either with religion or belief. Rather, faith is what helps us make sense of and gives direction to the experiences of life. It defines what we ultimately value and place our trust in and what is the surety for that trust.

Faith itself, says Fowler, is always relational. "There is always *another* in faith," someone or something "I trust in and am loyal to."² Further, faith is formed in the context of community. The first search for significant others in whom to trust is in the

family. As God would have it, as children are attached to the family with bonds of love and care, a loyalty is formed as well to shared family beliefs and values, the family's view of God and truth. Only in the later stages of faith development will these values be owned individually. And even then, in God's design they are to be lived out and passed on in community, in a braided cord of families that stretches across generations, both at home and in the church.

Ellen White encapsulates: "Their whole religious experience is affected by their bringing up in childhood."³ This is true because family is the primary setting in which the capacity for intimacy is developed, for better or for worse. And because knowing how to be intimate both with God and with each other is what being a disciple and making a disciple are all about (see John 15:15; 13:35). Armand Nicholi, a Christian psychiatrist of Harvard Medical School, expands: "Early family experience determines our adult character structure, the inner picture we harbor of ourselves, how we see others and feel about them, our concept of right and wrong, our capacity to establish the close, warm, sustained relationships necessary to have a family of our own, our attitude toward authority and toward the Ultimate Authority in our lives, and the way we attempt to make sense out of our existence. No human interaction has a greater impact on our lives than our family experience."⁴

So that's the ideal. In a sense it's also the real, because these are the laws of human faith development we are talking about. But there's another reality we must confront, and that is that the energies of many adults are being absorbed just coping with the brokenness of their lives that are rooted in painful family experiences. Energies that cannot be drawn upon to disciple their own

children or for Christian witness. Remembering we are family means we must commit ourselves to helping one another become whole so we will have something to give to mission.

3. Jesus said that how we do relationships is the demonstration of the reality and substance of our faith.

Family is not only the place where disciples are made; being family is itself discipleship. It is through love for one another that we manifest love for God. When Jesus painted a picture of the end-time, He portrayed saints surprised to find themselves counted among the righteous, asking why. God responds, "As you did it [showed love] to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40, RSV). The surest proof of our acceptance of Christ's atoning righteousness will be how we have let Him make us loving and lovable Christians. Through us all, God wants to show His love to the world. Countless people around us long for a vision of His love. They search for models of what it means to be a Christian family. They hunger for human affection and embrace. Jesus' question penetrates the centuries: "You are the world's seasoning, to make it tolerable. If you lose your flavor, what will happen to the world?" (Matt. 5:13, TLB).

So where does all this leave families with kids growing up and marriage struggles and rings in the bathtub? Families with members off on their own searches for faith? Families in such pain they can scarcely hang on to hope? It leaves us knowing, on the one hand, that there is no more significant fundamental belief in our list than the one about family, because if family fails, we have lost both our best hope for the inculcation of all the rest, and we have lost our greatest witness. It's worth our best energies to make it work.

But on the other hand, it can leave us frightened and discouraged because few of us delude ourselves that we are "making it work" with any semblance of perfection. Unless we remind each other that the surety of our faith rests in Jesus, in whose perfection alone we have hope. And that perhaps the most important things we all need to learn in the family are what Christians do when they have made mistakes, when anger has gotten out of hand, when hurtful things have been said and done, when relationships have drifted apart, when love has not been enough. Remembering we are family means we have made covenant to walk the path toward healing together, to be there for each other when it seems all else has failed, though it will stretch human commitment to the limit. And when, for some, brokenness and pain run so deep that they cannot seem to lay hold of grace, when relationships have become so destructive that they can no longer endure, remembering we are a big family means we must not compound their pain with judgment and the casting of blame. Ours is to reach out a hand in love, to support and encourage, to bind up broken hearts.

Something in us likes neat packages. Ideals are like that. Real life has too many loose ends. It will be eternity before some things are tied up with a bow. But we can hold on. We're family.

¹ See *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 12.

² James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), p. 16.

³ *Child Guidance*, p. 473.

⁴ Armand Nicholi II, "The Fractured Family: Following It Into the Future," *Christianity Today*, May 25, 1979, p. 11.

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Family Worship

by Gloria Carby

Jt was a sweltering August Sabbath in Orlando, Florida. Two families were enjoying a vacation together in a summer home. The children, then in elementary school, volunteered to conduct sundown worship.

Children love to plan surprises, so it was not unusual that worship would be a surprise for the adults. The excited and secretive children did their planning outdoors, giving strict instructions to keep the drapes closed. It was a lengthy strategy session but eventually, just before sunset, came the long awaited announcement, "Open the drapes."

The six children were fully costumed and ready for action. The plot quickly unfolded as Jonah was thrown into the ocean and swallowed by the whale. The elaborate production ended with prayer by the much refreshed Jonah himself.

Interesting spirit-filled family worships don't just happen. They need to be planned. Our family has gathered worship ideas from friends, relatives and inspired writers. It is with gratitude to these people that I share some of the ideas that enriched the hour of worship in our home.

Don't Be Predictable

Variety is the spice of worship. As weather permitted, we worshipped outdoors. On Vancouver Island, we delighted to worship beside the ocean enjoying the picturesque sunsets on the water. While living in Alberta, a low riverbed was often chosen as the

rocks provided seats from which we could get our feet wet in the cool running water. In Ontario, the highest sand dune at Sandbanks Provincial Park was a vantage point for sundown worship. The colorful sunsets over Lake Ontario provided times of absolute serenity.

During the winter months, we experienced warmth and togetherness as we worshipped at home by the crackling fire. One of our special memories was having worship on speaker phones with relatives in another province. To share the blessings of worship, we often visited shut-ins and nursing homes. These were joyful occasions, and we were blessed by those we were privileged to worship with.

Schedule Time for Worship

We live in an out-of-breath society. Our hurried lifestyle is cluttered and complicated. A four-year-old girl attending day-care was asked, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" Her immediate reply was "A hurried mother." Jesus also lived a busy life. He spent long hours healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and affirming mothers and children, but it was His priority each day to spend time communing with His Father.

Our Heavenly Father delights to meet with us, His children. His heart of love overflows toward us as we, with our children, seek to build a love relationship with Him.

"In every family there should be a fixed time for morning and evening worship. How

appropriate it is for parents to gather their children about them before the fast is broken, to thank the Heavenly Father for His protection during the night. . . how fitting also when evening comes, for parents and children to gather once more before Him and thank Him for the blessings of the day that is past.” 7T, p. 43.

Make It Interesting

Vibrant! Relevant! Intensely interesting! Can these words accurately describe our family worships? Would our preschoolers agree with this description? It is important that worship be made relevant to the youngest family member.

“When a long chapter is read and a long prayer is offered, the service is made wearisome, and at its close a sense of relief is felt. God is dishonoured when the hour of worship is made dry or irksome, when it is so tedious, so lacking in interest, that the children dread it. Fathers and mothers, make the hour of worship intensely interesting.” 7T, p.43.

Preschool children are bombarded with fairy tales—Santa Claus, the tooth fairy and monsters. These are made real by attractive preschool books and television. At this developmental stage, children have complete trust in their parents. Parents, let us grasp the opportunity of making God real to our young children. As we model how to pray, we can by example teach our little ones to enjoy talking to God as to a friend.

At this stage, when children are like sponges, memorizing scripture is very effective. “And how from infancy you have known the Holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” 2 Tim 3:15 NIV. Young children learn by doing. Action songs, drama and nature events will be a blessing to the entire family.

Consider Your Children’s Interests

In the elementary grades when friends topped the priority list, we took turns inviting friends and their families to Friday evening and Sabbath worships. We sometimes conducted Sabbath afternoon story hours. The children and their friends planned and presented concerts with singing, drama and instruments. Considering the natural interests of the children created interesting worships for them. On one Sabbath afternoon everyone was so involved in making a picture of Heaven that no one noticed that the sun had set, and worship lengthened into the evening. The results were masterpieces of scenic art depicting the beauties of Heaven and showing the meeting place for our first Heavenly family reunion. These pictures were kept in special scrapbooks made for each child, and given to them on their 18th birthday.

The high-school years brought with them a special treat for parents. Now the young people planned most of the worships. There were always new songs to learn. There was rich music. We were always blessed with piano and harmonica accompaniment, and sometimes other instruments would be available to blend in. Sometimes a poem composed by a family member was read. At other times, we took turns choosing scripture for reading and applying it to our everyday lives. Question and answer sessions, Bible search and relevant discussions were other creative ways to enjoy our family worship time.

Use Worship As An Outreach

There is a well-known song that says:

It only takes a spark to get a fire going. That’s how it is with God’s love; once you’ve experienced it, you spread His love to everyone, you want to pass it on.

Seasonal worships present the perfect opportunity to spread God's love. Once, all the neighbours on our block were invited to a valentine's worship. It was a fun gathering where the couples were invited to share the story of how they first met. This was followed by an appropriate scripture and prayer. The evening ended with a simple but special supper.

There were also special worship celebrations for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Birthdays of older family members were times of celebration. A worship of thanksgiving and affirmation was planned for that special person.

Studies show that 80% of high school Christian children in America abandon their faith sometime during their college days. The greatest reward a parent can enjoy is to see their young people take along their love relationship with Jesus to college. Attending a Christian college, our young people had the opportunity to be a part of and lead out in dormitory prayer groups.

Involvement in campus ministries led to different outreach activities in the community. The highlight of one of our weekend visits to college was accompanying a group of students to a women's shelter. There we served a meal

and involved the children in songs and stories. On the trip back to campus, a van packed with young adults sang, repeated scripture and shared stories of God's leading in their lives. When asked what worship meant to them, one of the young adults responded, "Worship is the thread in the hem of a frazzled day."

Parenting is a temporary job, but the rewards are eternal. Our children are lent to us for a short time. Please make Heaven so appealing that your children will long for Jesus' soon return. Read often the exciting description of Heaven given by John in Revelation 21 and 22.

Our young children especially liked Revelation 22:4 which says, "There will be no more night there." "That means no more bedtime," they reasoned. Christ Himself will be the Light. Words are inadequate to paint the picture. Let us, with our precious families, plan that *great* reunion where with our Heavenly Father we shall experience family worship in the style of Heaven.

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In the Spirit and Power of Elijah

by John and Millie Youngberg

With the earnestness that characterized Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to prepare the way for Christ's second advent.

Like a bolt of lightning out of the blue the most singular and colorful of the Old Testament prophets appeared on the stage of the nation. Nothing is known of his parentage and early life, except that he came from Tishbe in Gilead. Some 60 years after the division of the kingdom at Solomon's death, he appeared uninvited and unannounced before the startled Ahab in Samaria to predict an impending famine. He pronounced divine retribution against a nation steeped in apostasy and sold by Jezebel into Baal worship.

Halfway between the ministry of Elijah (around 870 B.C.) and the birth of a second Elijah (John the Baptist) came the remarkable prophecy of Malachi (around 430 B.C.), which closes the Old Testament canon: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse" (Mal. 4:5, 6).

Like the prophecy of Matthew 24, the Elijah-message prophecy has a double

application. The work of John in preparing the way for the first advent foreshadowed a larger work that will prepare people for the Second Advent.

Concerning the message to be given "in the spirit and power of Elias" (Luke 1:17) in the last days, Ellen White says: "In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord. Just such a work as that which John did, is to be carried on in these last days . . .

"In this time of well-nigh universal apostasy, God calls upon his messengers to proclaim His law in the spirit and power of Elias. As John the Baptist, in preparing a people for Christ's first advent, called their attention to the Ten Commandments, so we are to give, with no uncertain sound, the message: 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come.' With the earnestness that characterized Elijah the prophet and John the Baptist, we are to strive to prepare the way for Christ's second advent."—*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, on Mal. 4:5, 6, p. 1184.

Messengers (plural) will proclaim this last-day message. This ministry need not be limited to the work of one mighty prophet. It is rather a message entrusted to the church.

The work of the church today

What parallels can we draw between the work and messages of Elijah, John the Baptist, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church? Christ said, “Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things” (Mark 9:12).

As Seventh-day Adventists we have been called to restore *two* institutions that God bequeathed to man in Eden—marriage and the Sabbath. In an age when apostasy on these two points is well-nigh universal, a holy people is to be Exhibit A to the universe to the praise of a God, who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.

The fourth commandment is a seal of their faithfulness to the true God, as His character is expressed in the first table of the Decalogue. The seventh commandment is their seal of faithfulness to their spouse, and of purity toward others, as enshrined in the second table of the Decalogue. Thus, should not Seventh-day Adventists be known just as much for their positive, happiness-giving message for the home as they are for their witness about the Sabbath?

The prevailing sin in Elijah’s day was Baal and Ashtoreth worship with its sensuous cult deifying fertility and the reproductive principle. Baal was venerated as the male principle of reproduction, as husband of the land he fertilized. Ashtoreth was the female counterpart of Baal. The Greeks named her Aphrodite. The Sidonians had a custom that girl devotees had to give up their long tresses to Ashtoreth or surrender themselves to the first stranger who solicited their love in the precincts of the Temple.

The prevailing sin in John’s day was a profession of truth, without heart religion and corresponding action to bless one’s

fellow men. These false gods were clearly denounced by John the Baptist (Luke 3:7-14).

The prevailing sins of our day undoubtedly include sexual indulgence, intemperance in eating and drinking, inverted priorities that make family life a mockery, as well as Satan’s overt attack on the Sabbath commandment. These, together with doctrinal errors, accumulate into the fall of Babylon. The church’s message is to unmask the real issues and to give a straight testimony that calls sin, wherever it appears, by its right name.

Prayer and the last-day message

James 5:17, 18 says that Elijah, though “a man subject to like passions as we are, prayed earnestly. . . . And he prayed again.” His prayers were powerful and persevering. Seven times he prayed until a small cloud betokened God’s coming answer. He prayed on Mount Carmel for fire from heaven and he prayed in Zarephath for the resurrection of the dead.

Elijah and John the Baptist viewed the decline of the nation from their hill-country retreats. They prayed for God’s intervention and were almost surprised when God commissioned them to give a message in answer to their prayers. They instantly obeyed and proclaimed a message imbued with the power of prayer.

The church’s message today also will be characterized by deep, earnest intercession. By prayer, fathers will be daily building a wall of protection around their wives and children to shield them from the power of temptation. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (verse 16).

When announcing the birth of John the Baptist, Gabriel said: “Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God.

And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” (Luke 1:16, 17).

Under the first angel’s message, shortly before 1844, “the hearts of parents were turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents. The barriers of pride and reserve were swept away. Heartfelt confessions were made, and the members of the household labored for the salvation of those who were nearest and dearest.”—*The Story of Redemption*, p. 359.

Again, under the combined three angels’ messages as they swell into a loud cry, we may expect to see the hearts of parents turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents. How could it be otherwise? As the modern idols of materialism—business before family and inverted priorities—are dethroned, the sin that estranged hearts will be swept away. Parents will make heartfelt confessions to their children, and the children will respond in kind.

Reuniting estranged hearts

There is nothing cold or impersonal about God’s message. What could be more tender than meeting the needs of others and reuniting estranged hearts? Look at Elijah, who, after testing the faith of the woman of Zarephath, met the needs of that struggling single-parent family, promising that “the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth” (1 Kings 17:14). See him imploring God to resurrect the widow’s son and tenderly returning him to his mother’s embrace.

John the Baptist’s message spelled out practical religion that met people’s needs. To the crowd he said, “The man who has two shirts must share with the man who has

none, and the man who has food must do the same” (Luke 3:11, Phillips).

Children of today will be predisposed to accept their parents’ concern for them as they perceive that their father and mother are meeting their basic physical and emotional needs.

“You are the only parents among my circle of friends who don’t let their children watch TV or stay out at night!” Such comments from one’s children are not easy to take, but we can thank God that Elijah was willing to stand alone against 850 false prophets on Mount Carmel. True, in a moment of discouragement he complained, “I, even I only, am left” (1 Kings 19:11). Yet God answered, “I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal” (verse 18).

John the Baptist was not “a reed shaken with the wind” (Luke 7:24). “In his faithfulness to principle he was as firm as a rock.”—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 218. He stood alone and died alone. Yet he wasn’t alone, for He that promised, “Lo, I am with you alway” (Matt. 28:20), was with him. Only those today who value God’s word above social approval and who will guide their families accordingly will be made guardians of the holy trust of transmitting God’s last-day message.

Not only did Elijah preach a message but his own life exemplified the truth of that message. He was transformed under the control of the Spirit of God so that he was translated to heaven without seeing death. If the work is done on earth as it should be, and the message is fully heeded by God’s people, they can be translated to heaven as was Elijah. What a sight it will be to see families translated into glory to be reunited with other dear ones who have been wrenched from them by death!

There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. As God's remnant people, let us join in a correct relationship with God and with our families and thus

"prepare. . . the way of the Lord" (Isa. 40:3).

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Passing On Your Faith to the Next Generation

by Donna J. Habenicht

Nine-year-old Allan cried disconsolately. He had lost the special hunting knife his dad had made for him from hard steel and leather. When he started across the alfalfa field next to their house, the knife was securely in its sheath fastened to his belt. But when he reached for it on the other side of the field, it was gone. How could he ever find it in a field of alfalfa? Mommy hugged him and said confidently, “Let’s call the whole family. We’ll all pray that God will help us find your knife. He knows exactly where it is right now.” So the family gathered, and everyone prayed that God would help them find the knife. Then they all went out looking, trying to cover the route Allan thought he had taken. Then, a shout of triumph! Dad found the knife hidden among the alfalfa plants. Another family gathering. More prayers. But this time broad smiles lighted every face, and all the prayers said “Thank You, God.”

Liza, our fourteen-year old grand-daughter is facing a major move. She has lived all her life on a beautiful Caribbean island. Now her parents have decided to move back to the United States. Recently she sent me this e-mail message, “I keep asking myself: Will I be smart enough? Will they like me, and will I make friends? This all scares me, but I know that I’ll like it when I get up there. God will be with me, and I’ll do all right.” Clearly, she is depending on God to see her through this major upheaval. Her parents have

passed along to her their own faith in God. I’ve heard them say, “God will lead us. He has everything under control.”

Three, nine, or fourteen—age doesn’t matter. It’s all part of passing along our religious values to our children—one of the greatest joys, and sometimes one of the greatest puzzles, of parenting.

In Deuteronomy 6:6, 7, God tells us that passing our religious values to our children should be our all-day, every-day priority. Teach your children when you get up, when you go to bed, when you go about your daily tasks. Involve their minds, eyes, ears, and hands. Total immersion.

Sound difficult? It’s not. It’s really quite natural and simply flows out of your daily family life.

1. Give your home a spiritual atmosphere. Children absorb the atmosphere around them. Make the atmosphere of your home palpably spiritual and faith oriented. Does your home say that you are people of faith in God? Are some religious pictures visible? Religious magazines? The Bible? What toys or games do the children have to play with? What TV shows do you watch? What’s on the Internet? What CDs do you play? What kind of conversations take place? What do your children see when they first awaken in the

morning? When they close their eyes for sleep?

2. Share your joy in the Lord. Children gravitate toward joy and happiness. If faith in God makes you sour, they'll go elsewhere for the joy they crave. So, make Psalm 118:24 your family motto: "This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." Thank God daily for his blessings. Talk about them, make a family "Joy From God" notebook. Record in it special joys that come from God, and let anyone add a page any time they want to. Talk about God's love and forgiveness. Talk about His grace. Share the joy! Fill your hearts with gratitude.

3. Share your personal faith experience with your children. Don't let your faith in God be one of your family's best-kept secrets. Talk openly about God. Share your faith experience—including its ups and downs—with your children. Demonstrate in your own life the power of God's grace. They'll learn that faith is a real part of your life, and they'll want that faith too.

My parent shared a personal faith experience with me that I have shared with my children and grandchildren. My father, Grandpa Lugenbeal, was a couple months from his college graduation with a degree in theology when the college president summoned him to his office. The president asked Dad to stay on at the college as the farm manager, saying that he felt he did not have the social skills that a minister needed.

Dad thanked the president for the job offer and for his concern but said that he really felt called to the ministry and wanted to give God a chance to use him in that way. The summer following graduation he worked as a trainee with an evangelist. In the fall he took a job teaching a church school and pastoring a church on the side. The next year, Mom taught the school, and he

pastored full time. Dad went on to become a respected church administrator. Dad's story has encouraged generations of our family to believe in following God's directions for our lives.

Children can be gently led but not driven toward faith in God. Make your faith the beginning of a family tradition, passed from generation to generation. That is the Lord's way. He says, "Tell it to your children and they will tell their children."¹

4. Pray for your children and with your children every day. Christian parents have always prayed for their children. Hannah prayed for Samuel, Jochebed and Amram prayed for Moses, and Elizabeth and Zacharias prayed for John. But we must do more than pray *for* our children. We also need to pray *with* them every day. Pray many short prayers during the day to communicate your joy or sorrow or need to God. Your children will quickly pick up the idea, and God will become their confidant and friend.

Make prayer an established tradition to begin and end every day. Gather your family around you before you send them out to confront the world each morning. Pray for angel protection and for the Holy Spirit to be with each family member during the day. Do the same each evening, thanking God for His blessing and care during the day.

Listen carefully for your children's needs and unspoken questions. Respond with loving concern. Help your children find assurance through prayer. Pray about decisions, wrongdoing, special events and temptations, and about friendships. And pray for others.

5. Read God's Word every day. God's Word undergirds faith, and it provides answers for life's dilemmas, assurance in

difficulty, connection in times of stress, and promises for the future. Without a strong connection to God's Word, your children will not develop faith in God.

Show your children how important the Bible is to you. Use it every day, lovingly and reverently. Turn to it for help in daily affairs. Claim Bible promises for your family's needs. Keep the family Bible in a special place of honor. Share your own insights from Bible study, as well as your joy in God's Word.

Your children need Bible knowledge to build their faith in God and to learn how God wants them to live.² God's Word can be a protective shield from the tempting sin-traps around them. Make Bible learning fun and interesting. Create happy memories around God's Word. Choose a time of day when everyone can be relaxed and enjoy the experience of God's Word. Use a modern version so the children will understand better. Select short passages that have meaning for the children and that will guide their behavior. Let older children wrestle with the meaning of the Bible verse and come up with their own ideas. Trust the Holy Spirit to speak to your children. Use Bible games, role playing, audio tapes, videotapes, and pictures. Give Bibles to each of your children, and make the presentation a special occasion.

Teach Bible principles that will help your children deal with life. Show Bible reasons for faith. Go to the Bible for answers to everyday twists and turns and bumps in the road. Help your children think independently about what the Bible says—what actions

should they take? Encourage your children to memorize key verses that will be a comfort and guide to them in the future. Make memorizing Scripture fun and interesting. Personalize the Bible by relating it to your children's interests, needs, and puzzling situations.

6. Use everyday experiences to teach religious values. Jesus usually taught values by telling stories about everyday happenings. What does your family see every day that might deepen your children's faith in God?

When you plant a seed, you have faith that it will sprout. When you put a disk into the computer, you trust the programmer who wrote the program. When you travel in an airplane, you trust the mechanic who checked the plane and the pilot who flies it. Faith and trust are written all over our everyday lives. You can use these experiences to help your child understand faith in God.

Faith and trust are written all over our everyday lives. You can use these experiences to help your child

The discerning can use the great outdoors to teach religious values. Trees, for instance, come in many shapes and sizes—palms, oaks, maples, flamboyans, pines, redwoods. Some have very deep root systems and are flexible. They can withstand hurricane-force winds and great storms because their roots are anchored deep in the

earth. When we study God's Word and learn about Him, we are planting our heart roots into deep soil. We cannot be upset and thrown about or destroyed by evil temptations. We are protected by our faith in God.

In the end, what counts is your children's own faith. You should use all of the above ideas to help them develop a personal faith connection with God. Invite your children to accepted Jesus as their personal Savior from Satan's sin tangle. Teach your children that Jesus is a Friend who never leaves or abandons us. He is a forgiving Friend who wants a forever relationship with them. Nothing could be more beautiful or more reassuring. Your children can walk beside Jesus for the rest of their lives because you have introduced them to Him and to your religious faith.

¹Psalm 78:4-7. ²See 2 Timothy 3:16.

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