

# Becoming Family



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A Department of Family Ministries publication

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# Preface

Welcome to the 2010 Family Ministries Planbook: *Becoming Family*. This manual has been designed as a resource tool to complement the special family emphasis weeks in the Seventh-day Adventist World Church Calendar of Special Days and Events. The three special Sabbath days are listed within these weeks.

*Christian Home and Marriage Week, February 13-20*

- *Christian Marriage Day, February 13*
- *Christian Parenting Day, February 20*

*Family Togetherness Week, September 5-11*

- *Family Fellowship Day, September 11*

The resources for sermons, seminars, children stories and other material found within will aid your preparation for events and programming that will enable individuals, families and church relationships to be enriched.

Much of the material for 2010 has been prepared by Family Ministry teams from across the Euro-Africa Division, the Inter-American Division and the West-Central Africa Division with Euro-Africa acting as the lead division in the preparation process. Karen and Ron Flowers of the General Conference Family Ministries have acted as our editors, incorporating other materials to help round out the manuscript.

We trust that *Becoming Families* will serve pastors and family ministries leaders well in strengthening relationships in the family and in the church.

Roberto Badenas  
Family Ministries Director  
Euro-Africa Division

# *Introduction*

## *Families We Make*

Karen & Ron Flowers  
Co-directors  
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Recently we sent a greeting card to a family unrelated to us, but who are very special people in our lives. We often do things together, frequently talk on the phone or share e-mails and photos, visit in each other's homes, help each other with tasks, celebrate special occasions, and give each other gifts. Most especially, perhaps, for people in our stage of life, the children of this family call us "Grandma Karen" and "Grandpa Ron." While we have a family of our own that is most dear to us, we wanted to acknowledge the close ties we enjoy with this young family, and to thank them for including us in their lives and giving us opportunity to "be family" with them. The words on the card we chose seemed very appropriate: "Each of us has the family we were given and the family we make for ourselves." The card identified an important truth: family is as much a verb as it is a noun.

When we think of "family" as a noun, we tend to focus on the *structure*, that is, the configuration of the people that make it up. We differentiate between families with labels such as *nuclear*, *extended*, *step/blended*, or *single-parent*, etc. Even unrelated individuals who develop emotional attachments, help each other with tasks, and think of themselves as "family" are given structural definition. *Ecological* families, the theorists call them (Garland & Pancoast, 1990; Hartman & Laird, 1983). Defining family as a noun (albeit with adjectives) helps to designate groups of individuals with similar characteristics. Such definitions can facilitate ministry to families that is focused on the unique needs that their structure presents.

However, there is another way to define "family" that intrigues us. It focuses on the way persons behave toward one another. This *functional* definition of family looks beyond structure to what a group of people mean to each other, what they do for and with each other, and how their relationship endures across time (Garland, 1999). As Bryan Craig points out (see "Family is a Verb"), "family" by this understanding is a dynamic action word. It "is not so much a label to describe *who* we are as it is a way of describing *how* we care for one another" (Craig, 1994).

The roots of this concept of "family" go back beyond the creation of humankind to the close relationship within the Trinitarian Godhead. Scripture declares "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16) and a century ago theologian Augustus Strong reflected, "Scripture compels us . . . to maintain that there are personal relations between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, independently of creation and of time; in other words we maintain that Scripture reveals to us a social Trinity and an intercourse of love apart from and before the existence of the universe" (Strong, 1907, p. 326). The intimate relationship of love in the Godhead was surely in the divine mind when God said, "Let us create humankind in our image, after our likeness." Sang Lee draws the conclusion that marriage and family, as part of the created world, were meant to glorify God by being "the repetition in time and space of the supreme beauty of the self-giving love within God's inner-trinitarian life" (Lee, 1986, p. 119).

What meaning and purpose such an understanding of “family” can give to life in our individual households, whatever their structure may be! How important that we not think of family only in terms of our legal ties in marriage or adoption and our connection by blood and birth. We become family indeed by the attachment that develops through the sharing of self-giving love. In the absence of such love, the nomenclature and form of “family” may be there, but without the defining ingredient.

While on the one hand we uphold the divine blueprint for marriage and parenting and family living, wanting to do all we can to strengthen families in their pursuit of God’s ideals, we also realize that the divine plan is rarely even approached in a world distorted by sin. Scripture chronicles a great deal of diversity as well as distress in families of God’s people, yet portrays how God helps individuals to experience aspects of self-giving love and to become family through the workings of His grace in the midst of brokenness. Some of these situations are reflected in this resource. Jacob’s marriages to the sisters Leah and Rachel resulted in great pain in the household, yet God had surprising endings for Leah which she could not have guessed (see “Happy End for an Unloved Wife”). In the story of the healing of Naaman, we are reminded of how God uses the influence of a faithful young person to bring blessing even in the midst of her servitude to a foreign military general (see “God’s Way Versus My Way”). Single individuals often wonder where they fit in God’s scheme of family living. Roberto Badenas’ article “Jesus was Single Too” shows how Christ has opened the door of inclusiveness to all in His family. In fact, as Dr. Badenas reminds us in the sermon “Who are My Family?” whatever our life circumstances, “by the grace of our heavenly Father we become brothers and sisters of each other in the church.”

That God loves people and families in all their varied situations is a source of abundant encouragement to us today. His care for them and for us can lead us to a deeper appreciation of widely varied family structures among His people and to greater efforts in our ministry to our homes and to the church—the household of God—as we become family indeed.

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# *Happy End for an Unloved Wife*

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## **Introduction**

The Bible is full of startling love stories. Its first love story goes back to the Garden of Eden, when the first couple began life together in such idyllic circumstances that it seems like a dream. The beginnings of some Bible love stories were unexpected, at times traumatic and hair-raising—occurring in the middle of a war, during a long dusty trip through the desert, near a well. Unusual examples of couples' experiences in marriage abound in Scripture. In one amazing love story, the unexpected pregnancy of Mary almost broke apart her relationship with Joseph even before they got married. . . .

Some love stories ended in extraordinary ways—Esther married the King of Persia, Ananias and Sapphira died one after the other on the same day as a result of their lies before God and their conspiracy in the early church. Most love story endings in Scripture, however, are just common and rather ordinary. For most of the kings and queens of Judah and Israel, no comment is made at all regarding their marriage stories. Unlike the fairytale marriages where the hero and heroine were “married and lived happily ever after,” in most Bible accounts of kings' lives the stories end laconically just like those of ordinary people: “and they were buried and rested with their fathers.”

One might think that the way a couple begin their married life would somehow determine the kind of marriage they would have. That might be true in some cases, but in at least one story recorded in Scripture, the Bible has some surprises in store for us.

## **A Wife Not Chosen**

Wrong decisions and serious mistakes involving marriage are likely to have long-range and often unpredictable consequences. The story of Jacob's marriage (Gen. 29) is full of them. Being a poor migrant shepherd in Haran far from his Canaan home, his life was at the mercy of his greedy employer. This employer was none other than Laban, an uncle whom Jacob should have been able to trust. The self-serving Laban decided to pull a mean trick on Jacob. To the wedding ceremony he brought his eldest daughter, Leah, dressed in the full body-covering wedding garments of the ancient Middle East. Leah, however, was not Jacob's choice. This big mistake led to unhappiness in the family for generations.

The Bible tells us that Jacob's true love was Leah's sister, Rachel. He waited and worked seven years to be able to marry her. After the ill-conceived wedding with Leah and a second wedding with Rachel, Jacob worked another seven years for Laban. In a surprising way, Leah's father tragically deceived his son-in-law at the wedding. Laban imposed his own criteria—what he thought was best for him and his daughters. The ruse was conducted in such a manner that the bridegroom, Jacob, was unable to retract.

The conspiracy with her father to force a marriage that Jacob had not planned led Leah to an unhappy married life. Living with a marriage that he did not want led to quite a bitter experience in marriage for Jacob. However, there was no turning back. The story of that mismatched couple became more and more complex. On the wedding night Leah lay down hoping that her “smart” plan would succeed; she got up the next morning with a disturbing question: How can a wife share her life with a husband who does not love her? The biblical narrative presents the subsequent marital relationship of Jacob and Leah from quite a realistic perspective. Hers was the story of a woman who suffered much throughout her life trying to be loved by her reluctant husband.

Leah, the imposed wife, was fertile and soon gave Jacob several sons (Gen. 29:32-35). Four verses, four sons!! Rachel, Jacob’s true love, was barren and suffered intensely from infertility. She became depressed and wished she could die (Gen. 30:1). It is a dramatic paradox of pain produced by the side effects of a bigamous marriage: Rachel, the woman loved, agonizing and desperately trying to have children; Leah, bearing many children, struggling desperately to be loved. In line after line of the text, the story stresses the frustration of both women. Rachel finally conceived two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, to the surpassing happiness of Jacob and herself; Leah, though, almost reached the end of her life without gaining her husband’s love.

Most readers take sides in this plight with the beautiful and loved Rachel over Leah, the imposter. They do sympathize, though, with Leah’s anguish as the daughter of a greedy father who did not understand the ways of true love. They share in her pain as an unloved wife. As it happens, the Bible records an unpredictable happy ending for Leah.

### **Leah’s Journey**

The way Leah went through her marriage plight can help us assess our own marital relationships realistically. Analysis of the narrative shows that Leah went through several phases in her married life that are common.

**Phase 1: Disappointment (Genesis 29:16-30).** The marriage between Jacob and Leah was marked by disappointment on both their parts. Not only was Leah disappointed in her husband’s response to her, but he, too, faced a cruel disappointment in being deceived by Laban and indentured for another seven years of labor to obtain the woman he truly loved.

Disappointment is often felt in many marriages, even for those who don’t necessarily go through Leah’s experience. If you are married, think back for a moment over all the years that have gone by since your wedding day. Have you ever felt frustration and disappointment? Why? How often? Do you feel that expectations have not been met, that you have not obtained what you worked really hard for? Unrealized expectations are common in marriage. Even those dearest to us can turn out to have short-comings, weaknesses we didn’t count on, traits that can be difficult to live with. In all cultures we tend to mask our unhappiness and disappointment. How have you faced your disappointments?

**Phase 2: Longing (Genesis 29:31-34).** One of the most dramatic moments in Leah’s tragic love story is revealed in vs. 31. The text says simply, “God saw that she was unloved.” Every time Leah gave birth to a son, she revealed what was on her mind in the name she chose for the baby. When the first, Reuben, was born, “She named him Reuben, for she said, ‘It is because the LORD has



seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now” (Gen. 29:32). But Jacob did not love her more because of Reuben. Then a second child was born, whom she named Simeon, which means *the one who hears* (Gen. 29:33). However, Jacob did not listen to her. When her third son was born, Leah exclaimed hopefully: “‘Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.’ So he was named Levi” (Gen. 29:34).

Maybe part of the problem came from the fact that Leah was not quite the striking “Miss Mesopotamia” that her sister Rachel was. We can imagine that, if Leah had been as beautiful as her sister, life might not have been so hard. But it was not so. Reality is as it is and we have to deal with it for the best or for the worst. God leads our lives, not by magically transforming our circumstances into a perfect situation, but by showing His love even in our imperfect reality. This, of course, includes marriage.

There is not a single hint in the text that would make us think that God considered Leah as a “second-rate” wife. In reality, God has no “second-rate” children. God saw the pain in her heart for being despised by her husband and, despite her mistakes, He blessed her with many children.

**Phase 3: Finding purpose (Genesis 29:31-35).** In the midst of difficult circumstances, it was the children that gave her life purpose. While Leah was not loved by her husband, she did have many children to love and by whom to be loved. After the birth of Levi, Leah decided to change her approach. It seems she stopped seeking Jacob’s love. She began instead to acknowledge the love of the One who had always loved her. Probably this is why she called her fourth son “Judah” and said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” (NIV marginal note: “*Judah* sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for *praise*.”) Here we may see a progression in Leah’s faith and emotional maturity. Her longing for the love of her husband was surmounted by finding a great purpose in being mother to her children.

There are many people who suffer in marriage—making great efforts to keep or recover the love of a non-responsive spouse. No matter what gestures of affection are shown, the response never seems to correspond with the spouse’s cry for love. All those who experience situations like these can sympathize with Leah. It is not by chance that her story is included in the Bible. It is hard to live within a marriage with a spouse who does not manifest the expected expressions of affection. For a fulfilling relationship to take place, we need mutual commitment, love, and a harmony, at least minimally, of the two minds, bodies, and hearts. Clearly, not everyone is always willing or able to provide what such harmony requires.

After this turning point in Leah’s life, it is interesting to note that she still gave birth to two more sons and one daughter. She gave to her sixth child the name Zebulun, which means *dwelling*. This baby boy arrived at a time in Leah’s life when she was definitely looking for her place in the family, if possible as a wife, but at least as a mother: “now my husband will dwell with me, because I have born him six sons” (Gen. 30:20 NKJV). Leah did not lose hope. The persistent shadow of her rival, the beautiful Rachel, gave to Leah a quite unsatisfactory married life, but she managed to survive.

Just like her, we live in a fallen world, where disappointment often thwarts our illusions and where frustration may coexist with having nice children and enjoying many other blessings. Married life seldom presents itself in a fully satisfactory manner; instead, we live with a certain degree of

dissatisfaction in our family relationships. Not enough commitment, not enough love, not enough intimacy, not enough good communication. Whatever it may be, we often come disappointingly short of what we really wanted. Like Leah at the beginning, we can choose to focus on the things we lack and thereby spoil our life through pain and desperation. Or, as Leah eventually did, we can choose to focus on the gifts we have received and praise God for them. She felt at least partially vindicated and fulfilled as a mother. In fact, the great majority of the people of Israel would descend from her offspring.

### **The Recognition of Leah**

Leah's moving story has impressed the hearts of Bible readers throughout the centuries, especially the hearts of those who also feel rejected or unloved by their spouse. However, God knows every human heart and He is able to make the last to be first. Leah's story conceals one of those surprising "happy endings" that God likes so much to grant, even though this final recognition came late in her life. There is no romantic reconciliation in a beautiful garden under the full moon, nor a great resounding reconciliation banquet in front of a clapping group of friends. There is just the silent witness of a quite unexpected recognition ultimately manifested in the choosing of a tomb.

After Rachel's death, Leah finally became the only woman in the life of her husband. How long and how satisfying this period was in the life of this couple we do not know very well. What we do know is that when old Jacob began to understand that his days were coming to an end, he gave specific orders about the burial place for him and his family: "In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought . . . as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, *and there I buried Leah*" (Gen. 49:30, 31 NKJV, emphasis supplied). Leah was buried in the family pantheon, while Rachel's body was never placed there. She was buried on the way to Bethlehem (Gen. 35:19, 20 NIV).

Leah was number two in Jacob's heart for many years, but by circumstance she succeeded in becoming number one. In death she would rest forever with her husband in the couple's burial place. We do not know when in the waning years of their life together as a couple that the decision was made to bury her in Machpelah, but it was a telling decision on Jacob's part about his attitude toward her. It was indication that he recognized and accepted her fully as his wife.

God had even more surprising endings for Leah which she could not have guessed. It was through Judah, Leah's son, that King David was born. And, further down the stream of history, Jesus the Messiah would be born in this same line. Leah was His grandmother!

### **Conclusion**

God can bring surprising endings into our lives. He loves us despite all our mistakes. We are his family, His dear children. "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility . . . His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross. . . . You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household . . ." (Eph. 2:13-19).

May God bless our homes and make us more loving and affectionate toward each other. May God especially bless those who suffer for any reason in their family life. May we feel His eternal love for us. May we rest in His promises and be filled with joy and satisfaction in living.

# *Four Essential Duties in Parenting*

by Roberto Badenas  
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What are our main responsibilities in parenting our children? For some parents, their ultimate goal as educators is their children's *autonomy*. Others speak of wanting *self-fulfillment* for their children. For other parents, the aim is to insure their child's *happiness*. Many Christian parents would prefer to say they want *salvation* for their children. How shall we reach these results? The question presupposes that the ultimate outcome will not come by chance. We need a plan of action. What are the essentials of such a plan?<sup>1</sup>

According to an ancient Talmudic tradition, parents “owe” the following to their children: to teach them the Torah; to ensure that they learn a trade; to get them married; and to teach them to swim.<sup>2</sup>

Let us examine from a Christian perspective the principles that lie behind these fundamental duties.

## **Transmitting God's Revelation to Children**

The first duty of believing parents according to the Bible is to transmit God's Word to their children: “These commandments . . . impress . . . on your children” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7). This teaching from the writings of Moses means that parents are expected to equip their children with the best spiritual and moral reference, to transmit a love for divine revelation. Knowing the Bible will enable our children to find their landmarks in life.

It is important that the ultimate moral and spiritual reference for the children not be the parents themselves. The originality of biblical parenting rests in the fact that it refers to an authority that lies beyond the parents. This idea is revolutionary compared to other educational models. All human educators, even the prophets, are not omniscient. They are fallible. They make mistakes. This is why parents must refer to God and to a law that is above all human beings, including the parents.

Having the same book, the Bible, for the education of parents and children has important implications for parenting. It is well known that children learn through imitation. They do what they see others doing. They need consistent examples. A child who wishes to obtain permission to do something is tempted to go from one of the parents to the other to get what he wants. If the parents do not agree with each other, their dissension produces confusion in the child's mind. A clear, consistent message from both parents is needed to build a strong character in the child. While they may not

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<sup>1</sup> These reflections are inspired by Pauline Bebe (first woman rabbi in France), *Peut-on faire le bonheur de ses enfants [May we ensure our children's happiness]?* Paris: Éditions de l'Atelier, 2003, pp. 65–80.

<sup>2</sup> According to Kiddushin 29a, “A father is obligated to do the following for his son: to circumcise him, to redeem him if he is a first born, to teach him Torah, to find him a wife, and to teach him a trade. Others say: teaching him how to swim as well” (cited in Isaacs, 2009, p. 1).

reach perfect harmony, it is important that the parents be united on fundamental points. To reach agreement, negotiation will sometimes be necessary between the parents. Omnipotence on the part of one parent or the other will be renounced when both of them refer to the common set of ethical values in Scripture. Only in this direction does stability for both children and parents lie.

To head in one direction as parents, though, even to have a common focus and be consistent, is not enough by itself; this direction must be an ethical one. The Bible teaches the importance of good behavior, of doing constructive deeds that fit the formula: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The teaching of ethics starts with renunciation of selfishness. I must love myself, but at the same time I must love and respect others. In this fundamental ethical teaching of the Bible, repeated by Jesus in Matthew 22:39, the interdictions—the things we are to refrain from doing—are just as important as the duties—the things we are obliged to do. Freedom and spontaneity have their place, but within a framework which guarantees respect for others. The Bible acknowledges the reality of personal desire. It does not forbid it; but it places it within the framework of laws to regulate it, in this case “the love of neighbor.” Rabbinic philosopher Abraham Heschel once said: “The aim of God’s law is to be the grammar of life.” To stay with his metaphor we may say that the rules of writing must be given by the parents, but the child will have to write his own book—his own life.

The fact that the Bible offers the same teaching for children and for the parents presents an ongoing challenge for parents as educators. They must be submitted to the same laws as their children and must continue their learning for their whole lives. Despite the necessary distance between child and parent, a partnership nevertheless exists between them because of this same foundation. The children learn from their parents, but the parents also learn with, even from, their children as both construct their lives on this common base.<sup>3</sup>

### **Teaching Children About Work**

In classical Judaism, the parents’ second obligation to their children is to help them to learn a trade, i.e., to make a living and fulfill their calling in life. The Talmud says that “Anyone who does not teach his son a skill or profession may be regarded as if he is teaching him to rob” (Tal Kid 29a).

In the Bible, God’s first instructional act toward the human beings whom He had just created was to assign them responsibility and teach them how to work and take care of their living space, the Garden of Eden. “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Genesis 2:15). This text establishes the importance of work as a part of adult life long before the Fall. The first human pair, even within the Garden of Eden, had to work. After the Fall, work took on negative connotations. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden without possibility of return. They now were forced to work to survive, not simply to fulfill their creativity.

On one hand, work implies self-realization, vocation, and creativity. On the other, it implies independence, freedom, and autonomy. It affords opportunity to deal with the world in which we live

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<sup>3</sup> In Judaism, the completion of this basic learning is marked by a particular rite, the *bar-mitzvah*, i.e. the religious coming of age, during which the parents symbolically transmit to their child the spiritual and ethical responsibility of his/her own life. Traditionally, the father pronounced a public blessing to show that the child was now taking independence into his/her hands and that he/she was from now on responsible before God in keeping the commandments.

using our own talents and skills, without dependence on our parents. Work also means playing a useful role in society, a social link that is very important to a growing young person's integration within the community. Parenting includes this task of helping our children find their place as contributing members of the group—to find their “position” in both meanings of the word: in space and in society.

Teaching children to work is to prepare them for the independence a profession brings. It also means to help them learn a proper relationship with work, such as the importance of moderation and setting limits to personal desire, which may constantly lack satisfaction (1 Timothy 6:8). To teach a trade also means to teach the limitations to be placed upon work. Scripture presents the Sabbath—the sanctification of time, the periodic and regular cessation of the whirl of life. The Sabbath is a necessity; work would otherwise enslave us. Oscar Wilde has said: “In this world, there are only two tragedies: one is not to obtain what we wish, and the other is to obtain it.” To educate about work also means to show our children that the unquenchable thirst for money, power, glory, etc.—the continual dissatisfaction with what one has acquired—is a curse. Most important is what we *are*, not what we *have*.

The sanctification of the Sabbath is very important because it affords time to worship the Creator, rather than worshipping our own works. It lifts our eyes from our tasks to heaven, to behold the infinite space of divine creation. Children have an innate sense of wonder—the bird's melody, the rising sun, a small wild flower, the feeling of the wind on one's face—everything is for them a cause for wonder. When we become adults, we somehow lose this capacity to admire creation; everything becomes commonplace. The weekly rest of the *shabbath* sets a limitation to work and allows us to keep a child's sense of wonder.

A well-known pediatrician wrote this about children: “As soon as their gaze becomes able to go beyond their immediate environment, show them the sea, the mountains and their immensity, show them the night and the starry sky, give them a glimpse of the infinite.”<sup>4</sup>

Prayer, as an acknowledgment or thanksgiving for the divine blessings, allows us also not to consider anything as matter of fact. These words of thanks before action—a meal, a journey, sleep—are as so many moments of awareness which place a distance between desire and its fulfillment. These moments of inspiration are particularly important in a world in which everything goes too fast, in which the agendas—both of children and parents—are overcrowded, and in which, often, no time is left for personal reflection.

A rabbinical story tells that King Solomon requested a jeweler to make a magical ring to comfort him when he would be depressed and to make him wiser when he would be too merry. The jeweler made the ring with this inscription: “It will soon be gone.”

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<sup>4</sup> Docteur Maurice Bebe, *Votre enfant m'intéresse ! Manuel de pédiatrie à l'usage des parents qui doutent* [I am interested in your child: A manual of pediatrics for doubting parents]. Paris: Sand, 1991, p. 131.

## **Preparing Children to become Autonomous**

The parents' third duty, according to the Jewish tradition (Kid 30b), is to help their children find a spouse. It implies teaching them that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18) and that, some day, they must "leave father and mother" (Genesis 2:24). The idea is to prepare the children to be independent from their parents.

A successful education is one which allows the children to do without their parents. The parents' duty is to ensure that their children may leave them once they have become adults. Too often, well-meaning parents turn their children into "permanent children in care." The psychiatrists' couches are filled with 40-50 year-old "adolescents" unable to break the link tying them to their parents (manifested by a sickly, affective dependency or by endless fights and blaming). Learning to break with one's parents is necessary if children are to become responsible, free and autonomous adults some day.

If this initiation has been well done, the children will be led to seek a remedy to their existential loneliness outside their family, whether they marry or remain single. They will be able to distinguish between filial love and an amorous relationship and to understand respect for their parents outside of a relationship of dependency. In this tension between dependency and self-sufficiency, the children also learn that their freedom is limited by others' needs and that, for the sake of their own happiness, they must learn to interact with others through negotiation and respect.

In the fifth commandment "Honor your father and your mother" (Exodus 20:12), the Hebrew word *kabed* ("honor") means to give weight. It does not necessarily mean to agree or to obey but to respect. If a parent gives wrong orders, the child is not required to accept them, nor to follow them. He is required to take them into account, to evaluate them and to respect his/her parent accordingly.

## **Preparing Children to Face the Difficulties of Life**

According to a much-debated textual variant, the parents' last duty is to teach their child how to swim (Talmud *Kiddushin* 29a). It is necessary to place this strange precept in the context of its own time. While the Talmudic law was being developed, travel often took place aboard ships. The sea was a symbol of danger. It was therefore useful to know how to swim in order to face the potential danger of storms.

This example served to point out that it is necessary for parents to teach their children the skills to survive. God has given us life as a most precious value: "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Today, we understand how important it is to protect children and to prepare them to protect themselves. They must know how to extricate themselves from danger as far as possible, to solve their problems by themselves, to face adverse and difficult circumstances. The children must learn resilience and how to survive in an ever more difficult and dangerous world. While knowing how to literally swim is important, children must learn to swim against the currents of life. Children must appreciate life—their own and that of others. They must be able to swim not only to save their own

life, but to be able to save others' lives should the need arise. The Talmud reads: "He who saves a life is as one who saves the whole world" (cf. Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 37a).

## Some Conclusions

Parenting is a very serious responsibility (cf. 1 Timothy 5:8). However, we cannot give what we do not have. To succeed at making our children happy, eternally happy, we must first of all know this kind of happiness personally. Children, of course, may not necessarily take on their parents' values. The parents may teach their children the rules and way of life that lead to true happiness, but they cannot ensure that the children will secure them in place. There is no insurance for happiness. Parenting is a building<sup>5</sup> task which may be done on strong or brittle foundations (Matthew 7:24–27).

What may we draw from ancient wisdom as vital elements for the education of our children? Four great duties of ancient Jewish tradition were to teach children:

- To love God's Word.
- To be useful.
- To be able to survive without their parents.
- To face the reality of life.

A successful education is not the result of chance, but is a wise project with clear outcomes and directions. Children must:

- Learn from God's Word how to live (now and in eternity).
- Prepare and equip themselves to earn a living.
- Learn about emotions and feelings and build such characters as will be able to make wise personal and social choices in life and to help others do the same.
- Develop resilience mentally and physically so as to survive and to save other lives.

To educate our children on these strong values, we parents must first of all have assumed these values ourselves. The text of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 as well as Matthew 28:19-20 request us to listen to God first and then internalize His teachings before we try to transmit them to our children. While each generation of parents must face the huge privileges and responsibilities of parenting, with the help of God and His directions we may fully enjoy the task of discipling our children.

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<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew tradition makes a play on words by changing a vowel between *banaim*, "children", and *bonhaim*, "builders." The parents lay the foundations, but their children are the builders. The Hebrew word *av* ("father") also means "principle." The parents give their children a vital framework—basic principles—on which their children are called to build their lives throughout life.



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# *Who Are My Family?*

by Roberto Badenas, Director  
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## **Introduction**

*“Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, ‘He is out of his mind.’”*

*Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him and they told him, ‘Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.’”*

*‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ He asked.*

*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.’” (Mark 3:20, 21, 31-35).*

Here the gospel gives us some insights into Jesus’ family relationship and His thinking regarding family. As you contemplate this text and your relationship with your family today, ponder these questions: Do you have the family you need? Do you have the family you would like? Can you choose your family?

## **Family Concerns**

Having lived with His family for more than three decades, Jesus’ new activity as a Teacher now took Him away from home, almost all the time. He lived, first by Himself, then with His group of closest followers, His disciples. One day, while Jesus was preaching at Capernaum, His family showed up.

Now Jesus was so successful that people crowded around Him, wanting to listen to Him. He hardly had time to care for His needs. The text says He wasn’t even able to eat! His relatives, namely His mother and His brothers, were apparently concerned about His health. They had heard strange rumors—how He had fasted for forty days, was spending whole nights in prayer, was teaching the crowds all day long and taking no time for rest. In their view, He was burning Himself out. On top of that, the Pharisees were now accusing Jesus of healing a possessed man through the power of Satan. The brothers of Jesus simply could not stand to have their reputations soiled in the neighbourhood and at the synagogue because this younger brother was out of control. They believed that if they engaged Mary, His mother, to help them speak to Him, Jesus would probably listen (see E. G. White, *Desire of Ages*, p. 321).

We should try to understand these relatives of Jesus and why they would do that. In that time, as in any other time, it is not pleasant to be the family of one under suspicion of being an enemy of the state. The members of the Sanhedrin were investigating Jesus! The whole family might suffer dire consequences as a result! So His family just wanted to put some things in order at home and avoid any problems with religious authorities.

It is not entirely surprising to see the brothers of Jesus opposing Him here. The gospels tell us elsewhere that they did not believe in Him (John 7:5). What is surprising is to find Mary, Jesus' mother, also a part of this hostile group. How is it that she would be found among those relatives circulating the rumor that He was crazy (Mark 3:21)? After all, had she not received divine revelation through an angel of the sacred mission of Jesus (Luke 2:19). Was she not convinced? We do not know why, but there she was, outside the house, calling for Jesus and sending in messages for Him to come out and quit His ministry (see Mark 3:31-35). Mary reminds me a little of my own mother, who was always trying to feed me and take care of all my needs whenever I went back home for holidays or to visit! Such possessive love, such overprotecting love—though it may seem entirely appropriate to the parent—is often detrimental and can even be destructive to the relationship with one's child.

### **Jesus Felt the Need for a Family**

Jesus reacted to the actions of His relatives with two unexpected questions: “Who is my mother?” and “Who are my brothers” (Mark 3:33)? These are the kind of questions that an adopted child might ask, but Jesus was not adopted. These questions are the more surprising because Jesus knew for sure who His mother was and who His brothers were. There were rumors about His father's identity to be sure, but never had there been a question about His mother. What then was the real sense of His questions?

Two different views have been put forward to explain Jesus' questions. The first suggests that the questions mean, “Who are they to interfere with my ministry to the point of being ready to stop it? Family ties do not give my relatives the right to control my vocation.” An alternate way of understanding Jesus' questions is to find in them His surprise and disenchantment: “Who is my mother and who are my brothers? I do not recognize them in this role of ‘enemies’ that they are now playing. I thought that a mother is someone in whom a son can always trust, because she would always unconditionally listen to Him and support Him. I thought that real brothers would be always on my side, supporting me and helping me to fulfil my mission. I have a hard time in recognizing my relatives in these people who are so hostile to me. I do not have a family to communicate with. I realise that we cannot understand each other.”

Of these, I prefer the second view. We could say that, in these questions, Jesus is not looking for information. He is looking for affection, for support, understanding and commitment to His mission from His family. Attacked by the Pharisees, criticized by the scribes, suspected by the rulers of the nation, offended by those who associated Him with devils, Jesus was surely even more hurt by the hostility of the members of His own family, including His mother!

“Looking around on all those who were sitting with Him” (Mark 3:34), and “extending His arms to his disciples” (Matt. 12:49-50), Jesus identifies Himself as family with those who support and uphold the will of God: “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my

Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:34, 35). What a surprise, what a joy for the disciples and for all the friends of Jesus to be considered by Him as His new family!

### **We All Need Family**

Many of us suffer from dysfunctional relationships in our family networks. Hostilities, misunderstandings, jealousies, favouritism shown to some and not others, and faulty communication are often present in families. Good relationships just don't exist. No matter how hard we try sometimes, little progress is made. We do not always have the family we would like or the family we need. When we do not have the right family, we all hunger for love, understanding and support.

You can rent anything today—cars, houses, tools, plants, videos, babysitters. In Japan, you can sign up for “Rent-a-Family.” Elderly Japanese are lining up for this service, in which a stand-in family visits for a few hours and acts like “real” family. Reports tell of customers paying more than \$1,000 a visit for the service. The president of the Lifestage Casting Center that runs the service says that most of his clients have families who rarely come to visit. During “Rent-a-Family” visits, elderly people treat the actors like their own children and grandchildren. They often hand out pocket money to the “grandchildren” and berate their “children” for not visiting more often. The Center president says, “There are lots of people who feel lonely because everyone is chasing money and no one pays attention to the human need for love and acceptance.” Mrs. Suzuki, a retired dollmaker who rented a family, wrote about it: “From the bottom of my heart, I felt as though they could be my family. I know they're not my real family, but there was a real feeling of warmth” (Krause, 1996, p. 8). Although this “Rent-a-Family” story may raise a smile at first, it really points to a deep need and a disturbing problem that is widespread in family relationships. We can judge the moral strength of someone by how they treat their family.

How is it with you and me? What kind of family do you have? What kind of parents or children are we? Are we sensitive to the needs and feelings of our families—our parents, children and other relatives? Do we treat the elderly with dignity and respect? Since the family is the cornerstone of a balanced life, we ignore the need for a caring family at our own peril. We need a family.

Some of us have wonderful, loving families who are a pleasure to live with or to visit. No one, though, has a perfect family in this fallen world. Often we are exasperated by things that are said or done by our parents or by our children or other relatives. Sometimes we find visiting very difficult. In any case, God is asking us to find ways of bringing our family members together. Along with His request, He offers the power and the courage to do it well. We can commit ourselves and our families to Him and do our part to instigate healing and renewal in damaged relationships.

### **The Church: Our Spiritual Family**

It is wonderful news found in the book of Acts that members of Jesus' natural family became part of His church as well. Mary, His mother, and James, the brother of Jesus, are found in the upper room (Acts 1:13-14), receiving the Holy Spirit.

Meanwhile, Jesus' gaze around the room falls on us even today. His question to each of us is: “Are you my brother?” “Are you my sister?” Perhaps we may think of ourselves as being among His disciples whom He calls family. If so, we no doubt read with contempt the acts and attitudes of His

earthly family as recounted in Mark's gospel. However, Jesus' question goes deeper than we may think, for the ties that make us His brothers and His sisters are the ties of God's family, that unite in the church all those who seek to do the will of God. So His question, "Who are my brothers and sisters?" infers "Are you who think of yourselves as my family supporting my ministry like good brothers and sisters who do the will of our common Father?"

Another lesson we derive from this episode in the life of Christ is that the church may supply us, as it did Jesus, with the missing family member, the mother, father, brother, sister, aunt or uncle whom we need. One of the many ways God wants to bless us is by providing for us, within the church, siblings, parents, children, grandchildren and other family members whom we do not always find in our own homes. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take care of me" (Ps. 27:10). We may be without people to be family to us for many reasons, but as we are "born again" (cf. John 3:3) into Jesus' family, we often find the spiritual links to be stronger and deeper than the links of blood.

Some of our family situations may be happier, more fully functional and satisfying than others. But wherever our different family situations find us, by the grace of our heavenly Father we become brothers and sisters of each other in His church. Along with the abundant riches of His grace, may we find also this additional blessing in His church—the extended, complementary family we need, and may we become "family" for many who need us.

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# *God's Way Versus My Way*

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## **Introduction**

*But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.*

*Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.*

*Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (1 Kings 5:11-14).*

God's ways are most times not man's ways. God's ways are different from man's ways. Our human feelings will surely fail us; our human thinking will surely not be perfect. Man's ideas will never be the best of ideas in life. In this biblical story, Naaman learned "that there is no God in all the world except in Israel" (1 Kings 5:15). He learned that God's way is the way of faith and trust—trust in Him and in the close relationships we have with the people who are in our households.

God never created humans to be lonely and separate from one another. Created as we are, we cannot be complete nor have joy without association. There is an Ibo adage that says, "The sweetness of the world lies in human existence and relationships." It is also worthy of note that relationships can either make or mar a man. That is why the Bible says, "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character'" (1 Cor. 15:33).

The relationships of Naaman with his wife, with their servant girl and the other servants were positive. These relationships would lead to health, healing, faith and happiness and in the household.

## **Leprosy!**

What a challenge Naaman had to deal with! What a high mountain he had to scale! What an eternal decision he had to make to determine his future! Have you ever been in a situation in life when you could not help yourself? Or experienced a time when you felt utterly disappointed? Have all human connections ever failed you? Or have bitterness and shame almost taken over your life?

Has anger ever replaced happiness, so that you became identified with what you could not stop? It may be that only then will you know and understand that man has little in his control. God, though, is omnipotent. Perhaps only then will you realize that man's world remains dim until there is a direct connection to the Creator. Connecting with Christ is the ultimate goal in life. Other things can fail; God never fails.

Naaman was a man who had everything. He was the commander of the army of the king of Aram (2 Kings 5:1). He was highly-regarded, a valiant soldier, wealthy, influential, and numbered amongst the “movers” and “shakers” of his society. He was locked, however, in a fierce personal battle and he was losing. An enemy raged within his body. Scripture says plainly, “He had leprosy” (2 Kings 5:1).

Fortunately for Naaman, his wife stood by him in this horrible affliction. She had what apparently was a very close relationship too with their Israelite maid servant, so close that the humble, dedicated and God-fearing young girl approached her with a suggestion: “If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy” (2 Kings 5:2). Quickly Naaman's wife relayed this possibility to her husband—that there was a man of God in Israel who could, through the power bestowed on him by God, heal the commander of his disease. Naaman and his wife must have had a relationship of open communication, love and trust. Without suspicion, he accepted her advice and the suggestion of the Israelite maid.

### **Importance of Supportive Relationships**

No good relationship can be created without love, trust and open communication. Where there is suspicion, anger, hatred and rancor a good relationship cannot flourish, cannot create or promote health and healing. Maintaining a strong, positive relationship requires effort and is especially hard work in the middle of health problems. Whatever the relationship—between husband and wife, between parents and children, between parents-in-law and daughters- and sons-in-law, brothers and sisters, employers and employees, pastors and members—the creation of a healthy, supportive bond involves two-way traffic. It requires the input of all the parties and their dedication, love, faithfulness and steadfastness.

If you put yourself in Naaman's wife's place, would you be supportive as she was? One who was faced with a similar situation was Job's wife. She, however, was not supportive. In the midst of Job's dire medical condition she advised him, “Curse God and die” (Job 2:9). Job, however, did not take her counsel. “Though he [God] slay me, yet will I hope in him,” he would later declare (Job 13:15). Such times are very hard. Think about how hard it must have been for Naaman and his wife to deal with his illness. He was a public figure and undoubtedly many would have known of his leprosy.

What might be the equivalent today? For example, what if through blood transfusion your spouse contracted HIV/AIDS? Would you be as supportive as Naaman's wife? Or as unsupportive as Job's wife? Would you consider severing the relationship and opting for a divorce despite the vow “in sickness and in health, until death do us part”? How does a spouse respond to what can be the overwhelming care required by a terminally ill partner?

The concern of this faithful, patient, down-to-earth, soft-spoken, humble and supportive wife of Naaman—together with the faithfulness of a God-fearing servant girl—created the hope of his

healing. This biblical account stirs in us the need for caring in all our relationships—with spouses, children, relatives, domestic helpers and strangers so that all may reap the benefits of emotional and physical health and healing.

Searching for a cure, Naaman visited Elisha, the great man of God in Israel. The cure Elisha prescribed—to immerse himself in the Jordan River seven times was something he never expected. Not for a moment had he envisioned that such would be his cure. It was much too easy and not nearly extravagant enough. Naaman was a man considerable position and with him was sufficient wealth to gain him great respect and honor. He was in desperate need of healing for sure, but a more expensive cure would have been to his liking.

The ways of the Naamans of the world are always different from God's ways. Naaman's ideas and feelings contrast with God thoughts. Except we humble ourselves and open ourselves to the dictates of God, except we endeavor to empty ourselves of self, pride, pomposity, fame, power, wealth, and self-exaltation, neither may we be in position to be healed by God. The little Israelite helper girl, however, made a difference in His life. Amidst his pride, arrogance and pomposity came her sweet quiet voice of peace: "If the prophet had told you to do something bigger than this wouldn't you do it?" Our change does not depend on gigantic things; our change does not depend on extravagant things. It is often heeding the little things in life that make the whole difference.

**Leprous relationships.** Many relationships have a kind of "emotional leprosy," either in the marriage between husband and wife, or between mothers and daughters, or fathers and sons. Or perhaps, like leprous tissue, relationships between brothers or between sisters is rotting life from the inside out. Many things might constitute leprosy in our relationships—lack of love, lack of trust, suspicion, hatred, unfaithfulness etc. Far too often, we come to God or His representatives with our problems and difficulties. When His voice or His spokespersons call us to a greater personal faith and trust rather than reliance upon our own ideas and feelings, we tend to become disenchanted and feel dishonoured. Submitting ourselves to God's way is not what we are looking for, yet trusting God and following Him is the only way out, the only sure road to cure the leprosy that afflicts our relationships. In most cases, there will be hard work to do and details to be attended to. Ultimately, though, the healing for hurt will come from the One who created us for relationship.

## Conclusion

The story of Naaman is the story of our God who can bring blessings out of difficult situations. If you are facing health problems or other some other crises, follow the example of Naaman's wife. Have the optimism of the little servant girl. Be future focused, be positive and talk together about it. Let the faith of others strengthen your faith. Get connected to the One who created us for relationships. Let go of your personal philosophy about how things should be done and let God introduce a new way—the way of trusting in God. Forget about who you are—your rank, your status, your external façades that you may have created to prop yourself up. Think only of what God can make you become.

Let love replace bitterness . . . .  
Let joy replace sadness . . . .  
Let peace replace heartache . . . .  
Let patience replace arrogance . . . .



Let humility replace pride. . . .

You can trust God to meet your needs as you support each other. Turn the question: “Shall I do it my way or God’s way?” into a commitment: “I will put self aside and do it His way.”

# *Building a Stronger Marriage in Tough Times*

by Jansen Trotman  
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The first face Adam saw was the face of God. Adam was created by God for fellowship with God, a personal relationship. The primacy of this relationship with God has always remained as far as God is concerned. God's plan, however, included other relationships for man. As God joined the first man and woman together, He created the family with the deepest human relationship of all—marriage—at its center (Gen. 2:18-24).

But with the Fall came tragedy for human relationships—both toward God and toward each other. Angry that he was excluded from the plan of creation, Satan set forth his strategic plan for marriage and the family. His instructions for his demons must have been, “We must break up every marriage that we can. If we do not succeed in this, we must make it as unhappy as we can. If this fails, we must destroy its Christian witness.” Satan has been very successful in his scheme. He entered the home of Adam and Eve and caused them to sin. Their perfect relationship with God was broken. The only perfect marriage that ever existed was marred.

The pages of the Bible record the deterioration of the relationship between husband and wife. Polygamy (multiple wives), adultery and divorce resulted. God has a plan to restore the broken relationship between man and Himself. God also knows that husbands and wives could only have a perfect relationship with each other if they both have a perfect relationship with Him, their Creator.

## **God's Plan Centers on a Cross**

God's cross-centered plan was made before the creation of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8). Through the power of the cross of Christ we can be made new persons (2 Cor. 5:17). As we reflect on the power of the cross we see that God intends for the cross to:

- Reveal to our dull senses the unfathomable love of God (John 3:16).
- Enlarge our capacity to love as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5).
- Crucify selfishness in our hearts (John 13:34; Gal. 2:20; Titus 2:14). The major cause of marital discord is selfishness. Without selfishness, marriage would be blissful.
- Provide a model of submission and self-sacrifice for husbands and wives (Eph. 5:25). Jesus provides the perfect pattern for husbands in the way He loves the church.

## **God's Marriage Design**

God's design for marriage and the family is clearly stated in His Word. He plans for marriage to be a bond of love that nothing but death can break (Mark 10:6 - 9). Yet modern marriages are broken for the most trivial reasons. Even among Christians there is divorce frenzy. Too little effort is

given by some to keep the marriage intact and the vows unbroken. God's ideal for marriage, however, has remained unchanged. Christ reaffirmed marriage (Matt. 19: 4-6). "I hate divorce," God says in Mal. 2:14-16.

God's principles for marriage include *leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh* (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:6). When God joins a couple they are no longer two. They become one. Henceforward their motto should be "*Togetherness*." It should be "Each for the other and both for the Lord."

God's creation design for marriage afforded couples the power of procreation, the ability to produce children to people the earth (Gen. 1:28; Mal. 2:14, 15). The Psalmist makes it clear that children born to couples are really God's children (Psa. 127:3). Because of the broken relationship between man and God and because of the less than perfect marriages that are contracted, our children are not perfect either. The earliest example was Cain, who murdered his brother Abel out of jealousy. David, Solomon, and Absalom further illustrate the influence of sin upon the family. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons certainly were not without family problems. Not only were there conflicts between husbands and wives, but between parents and children, and between children as well.

Yet God wants to save our children. His plan for marriage is that each home will be a mission station reflecting to the world the love of Christ (Eph. 5:25-28; Phil. 1:9-11). Children will see the love of Christ in their parents. Neighbors will see the love of Christ in our homes. In the love chapter, 1 Cor. 13:4-8, we have a clear description of how love behaves. Love can be cultivated. It grows by exercise. We get better with practice. Christ's love for us is unconditional, expressive, sacrificial, forgiving, and eternal.

### **Our Struggle against Dark Powers**

Ephesians 6:11 calls us to take our stand "against the devil's schemes." "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). We must never forget who is responsible for marital misery—Satan. We must place the blame squarely in his lap. He began in Eden and continues to wage a fierce war against the home. He knows the powerful, positive influence of a well-ordered family and he is against it. He knows the devastating, negative influence of an ill-regulated family and he is for it. He knows that a rotten home is the most effective way to ruin a person for time and eternity.

Satan's methods are varied. He encourages incompatible persons to marry. He hurries the inexperienced into marriage. He sponsors marriages with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14; Judges 14:3). He inspires quarrels and fights. He brings outside pressures to rest on marriage—work, over-commitment of time, and alien sexual attractions. He promotes selfishness, the patron demon of marriage.

True and lasting happiness in marriage and family can only be realized by following God's plan. When God's model for Christian marriage and family is followed, happiness results. This is stated in Eph. 5:21-23; 6:1-4. Husbands and wives do well to read this together regularly, prayerfully, and submissively.

## Important “Rules for the Road” of the Marital Journey

**Rule 1: Husbands and wives are to be subject to one another (Eph. 5:21).** Mutual submission, i.e., submission to one another, as Paul describes it here is the only safe starting point for marriage. There is to be no master-slave relationship, no boss-servant relationship in this closest human relationship.

When God created Eve, He created her from the rib of Adam, indicating that she was his equal, to stand by his side, close to his heart. She was not to rule over him. Neither was she to be trampled under his feet (See *Adventist Home*, p. 25). Pagan and Jewish societies had subordinated women. It was Christianity through the teaching of Christ that elevated women to the status God had originally designed.

Scripture teaches that in Christ we are all one (Gal. 3:28). Men and women are spiritually equal—100% equal—in Christ. They are equal in sharing God’s image as originally designed (Gen. 1:26, 27). In status, value, and worth as individuals they are equal. In freedom and independence they are equal. Why should marriage rob us of the equality we have in Him? When the rule of mutual submission is followed, when each is willing to have the attitude of honoring another above oneself (cf. Rom. 12:10), two fully independent individuals can live together harmoniously in marriage. Dependence and trust are mutual; responsibility, reliability and loyalty are reciprocal. Each is to put 100% into the marriage. They are equal in privileges, in self-surrender, in devotion. They are subject to one another (1 Cor. 7:4).

The Bible is as much against bossy husbands as it is against bossy wives. “Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership,” wrote Ellen White. “The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other (*Adventist Home*, p. 106).

**Rule 2: The husband is to submit to his wife—loving her (unconditionally) as Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25).** Christ sacrificed Himself for His church (Eph. 5:28). The husband exercises his submission by loving his wife unselfishly (Eph. 5:28). The model for the husband’s love is Christ’s love for us. His love has no limit. It has no conditions.

*Conditional love is:*

- “I love you *when* . . .” (I’m in a good mood; you are in a good mood.)
- “I love you *if* . . .” (you cook, wash, give me money, clean the house, bear children, agree with me, etc.)
- “I love you *because of* . . .” (your looks, your figure, your position, your money, etc.)

*Unconditional love is:*

- “I love you unconditionally” (as you are, in spite of).

To the extent that I place conditions on my love for you, to that extent I don’t really love you. Love with conditions is an exchange or a purchase, not a gift. True love must be a gift. It must be unconditional (1 Cor. 13:4-8). “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

*Unconditional love* has the following characteristics:

- A caring love. Some men do not show caring love but treat their wives as glorified housekeepers.
- A sharing love. Share more good than bad. Share hopes and dreams, fears and disappointments.
- A sacrificial love. No work is too hard, no sacrifice is too great to undertake for one's spouse. Sacrificial love puts their needs ahead of our own.
- An exclusive love. "Forsaking all others" is what we pledge.
- An unbreakable love. "Till death do us part" (Song of Sol. 8:6).
- A protecting love. Love covers a multitude of sins. No exposure of a spouse's faults is fostered.
- An unquenchable love. "Many waters cannot quench love" (Song of Sol. 8:7).
- A building love. It brings out the best; boosts self-esteem and self-fulfillment.
- A buttressing love. Spouses should be able to tell all their troubles to each other and know they will understand and be supportive.
- An affectionate and expressive love. If you love her, tell her so; call her "sweetheart," "darling," etc. Call him "lover-boy," "my honey," etc. Hug and kiss regularly.
- A patient, forgiving love (1 Cor. 13:4).
- An enduring love (Jer. 31:3). It holds up under test and pressure. A Christian marriage nurtures love.

Such love is not natural for the human heart, but God promises through the presence of His Spirit in us to bring such love to our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Let us pray, "Lord, give me such love."

**Rule 3: The wife is to submit to the loving husband's leadership, respecting him out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21, 22-24, 33).** Scripture refers to the husband as "head of the wife." What does this mean? The text goes on to say "as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." Christ's sacrificial act as Savior head of the church defines what Paul means by the husband being "head" of the wife. "Head" does not mean his personal superiority or her inferiority. He is a servant-leader after the manner of Christ.

Christ elsewhere defined such servant-leadership in His discourse with His disciples, "Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27, 28). Being "head" implies taking responsibility for leadership—leading, not driving, bossing or bullying, the wife and children in the ways of God. "I will lead on softly," Jacob told Esau, "according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure" (Gen. 33:14 KJV). The husband exercises his responsibility as head in the sacrificial manner of Christ. Submission on the wife's part means to respect and respond humbly, intelligently and cooperatively to the husband's loving, sacrificial leadership.

It is important to distinguish between submissiveness and servility or subservience. As is true of all three pairs of social relationships addressed in Eph. 5:22- 6:9: wife-husband; child-parent; servant-master, the submission of the socially weaker member of each pair—wives, children, servants—is always qualified. For wives, Scripture dictates that their submission is "as to the Lord." This is not a submission that reinforces an existing social order, but the voluntary submission of a believing wife to her husband out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21). "Submit" does not mean being

piously silent, leaving all in the husband's hands. A wife is free to give her input in the family decisions as an equal partner. A wise wife who sees that her husband's judgment is wrong should, with all respect, tell him so. Where Christian standards and principles are in question, the wife should respectfully disagree with her husband and obey the higher authority—the Lord (Acts 5:29).

A woman may be her husband's superior in intellect or earning power and still be submissive. Don't always be correcting him. Help him to improve. Being submissive means:

- Being a helpmate not a hindrance. You are not in competition with each other.
- Being respectful, not rude, before children and others.
- Cheering him on. Give appreciation and encouragement.
- Helping him get ahead. You are on the same team. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is a good example.
- Bringing out the best in him. Use phrases like, "You can do it;" "I like it when . . .;" "You make me so happy when . . ."
- Letting him lead. Don't be a back seat driver. Don't emasculate him.
- Loving him even when he make mistakes or does other things that stir anger in you makes you angry.

### **The Secret of Marital Happiness is Jesus**

Zacchaeus was rich but empty until Jesus came into his home and life (Luke 19:1-10). True marital happiness is God-given. Only where Jesus reigns can there be real joy and lasting happiness. We cannot succeed by ourselves.

**Marital storms.** Your marriage or family may be in the midst of a storm right now.

- Financial storms? Jesus is the answer (Phil. 4:19).
- Waning love? Ridicule? Tired? Disagreeable husband? Lazy? Jesus is the answer.
- Nagging wife? Bossy? Spendthrift? Jesus is the answer.
- Rebellious children? Sexually active? Drugs? Jesus is the answer.
- Infidelity? Seeing someone else? Jesus is the answer.
- Communication broken down? Hardly talk? Jesus is the answer.
- Hostility and violence? Abuse? Distressed? Depressed? Jesus is the answer.

In Mark 4:35-41 we read the dramatic story of the disciples of Jesus caught in a terrible storm. They made many futile attempts to control the situation. Salvation came when they cried to Jesus and He stilled the storm. It is for us to cry, "Master, the tempest is raging and we need your help." We need Jesus in our home and family. We need Him in the living room, dining room, kitchen and bedroom. We need Him in the morning, and we need Him in the night. "Come unto Me," He pleads, "and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Come troubled wife; come troubled husband; come troubled single person; come troubled parent; come troubled child. "I will give you rest," says Jesus. Jesus is—the Creator, the Savior, the Healer, the Compassionate One, the Wonderful Counselor, the God who provides, the God of power, the Wonderful Lover. He will give you rest—love, joy, peace, pardon, power, grace.

**Do you know Jesus?** A church worker in Berlin, after World War II, went up to a man on the street. "Young man, do you know Jesus?" he asked. "No," replied the young man after a pause, "Try the police station; they know everybody." Jesus says, "This is eternal life, that they may know You,

the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John. 17:3).

Jesus in the heart makes a big difference in our relationships. “Jesus in the home,” said Charles Spurgeon, the Prince of Preachers, “puts the devil in the streets.”

**How to receive Jesus.** First, acknowledge you are a lost sinner without Him. Romans 3:23 states, “All have sinned.” “I guess I was born wrong,” a little mischievous boy confessed after repeatedly getting into trouble.

Second, believe in Jesus as Savior (Acts 16:31).

Third, confess your sins (1 John 1:9; Heb. 4:16); and confess Christ (Matt. 10:32; Rom. 10:9, 10). “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock,” Christ states. “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20). You can do it now. You can leave here knowing that you are a child of God.

## Conclusion

I do not know much about Joshua’s wife and children. But one statement he made has opened a window so we can see into his home: Josh. 24:15 “. . . as for me and my house we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). This suggests that in this home there was a loving, leading, wise, God-fearing husband; a loving, respectful, supportive wife; loving, obedient children; family worship, where they talked about the goodness of God; children who were taught to obey parents and God early; parents who modeled the virtues; and a home with love expressed.

Let us, like Joshua, say today, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord” let us, as husbands and fathers, lead the way; let wives and mothers be supportive and helpful; let children submit and obey; let all be examples of Jesus Christ before the world.

## Group Discussion Questions

These discussions may be interspersed throughout the presentation or used at the end.

1. What has the cross of Christ to do with a happy marriage?
2. Why do you think God hates divorce so much? (Mal. 2:14-16)
3. What are some of the methods of Satan to produce marital misery and divorce?
4. What do you understand by mutual submission between husband and wife? (Eph.5:21)
5. How important is a knowledge of Christ in having a happy marriage and family?

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# *Preparing Parents for Effective Parenting*

by F. Y. Adu-Gyamfi, FM Director  
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West-Central Africa Division  
with Ron Flowers

## **Introduction**

“Society begets the future it moulds today.” That saying gives credence to the importance of parenting. The good counsel given in Proverbs 22:6, which implores parents and guardians to “train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” highlights the responsibility parents have of child training. The apostle Paul entreats parents further: “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:11, 12).

Jesus would have every Christian parent know that every child is God’s child. Every child is worth Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. Every child is called into God’s kingdom of glory. An important part of local church family ministries is helping parents become more effective in rearing their offspring for Christ.

## **Session 1: Parenting Principles from Paul**

The apostle Paul seems to have understood much of what it means to be a father. He seems also to have understood what it is that children need. Paul presents three important principles that foster social and spiritual growth in all believers: “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, *encouraging*, *comforting* and *urging* you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess. 2:11, 12, emphasis supplied). These principles—*encouragement*, *comfort*, and *exhortation*—are especially important for children and may be considered keys to more positive, effective Christian parenting.

### **Encouragement**

The first attitude for effective parenting—*encouragement*—simply means to support, give courage or confidence. People often think encouragement is shouting at a player from the side of a football field, or offering some kind and uplifting words to somebody before an examination. But Paul points out that encouragement is an important part of the entire parenting process. In a sense, encouragement is not so much what you say, but rather more about who you are and what you do. I once heard Dr. Daniel Duda, Ministerial Secretary and Education Director for the Trans-European Division, explain in a seminar that the concept of encouragement in the original biblical languages had much more to do with *listening* than with *talking*. The greatest encouragement we can give is to listen and understand another person. Listening for understanding is perhaps the most important aspect of encouragement. So if we would encourage our children we must seek to understand them. Conversely, the feeling of not being understood is one of the most discouraging feelings. To point out our child’s failures and bypass the positives in our bid to encourage does more harm than good.



## Comfort

The second quality Paul demonstrated to the Thessalonians, as parents do for their children, is *comfort*. Have you ever been comforted by somebody who just does not understand? The intentions of the person are likely very good, yet somehow it feels hollow. We are comforted best by those who understand us. Paul links comfort and encouragement in these verses as they should be linked in family life. Only through listening, truly listening, can you understand. It is only when you understand that you can truly comfort. Comforting is about travelling with a person in their challenges, joys and pain.

Just taking your child in your arms and holding him or her close when you know they have taken a knock—that is comfort. That kind of comfort will empower the individual to keep on to “fight another day” as they say.

Exercising disapproval for misbehaviour should not get in the way of showing comfort, for comfort is not about *approval* but about *acceptance*. Approval is about our judgement of somebody else’s behaviour or worth whereas acceptance is focused on the other person’s intrinsic value as a human being—God’s way of dealing human beings.

God’s attitude toward us does not depend on our performance but on the premise that we are His children through Jesus Christ and can grow in His grace. Parents need to do the same for their children. A child who is accepted is safe and secure and will likely grow up with a sense of worth and responsibility. We have a chance to show them the truth that they are unique and wonderful human beings with huge potential for God’s kingdom. We do that first by encouraging and listening, and then by comforting, accepting, empathising and showing that we have understood.

## Exhortation

The third aspect of parenting as presented by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 2:12 is exhortation. To exhort is to urge strongly or earnestly. This is the bit of the process that we are usually too eager to do. When we see something wrong in our children’s lives or something that worries us, we grow impatient, and we want to jump in and fix it as quickly as possible. Under such circumstances some parents skip over the first two steps—encouragement and comfort—and go straight to exhortation assuming that they know what is going on. As parents we forget that, if somebody is going to change, they have to be ready to change. It is worth noting that it took a demonstration of understanding and an afternoon of listening from Jesus before Zacchaeus was ready to change. It was the same with the woman caught in adultery and the Samaritan woman by the well—exhortation always came after encouragement and comfort. So it must be in parenting. Patience and tolerance need to be exercised by parents in this regard. To be able to stretch towards the desired goal—living lives worthy of God—a child has to feel accepted, even in failure. These are the foundations for growth.

**Class exercises.** Here are several exercises from which you can choose to help make the above principles practical:

1. Give participants five minutes to share with the person next to them a memory from their growing up years which formed a significant base for their adult understanding of God and their feelings about the church. This memory may have been the source of a warm,

loving picture of God or it may have created a hurdle which they have had to overcome in understanding God as a loving parent and in feeling good about the church. After pairs of participants have had a chance to share, invite one or two persons to volunteer to share their story with the whole group.

2. Invite parents to divide into small groups and share some moments when, as children, they felt encouragement, comfort or exhortation from a parent, a relative, a teacher or pastor. Discuss together why these experiences are memorable. How can similar encouragement and comfort be given to the children and young people in our midst today? What must change in order for parents to incorporate encouragement and comforting as well as exhortation into their parenting?

3. Share this illustration and the discussion questions with the group:

Artie is an only child living in the poorer part of town. He would like to have friends, but has difficulty forming friendships. His parents both work away from home at low paying jobs and Artie often spends hours by himself waiting for them to return. Bullied by bigger boys in his class at school, he has tried unsuccessfully to defend himself. In despair he contemplates running away.

What needs for encouragement, comfort and exhortation does Artie have? How might his parents, his relatives, his teacher, his pastor minister to him?

4. Read together the following quotations from Ellen G. White that relate to these principles of encouragement, comfort and exhortation. (Distribute Handout #1 *Selected Quotations on Encouragement, Comfort and Exhortation*, so that participants can have their own copies. Work individually, in pairs, or as small groups to respond to the questions: How might these quotations shape the practice of Christian parenting? How can we be as loving, hopeful and accepting as parents as is presented in these quotations?)

### **Counsel from Ellen White on Effective Parenting**

Ellen G. White offers the following counsel for effective parenting:

“But, fathers, do not discourage your children. Combine affection with authority, kindness and sympathy with firm restraint. Give some of your leisure hours to your children; become acquainted with them; associate with them in their work and in their sports, and win their confidence. Cultivate friendship with them . . . . In this way you will be a strong influence for good” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 391).

“Home should be a place where cheerfulness, courtesy, and love abide; and where these graces dwell, there will abide happiness and peace. Troubles may invade, but these are the lot of humanity. Let patience, gratitude, and love keep sunshine in the heart, though the day may be ever so cloudy. In such homes angels of God abide” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p.393).

“No barrier of coldness and reserve should be allowed to arise between parents and children. Let parents become acquainted with their children, seeking to understand their tastes and

dispositions, entering into their feelings, and drawing out what is in their hearts” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 394).

“Parents, let your children see that you love them and will do all in your power to make them happy. If you do so, your necessary restrictions will have far greater weight in their young minds” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p.394).

Surely there is a time for exhortation, for urging. Exhortation and teaching are an important part of our responsibility as parents (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). However, as Jesus demonstrated and Paul taught so eloquently, we may well find that our exhortations fall on deaf ears if we do not first listen and understand, encourage and comfort.

## **Session 2: Spiritual Development of Children**

Many believers take the approach that it is the church’s responsibility to develop their children spiritually. A big challenge for local family ministries leaders is to help parents understand that, while the church may be able to augment the spiritual training of children, the primary responsibility rests with the parents. The family is undoubtedly the most powerful agency for making disciples of its members for Christ. “The work of parents, which means so much, is greatly neglected. Awake, parents, from your spiritual slumber and understand that the very first teaching the child receives is to be given to him by you. You are to teach your little ones to know Christ” (*Child Guidance*, p. 23). The child’s spiritual development should be of grave concern to Christian parents.

George Barna, a renowned researcher for Christian ministries in the United States, concludes that “Parents across the nation admit that one of the greatest benefits they receive from attending a church is having the community of faith assume responsibility for the spiritual development of their children. Knowing that there are trained professionals and other willing individuals who will provide spiritual guidance to their children is a source of security and comfort for most churchgoing adults” (Barna, 2003, p. 77).

While accepting the church’s unique role in spiritual development of its members, we want also to uncover the Scriptural truths about the parental involvement in the spiritual development of children. What does the Bible teach about parents’ responsibility for the spiritual development of children? In this session we will look at some Scripture passages that talk about the spiritual growth of children.

### **The Bible on Parental Involvement in Children’s Spiritual Growth**

Distribute Handout #2 *Scripture on Parental Involvement in Children’s Spiritual Growth*. Work in small groups to study the following passages. What do they express or imply with regard to parental involvement in children’s spiritual growth?

- Deuteronomy 4:10 – “Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they . . . may teach them to their children.”

- Deuteronomy 6:6-7, NKJV – “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children.”
- Deuteronomy 32:46 – “Command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law.”
- Joshua 24:15, NKJV – “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”
- Psalm 78:5-6 – “He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them . . . and they in turn would tell their children.”

The Bible tells us that it is God’s wish that His will, His laws and His words be shared with our children. He wants this teaching to take place first and foremost within the family. As Christian parents we are told to pass on the message of faith to our children.

### **Parents and Caregivers Who Shared Their Faith with Children**

Scriptural accounts of several parents/caregivers and the children/youth in their households are helpful to us in understanding how parents may respond to the call of God to share their faith with their children.

**Bible parents Scripture study.** Distribute Handout #3 *Bible Parents*. Invite participants to work in pairs or small groups. Assign the various Bible parents to the groups for study and reflection on the texts and questions.

#### **Abraham**

1. What was the significance of Abraham’s construction of an altar in Bethel? (Gen. 12:8)
2. Why was this important here and elsewhere to Abraham? His household/the community (Gen. 12:7; 13:18)
3. How do you think Abraham’s spiritual values influenced the development of his son Isaac’s spiritual values? (Gen. 26:24-25)

#### **Moses**

1. How did the faith of Moses’ parents influence his life? (Heb. 11:23-27; Deut. 34:10-12)
2. Why do you think parents are so important in the counsel of Moses about passing on spiritual values? (Deut. 6:4-9)
3. What does Moses envision as the responsibility of parents?

#### **Mordecai**

1. Why did Mordecai encourage Esther to join the beauty-contest? (Esther 2:5-11)
2. Where did Esther go for spiritual guidance? (Esther 4)

### **Mary**

What do you think Mary did to help Jesus grow spiritually? (Luke 2:52: cf. Matt. 4:4-10)

### **Lois and Eunice**

1. Who were these women and what influence did they have on Timothy? (2 Tim. 3:14-17)
2. Why do you think the apostle Paul called attention to the home life of Timothy?

### **Conclusion**

Our responsibility as parents is not to do it all and to perform with perfection. Rather, our work is to be diligent in our personal spiritual growth and be available as well as diligent for our children. We have a God who will walk beside us in all our struggles to fulfill this job we've been given and to which we committed ourselves when our children were conceived. Let us not get in children's way of coming to Jesus, but let us as responsible parents show them Jesus in our lives at home and in our fellowship at church.

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## **Selected Quotations on Encouragement, Comfort and Exhortation**

By Ellen G. White

*How might these quotations shape the practice of Christian parenting? How can we be as loving, hopeful and accepting as parents as is presented in these quotations?*

“But, fathers, do not discourage your children. Combine affection with authority, kindness and sympathy with firm restraint. Give some of your leisure hours to your children; become acquainted with them; associate with them in their work and in their sports, and win their confidence. Cultivate friendship with them . . . . In this way you will be a strong influence for good” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 391).

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## **Bible Parents**

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1. Who were these women and what influence did they have on Timothy? (2 Tim. 3:14-17)
2. Why do you think the apostle Paul called attention to the home life of Timothy?



# *Leading Family Ministries: A Seminar for Local Church Leaders*

by F. Y. Adu-Gyamfi, FM Director  
Ghana Union, West-Central Africa Division  
with Ron Flowers

This seminar will be of particular interest to pastors and local church leaders to provide orientation and leadership development on the topic of Family Ministries in the local church. Individuals who have been chosen to serve as leaders of local church Family Ministries or to serve on the Family Ministries committee will also benefit from these materials.

## **Part I: Families are Important**

Family, the basic unit of the community, the society, the nation and the world at large was ordained by God in Eden with the union of Adam and Eve. God designed the family to serve as the primary provision on the human level for the intimate relationships for which the human heart yearns. Family serves as the meeting point for an individual's profound needs for belonging, for love, for intimacy, and for social contact. It is in the family where identity and personal worth are developed. The earliest work in the socialization of an individual also occurs here. Moreover, values that are transmitted from one generation to another are implanted in the young. Most importantly, the family can be a powerful agency for the discipling of its members for Christ.

**Adventist Family Ministries.** The sacredness and uniqueness of the family and, for that matter, the Christian home with its significance in the development of society, church, and nation, calls for a pragmatic strategy to safeguard it. For sustainable family life, specialized ministry is necessary—a ministry like Adventist Family Ministries, that effectively enables people to express genuine love, that penetrates each relationship to open the way for God to reach down and work His miracle of grace, is the obvious option.

The home and family emphasis fostered within the Family Ministries Department endeavors to make the home a discipling center where family members by their relationships with each other are encouraged in their relationship with Jesus Christ and His church. It is “a ministry of grace which acknowledges . . . the biblical teachings relating to the family and holds high God's ideals for family living. . . . Family Ministries focuses on people in relationship” (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2005, p.125).

**Family, the Bible, and family ministries.** Scripture abounds with teaching concerning the family. Study the following Bible passages (See also Handout #1 *Family, the Bible, and Family Ministries*.). How does the presence of a Family Ministries Department in a local church help spread the teaching of the Scripture on family living?

- Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4. What spiritual principles and practical guidance for the relationship of husbands, wives, children and domestic helpers in the home are taught in these verses?

• 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 103:13; Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:9, 32; 1 John 3:16; Eph. 4:14, 32; 5:25; Rev. 1:6. How does Scripture present God's relationship with His people as the model of human relationships in marriage and parenting?

• Is. 49:15; Jer. 31:32; Eph. 2:19; Rev. 21:2. What evidence is there in these verses that would help the world gain a revelation of God and His ways from our relationships in our families?

• Malachi 4:5, 6; Luke 15:11-32. Why do you think family reconciliation is given such prominence in the prophecy of last day events of Malachi? How does Jesus' parable of family reconciliation capture the essence of the gospel message to be given to the world in the last days?

**Ellen G. White on the importance of the family.** Affirming the importance of the family, Ellen G. White stated, "Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are 'the issues of life'; and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349). (See also Handout #2 *Ellen G. White on Importance of Ministry to Families*)

## Part II: Family Ministries Leadership in the Local Church

At the local church level, Family Ministries is the responsibility of church leadership, working in conjunction with the Family Ministries Leader(s). In Ghana, both individuals as well as couples (a husband/wife team) could be elected as local church leaders. People elected are those with deep commitment to family relationships who have the desire to learn more about how God's grace can be demonstrated in everyday living in their homes. Those members who have faced traumatic life and family experiences and have grown spiritually through them may be valuable members of such a group or serve as a resource for it.

**Leadership responsibilities.** (See also Handout #3 *Family Ministries Department: Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*). Local church pastors and elected local leadership work closely with the Family Ministries Committee members who assist, offer counsel, and are responsible for developing and implementing the Family Ministry goals of the local church. The leader(s) and committee members share the following responsibilities:

1. Assist church leadership to clarify target groups for family ministry.
2. Assist in assessing the needs of the church members for family life information, education and training, counseling, and enrichment programs.
3. Encourage sensitivity to the needs of families and the impact of church programs upon them in terms of expenditure of time, energy, money, and other family resources.
4. Provide premarital guidance to couples preparing for marriage.
5. Cooperate with the conference/mission Department of Family Ministries to implement the Family Ministries emphasis programs.
6. Cooperate with church leadership in designing, planning, and implementing family life features and programs such as: premarital guidance, strengthening marriage, parent education, family worship, and family finance.

7. Foster a climate of warmth and closeness, engendering a sense of “familiness” in the congregation and a redemptive spirit toward families in need of support and encouragement. (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 2005, p.141).

**Approaches to Family Ministries.** The form that Family Ministries takes will be determined by the overall goals of the church, the felt needs of the congregation and the community, and the resources available. Specific approaches to family ministry may be sorted into three broad types or categories: *education*, *enrichment* and *counseling*.

*Education.* Substantial revelation concerning the divine purpose for families has been given. Practical principles for family living regarding the relationships of husbands, wives and children are found in Scripture. Churches can do much to integrate family life education into their regular calendar of prayer and other weekly meetings, Sabbath Schools, divine worship services, in the preaching program, and as members come together for fellowship. Study groups, seminars, workshops, lending libraries, and classes all may be used to educate members in every conceivable area of family life.

*Enrichment.* This process of enhancing family relationships through better communication, deeper understanding, and an improved ability to resolve anger and conflict focuses on the family as a system. Married couples, parents and children or the entire family group make gains together through sharing and interacting in various events and activities. Enrichment programs and activities help singles also, as they have family and relationship needs as well. All are part of a family system somewhere, even if that system is the larger church family. In a day and age when many people do not have extended families nearby, an enrichment group can become a surrogate extended family. When enrichment activity is carried on among individuals who are all part of the same church family, a spirit of community and cooperation is fostered. (Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries, *Starting a Family Ministries Program*, 2006.)

**Class exercise.** Carefully review Handout #4 *Five Levels of Communication* and Handout #5 *Communication in Our Marriage*. The handout *Five Levels of Communication* is a good example of the *education* methodology, i.e., it conveys cognitive information about communication. *Communication in Our Marriage*, however is an example of an exercise that uses *enrichment* methodology. How do they differ? What are the benefits of each?

*Counseling.* A third approach to family ministries is counseling. Some individuals and families are in such need as to require counseling, a specialized work that is particularly tailored to assist them in resolving short-term or long-term personal or relational crises and difficulties. More trained counselors are needed, and more must be done to inform church members about the availability and appropriateness of individual, marital and family counseling. Where professional counseling is not available, a pastor with some training in this area may be able to provide basic help. We will say more about the specific challenges of counseling in Part IV.

Ultimately Family Ministries is more than completing a checklist of programs, services or special events. While Family Ministries must have some structure, it is the spirit of Family Ministries to seek through each relationship to open the way for God to reach down and work His miracle of grace in every home and church community. Such a ministry is not only programmed

but spontaneous; it manifests itself in loving families and warm, vibrant communities of believers. (See Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries, *Starting a Family Ministries Program*, 2006.)

The Family Ministries concept has been fully embraced by all local churches in Ghana and local church FM committees have been put in place. Where the Family Ministries departments in the Ghanaian local congregations have functioned effectively, the burden upon the church boards regarding family and marriage issues has been lightened.

### Part III: Planning for Family Ministries Programs

The key to successful family ministry programs in the local church includes the following:

- A definition of needs
- A specific target audience
- Adequate planning
- Quality communication with the target audience
- A small team of church members who are willing to learn some essential relational skills, and
- A keen sense of how this ministry relates to the total church program.

(Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries, *Starting a Family Ministries Program*, 2006).

**A definition of needs.** Successful programs speak to peoples' needs. Where are people in the congregation and the community feeling their greatest need right now? How many are interested in parenting skills? In grief recovery? In divorce recovery? In improving their marriages? In coping with single life? In strengthening family worship? In friendship and recreation with other Christian families? What kinds of activities would be helpful to them? What are they willing to invest in time, money, and personal involvement?

One way to discover needs is simply to assemble the statistical data already available. Use a questionnaire like *Family Profile Questionnaire* (Handout #6) to gather information from your congregation. You may chart the results of your survey on *Family Profile* (Handout #7). This will give you a family profile of your congregation. You may be able to garner other census data (from the public library, for example) on families in your local community—the number of teenagers, married couples, single parents, divorced persons, widows, etc.

Statistical data cannot, of course, indicate the degree of interest or the “needs” of these people. A survey will help in uncovering the felt needs of both congregation and community. A simple questionnaire like the *Family Life Activities Interest Survey* (Handout #8) can be distributed to active members during a worship service. Inactive church members can be interviewed by telephone or personal visits. The *Community Family Life Education Survey* (Handout #9) can be used for surveying the general public by telephone or door-step visits.

**Group exercise.** Read Handout #10 *The Special Needs of Families*. How can the information from this handout help guide family ministries amid the congregation and community where you live and work?

**Family ministries activities.** With demographic data in hand as well as the surveys of needs and interests, you can now begin to make plans for family ministries activities.

*Church calendar of family ministries activities.* The local church Family Ministries leader(s) and committees cooperate with the local conference/mission Family Ministries Department Director to promote the two special weeks with three Sabbaths that are part of the annual Seventh-day Adventist Church Calendar of Special Days. “Christian Home and Marriage Week” occurs in February; it begins with “Christian Marriage Day” (usually the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sabbath of February) and ends with “Christian Home Day” (usually the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sabbath of February), which emphasizes parenting. “Family Togetherness Week” is promoted in September, with one Sabbath called “Family Fellowship Day,” which emphasizes the church as a family. New resources to support these calendar days in the local church are prepared by General Conference Family Ministries each year. Contact your conference/mission FM Director. (See also Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries, *Resources for Family Ministries*, 2006.)

*Celebrating family at church.* Without adding new programs to an often already overcrowded church calendar, consider giving a family strengthening emphasis to existing church services, programs and activities. (See Handout #11 *Ideas for Family Ministries*.)

*Specific programs for specific needs.* A formal program is not necessary for every family life need that surfaces in the congregation. Many responses will be informal and may be adequately met through one-to-one contacts or in the normal round of church activity. Carefully planned and presented programs are useful, however, 1) to instruct and inspire, 2) to expose participants to more effective models for relating, and 3) to provide opportunities for relational growth. The local pastor and/or conference/mission FM Director should be consulted by the local church FM leader(s) and committee in selecting presenters for programs.

Programs may be conducted in a wide variety of settings and on different schedules reflecting the needs of the target audience and the particular aims and objectives. Programs for the general church may take the form of an annual family life Sabbath, weekend, or week coinciding with special times in the calendar year such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day or in the church’s calendar such as Christian Home Week.

Other programs may be multi-generational with families in the church or community as the target audience (or “super families”—made up of biological families joined by other church members for the duration of the program). Family camps provide an excellent setting for multi-generational activities.

Some family life programs will be focused on special topics. They may be single sessions or multi-sessions depending on the content and aims. Parent education classes may be held on an intensive weekend, for instance, or over an extended period, perhaps one night a week for a month or more. In one church the Cradle Roll/Kindergarten mothers met one Sunday morning per month at a Mothers’ Brunch to share and study.

Enrichment-type programs generally require longer periods of time. Marriage strengthening programs, for this reason, usually take a block of time – such as a weekend-to accomplish their goals of relational growth. And, while certain attitudinal changes may occur in a relatively short time, behavioral changes require extended periods. Those kinds of programs, therefore, such as marital care groups, family clustering groups, divorce and grief recovery groups, which have behavioral change as part of their intention, may need continuing sessions for 6 to 12 months or more. (See Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries, *Starting a Family Ministries Program*, 2006.)

#### **Part IV: The Challenges of Counseling and Outreach**

Local Family Ministries leaders who endeavor to strengthen families in the local church are to be commended for their hard work and dedication. We are discussing in this final session some special challenges they face—counseling and outreach.

**Counseling.** Some individuals and families are in such need as to require counseling. Counseling is a specialized work, particularly tailored to assist individuals resolving personal or relational crises and difficulties. Where sufficient counseling is not provided for these emotionally distressed church members, they tend to look outside the church for help. They may sense a lack of concern for them on the part of their church. While family counseling is not within the job description of local church family ministries leaders and committee members, it is important to encourage members to utilize qualified counselors. Some pastors have appropriate qualifications. In the absence of adequate trained or professional counselors in the church, the Family Ministries department can join with the church leadership (1) to identify qualified counselors in the conference/mission or in nearby communities who could be recommended and (2) to encourage those with the gifts required in counseling to pursue specialized training in this ministry. A dissertation project is now underway in Ghana that is studying an appropriate strategy for equipping pastors in the Ghana Union Conference with counseling tools that will enable greater effectiveness in this area of ministry to members.

Where situations prevail which disallow professional counseling, a pastor or lay person with some training in this area may be able to provide some basic help. Counseling can make exorbitant demands, however, so early assessment of the individual's needs and the time that will likely be required in a given counseling situation is crucial. An awareness of when to refer individuals for more professional help is an important consideration for pastors or lay persons who seek to counsel others.

Special efforts are needed as well to put the financial cost of professional counseling within the reach of all who could benefit from it. Some churches with a strong commitment to providing professional counseling have set aside funding to help those who need but cannot afford professional help. Such funding is anonymously and discreetly distributed by the pastor and/or selected elders.

**Group exercise.** Discuss in small groups the attitude toward counseling in your church. What roadblocks, if any, exist? What can be done to encourage church members to utilize professional counseling?

## Outreach

It is the responsibility of the Family Ministries leader to extend activities beyond the walls of the church. Hence the need for knowing the non-Adventist families living within the community in which the church is situated. The churches are doing extremely well by inviting to church some families on social and special days. As part of the evangelistic thrust, outreach programs should be organized for families in the community whereby meetings would be held in the households. Some community Couples' Night programs and Family Night programs should be organized after series of outreach programs. When by this approach these families realize the positive impact of the church on their homes, families—not individuals only—will be won for the Lord.

**Group exercise.** Distribute Handout #12 *Family Ministries and Outreach*.

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## **Family, the Bible, and Family Ministries**

*Study the following Bible passages. How can the presence of a Family Ministries Department in a local church help spread the teaching of the Scripture on family living?*

- Ephesians 5:21 – 6:4. What spiritual principles and practical guidance for the relationship of husbands, wives, children and domestic helpers in the home are taught in these verses?

- 2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 103:13; Is. 54:5; Jer. 3:14; 31:9, 32; 1 John 3:16; Eph. 4:14, 32; 5:25; Rev. 1:6. How does Scripture present God's relationship with His people as the model of human relationships in marriage and parenting?

- Is. 49:15; Jer. 31:32; Eph. 2:19; Rev. 21:2. What truths are there in these verses that would help the world gain a revelation of God and His ways from our relationships in our families?

- Malachi 4:5, 6; Luke 15:11-32. Why do you think family reconciliation is given such prominence in the prophecy of last day events of Malachi? How does Jesus' parable of family reconciliation capture the essence of the gospel message to be given to the world in the last days?



## Ellen G. White on Importance of Ministry to Families

*Home and family were favorite subjects frequently addressed by Ellen G. White. What do these quotations indicate about the strategic importance of the Christian home? Why, in the light of these quotations, is ministry to families so important?*

“The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are the ‘issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349).

“Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 352).

“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 304).

“Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. . . . By many this home field has been shamefully neglected and it is time that divine resources and remedies were presented, that this state of evil may be corrected” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 429, 430).

“If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life, we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life, and beauty, and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 355).

## **Family Ministries Department** *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*

The over-arching objective of Family Ministries is to strengthen the family as a discipling center. The family was established by divine creation as the fundamental human institution. It is the primary setting in which values are learned and the capacity for close relationships with God and with other human beings is developed.

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.

Family Ministries focuses on people in relationship. It is concerned with the needs of married couples, parents and children, the family needs of singles and all members of the wider family circle as they pass through life's predictable stages and contend with unexpected changes in their lives.

Family Ministries reinforces and encourages wholesome families. It helps individuals build and maintain strong family relationships because it recognizes that healthy Christian families make strong members for the kingdom of God and present a winsome witness to the community around them. Family Ministries promotes understanding, acceptance, and love within the family and in the larger family of God and fosters the reconciliation and healing between the generations promised in the Elijah message of Malachi 4:5, 6. It extends hope and support to those who have been injured and hurt by abuse, family dysfunction, and broken relationships. Family Ministries fosters competence in a variety of interpersonal skills needed in relationships. It provides growth opportunities through family life education and enrichment. It encourages individuals, married couples, and families to avail themselves of professional counseling when necessary.

An adequate ministry to families will include: premarital guidance available to all couples before marriage; marriage strengthening opportunities; parent education, with attention given to the special needs of single parents and step-families; instruction in family to family evangelism; and support ministries to help families with special needs.

***The Family Ministries Committee***—To more effectively meet the needs of families in the church, the church board may establish a Family Ministries Committee, chaired by the Family Ministries leader(s). Although this committee should not be too large in order to remain effective, appropriate church leaders should be included as well as persons who understand the varied needs of families within the church. Persons who have faced traumatic life and family experiences and have grown spiritually through them may make valuable contributions as members of the committee. The committee should include both men and women, and where possible, at least one single person, at least one married couple, one or more parents, and a representative cross-section of the various age groups in the church. The duties of the committee shall be the following:

- a. To assist church leadership in compiling family demographic data both within the

church and in the surrounding community to clarify target groups for a ministry to families.

b. To assist church leadership in assessing the needs of church members for family life education, enrichment, and counseling; and in developing a plan for utilizing community and church resources to address these needs.

c. To encourage sensitivity to the impact of church programs on family life in terms of the expenditure of time, energy, money, and other family resources required.

d. To participate with the conference/mission Family Ministries Department in implementing family emphasis programs promoted by the department.

e. To cooperate with church leadership to design, plan, and implement additional family life features and programs as needed, both for family nurture within the membership and evangelistic outreach to the community.

f. To foster a climate of warmth and fellowship, engendering a sense of “familiness” in the congregation and a redemptive spirit toward families in need of support and encouragement.

***Family Ministries Leader(s)***—An individual or married couple may be elected to serve as the Family Ministries leader(s). The individual(s) should have a positive attitude about God, self, others, and the church. The leader(s) should model strong and growing family relationships and exhibit a sincere interest in fostering the well-being of all families. In order to be effective, it is necessary for the Family Ministries leader(s) to have an understanding of God’s redemptive plan for dealing with the brokenness in relationships which sin has brought. It is also important that the leader(s) be able to maintain confidentiality and know when and how to encourage individuals in critical situations to seek professional counseling. The duties of the Family Ministries leader(s) are:

a. To chair the Family Ministries Committee.

b. To represent the needs and interests of families through membership on the church board, and to coordinate Family Ministries plans with the overall church program.

c. To inform the pastor and church board of Family Ministries concerns and achievements, and to encourage funding and support for ministry to families.

d. To identify church and community resources which foster relational growth and provide help to meet critical needs, and to heighten awareness of these resources among church leadership and families.

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Reprinted from *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, Revised 2005 17<sup>th</sup> Edition*, pp. 125, 126, 141, 142.

## Five Levels of Communication

John Powell (1969) outlines five levels of communication, which can be likened to a person coming out of the forest into a clearing. In the deep recesses of the forest, little about a person is open to view. But as a person moves toward the edge of the forest, more and more light penetrates through the trees, and more and more can be seen. Out of the open spaces of a clearing, the person steps into full view.

### 1. Cliché Level

The first level of communication that Powell speaks of is the cliché level. At this level, the person is still figuratively deep in the forest, sharing in mere chit-chat with another. Couples use trivial talk to enter and exit one another's presence and to "test the waters" as they contemplate deeper levels of communication, to determine whether or not to proceed.

Conversation at this level includes comments like, "How was your day?" "Sure glad it's Friday!" "Aren't those flowers beautiful?" "It's good it rained today; the lawn is so dry!" Little of any personal significance is revealed at this level, but it is useful in a relationship as we move in and out of one another's lives.

### 2. Facts Level

Moving only slightly out of the recesses of the forest of personal privacy, a couple communicating at the facts level reports the news and events of their daily lives to one another. It is at this level of communication that we make one another aware of the information necessary to care for the details of life together as a family and to coordinate everyone's needs.

Conversation at this level runs along these lines: "Joe has a dental appointment right after school tomorrow and will need to be picked up fifteen minutes early." "I will be home late this afternoon because I need to stop at the market." "Jeff got his final examination scores today and he did really well in history." "The chain came off my bicycle and I had to push it home." "The pastor called and the church board meeting has been changed to Monday night."

### 3. Ideas Level

At this level the couple figuratively takes further steps toward the sunlight of the clearing. Here disclosure cautiously moves beyond mere facts to the sharing of ideas. "I prefer the darker color to the lighter one." "I think we should see what books are available at the library before we spend the money to order these." "You could push your bicycle over to Uncle Jim's house and maybe he could help you fix the chain." "Let's plan to do something as a family Monday night since Mom's meeting has been canceled."

### 4. Feeling Level

While the first three levels are important to the smooth running of a household, intimacy cannot be achieved when communication is limited to them. Within these levels, couples may enjoy "meeting minds" and may share considerably at an intellectual level. However, to this point emotions are still carefully guarded. It is at the feeling level that couples really take significant strides toward the light, moving toward intimacy with every step.

At this level, feelings are attached to information. With the disclosure of feelings, couples become increasingly more vulnerable in their relationship, risking personal safety for intimacy.

Someone has said that feelings can be sorted into four main categories: glad, mad, sad, and afraid. Learning to share negative feelings in a constructive manner particularly represents an important step toward intimacy.

### 5. Self-disclosure Level

It is at this level of communication that intimacy is built. The term *intimacy* is often equated with sexual intercourse. But to claim so narrow a limitation on the term is to cheat it of its fullness. Scripture uses the imagery of “naked and unashamed” to describe the intimacy of marriage in God’s original design. To stand naked and unashamed in a relationship is to risk being fully known so that you might stretch toward fully loving. Nothing is hidden. There is no reason to hide. Each feels safe in the other’s love, able to risk any disclosure because of trust built over time. This is no experience of illusion, however. As Elizabeth Achtemeier (1976) explains it:

In the biblical faith, there is never any illusion that you and I are saints, at least not according to the usual definition of the term. When we share that faith, we therefore do not take with us into marriage unrealistic expectations about what we are like or are apt to do. We are, according to the Christian faith, a unique blend of saint and sinner, capable of the highest and most tender love and equally of the lowest spite and selfishness. Usually both sides of our natures are in full operation at any given time. . . .

If we can acknowledge that in our marital unions, if we know we are both saint and sinner, if we realize that we live by the grace of love, rather than by earned merit and admiration, then we have the freedom to come out from behind our facades and to bare our souls, warts and all. (pp. 136, 137)

Interestingly, however, the Hebrew verb “to know,” is the word used in the Old Testament for sexual intimacy (compare Gen. 4:1; 1 Sam. 1:19). It is the same language used to speak of God’s desired relationship with His people (Ps. 139:1; Jer. 9:3; Hosea 13:4; John 17:3; 1 Cor. 8:3). It is much more than mere knowledge *about* a person. It connotes a profound relationship *with* another. One who *knows* God and is *known* by Him experiences a sense of total acceptance, assurance, and peace. *Knowing* one’s spouse and being *known* provides for the most complete, fulfilling, and at the same time pleasurable and satisfying experience known to humans. Physical intimacy then becomes a “bright thread of joy woven in the ordinary colors of daily life” (Grace and Grace, 1980, p. 81), a celebration of the vitality that surges in us as His creation as male and female, of the experience in knowing intimately—which we pursue together in marriage, and of the joy which is beyond belief as we enter into intimacy with the Giver of every good gift.

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Handout #4 *Five Levels of Communication*

## **Communication in Our Marriage**

Things about our communication which are very good . . .

Things we find difficult to communicate about but which I wish we could talk about more freely . . .

Things I can do to open and improve communication in our marriage . . .



## Family Profile Questionnaire

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Age group:  18 - 30  31 - 40  41 - 50  51 - 60  61 - 70  71+

Gender:  M  F

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Home) \_\_\_\_\_ (Work) \_\_\_\_\_

Baptized SDA  Yes  No

If Yes, local church membership \_\_\_\_\_

If No, what is your religious background/present affiliation? \_\_\_\_\_

Marital status:

Single, never married  Single, divorced  Single, widowed

Married - Spouse's name \_\_\_\_\_ Birth date \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse is SDA - Local church membership \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse is not SDA - Present religious affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Children whose primary residence is with you:

Name	Birth date	Grade in school	School attending	Baptized SDA?	Local church Membership
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Children whose primary residence is elsewhere:

Name	Birth date	Baptized SDA?	Local church membership
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Other family members living with you:

Name	Birth date	Baptized SDA?	Local church membership	Family relationship
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What is the most significant thing the Family Ministries Committee could do this year to address the interests/needs of your family?

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I am interested in Family Ministries and am willing to help by:

- ✧ Telephoning as needed
- ✧ Participating in planning sessions
- ✧ Providing transportation
- ✧ Preparation for events
- ✧ Help with meals/refreshments
- ✧ Child care
- ✧ Advertising
- ✧ Other
- ✧ Presenting lectures/classes/seminars/workshops or other presentations

Your interest area(s): \_\_\_\_\_



**FAMILY PROFILE**

Church: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Category	Active Members		Inactive Members	
	With children under 18	No children under 18	With children under 18	No children under 18
<b>Married, spouse is a member</b>				
Ages 18-30				
Ages 31-40				
Ages 41-50				
Ages 51-60				
Ages 61-70				
Ages 71+				
<b>Married, spouse is not a member</b>				
Ages 18-30				
Ages 31-40				
Ages 41-50				
Ages 51-60				
Ages 61-70				
Ages 71+				
<b>Single, never married</b>				
Ages 18-30				
Ages 31-40				
Ages 41-50				
Ages 51-60				
Ages 61-70				
Ages 71+				

Family Category	Active Members		Inactive Members	
	With children under 18	No children under 18	With children under 18	No children under 18
<b>Single, separated</b>				
Ages 18-30				
Ages 31-40				
Ages 41-50				
Ages 51-60				
Ages 61-70				
Ages 71+				
<b>Single, widowed</b>				
Ages 18-30				
Ages 31-40				
Ages 41-50				
Ages 51-60				
Ages 61-70				
Ages 71+				

Children under 18	Attending	Non-attending
Early childhood (0-5)		
Middle childhood (6-12)		
Adolescence		

## Family Life Activities Interest Survey

Listed below are various family life activities which could be of benefit to the church family. In order to help the Family Ministries Council in planning, please indicate activities which you would like us to feature during the coming year.

Beginning with #1 for the item you desire to have most, rate the activities in order of importance to you from 1 through 20.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child development and training<br><input type="checkbox"/> Communication<br><input type="checkbox"/> Discussion sessions for adolescents<br><input type="checkbox"/> Effective “in-lawing”<br><input type="checkbox"/> “Empty nesting” (When the children are gone)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Family finances<br><input type="checkbox"/> General family life<br><input type="checkbox"/> Grandparenting<br><input type="checkbox"/> Handling grief, death, dying, other crises<br><input type="checkbox"/> Seminar for single parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Human Sexuality<br><input type="checkbox"/> Marriage enhancement<br><input type="checkbox"/> Parenting education<br><input type="checkbox"/> Parent-adolescent relationships<br><input type="checkbox"/> Prenatal development and care<br><input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for marriage<br><input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for retirement<br><input type="checkbox"/> Seminar for senior citizens<br><input type="checkbox"/> Seminar for single adults (never married, widows, widower, divorcee)<br><input type="checkbox"/> Other: Please give your suggestions below. |
|---|---|
- 
- 

What time of the day and day of the week is best for you to attend a class on family life? (Check those blocks that are *open* for you.)

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Afternoon	___	___	___	___	___	___	___
Evening	___	___	___	___	___	___	___

## Community Family Life Education Survey

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?
2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area? (Select as many as you wish.)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> How to Handle Conflict                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce Recovery                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communication in Marriage                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Stress Management                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage Enrichment or Encounter<br>Weekend | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming Loneliness               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding Children                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning Retirement                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Esteem                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Finances                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Skills                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Grief Recovery                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with Teenagers                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management and Life Priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childbirth Preparation Class                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify below)        |
- 
- 

3. What time of the day and what day of the week is best for you to attend a 1 ½ - 2 hr. class on one of the above topics? (Check those time periods blocks that are best for you.)

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. It will help strengthen this survey if could obtain the following information about you:

Sex:     M     F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

17 or under    19-30    31-40    41-50    51-60    60-70    70+

Do you have children under 18 years of age in your home?     Yes     No

Are you:     Never married     Married  
                    Separated                    Divorced  
                    Widowed                        Remarried after divorce

Handout #9 *Community Family Life Education Survey*

## The Special Needs of Families

### Varied Family Situations

Family ministry seeks to reach every kind of household. The stereotype of the “ideal” family and household—father, mother, children together—is no longer typical. In the United States, for instance, such families now comprise only about one-third of all households. Two out of every five of U.S. households are now headed by single parents. The death of a parent is responsible for some of these homes, divorce and marital separation for many more. Divorce has necessitated custodial arrangements for children. A wide variety of custodial situations exist. Joint custody, in which divorced parents share equal time with their children, is becoming increasingly popular.

The single parent who has never married represents another less prominent family style which is gaining in numbers. As more and more widowed and divorced parents remarry, stepfamilies, with their own unique needs and challenges, increase. Singles, while not considered “family” by dictionary definition, nevertheless have family life needs. These too must be considered.

Family ministry in its widest context is not addressed to any one segment of the church; it includes everyone, for it speaks to universal needs. In a real sense, the church itself constitutes a family. Because of this, family life ministry will be alert to special needs in the whole congregation that require consideration as well.

### Seasons in Family Living

Family ministry must be aware not only of the many and varied forms which the family takes, but also of the fact that people and families pass through various phases in their lives, such as childhood, adolescence, pre-marital, neo-marital, mid- life, retirement, etc. The needs of families will vary, and ministry to families will change according to the particular stage or “season” through which the family is passing.

**Anticipatory ministry.** Much study is currently being given to the phases of life and the periodic change points that individuals and families encounter throughout their lifetimes. Students of these life-cycle stages have identified some built-in, predictable stresses and crises that can and often do occur. Helping a person anticipate and prepare for these potential stresses is what we call “anticipatory ministry.” When we alert people to upcoming, new experiences in their lives, we greatly increase the likelihood that they will make a successful transition.

## Balancing Ideals and Limitations

Ideally, Adventist families should be happy, well-regulated and spiritually strong, with capabilities for coping with the events of life. While we all have much to learn, some families have had more opportunity for growth than others. It is important to remember that it is easy to be too idealistic in our presentations. People who are already carrying enormous burdens of anxiety and guilt regarding their home life may become more discouraged. While we have certain goals in mind toward which we wish our families to progress, we must work with great care, recognizing the importance of unconditional acceptance as a prelude to growth. We must, in other words, grapple with the family as it is as well as how it might be.

Family can be a place of great happiness; it can also be the scene of terrible hurt. Realistic family life ministry must deal with the pain of disappointment, crisis and failure. It must address the complicated struggles that are part of life, while avoiding idealistic solutions that create guilt rather than stimulate growth. The Savior must ever be lifted up as the One who loves people and loves families. He died to redeem them and lives to minister in their behalf. “Satan's work is to discourage the soul. Christ's work is to inspire the heart with faith and hope” (E. G. White, *Mind, Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 32).

## A Broad Spectrum of Topics

The following list catalogs the broad issues and topics that typically concern families and family members:

### General

- Self-concept
- Emotions
- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Decision-making
- Equality
- Sexuality
- Finances
- Mission of the home
- Love
- Forgiveness
- Reconciliation
- Family worship
- Family council
- Recreation
- Stress
- Impact of T.V. and media
- Understanding temperament
- Abuse

### Marriage

- Preparation for marriage
- Neo-marital experience
- Roles
- Headship
- Mutual submission
- In-law relationships
- Marriage enrichment
- Divorce and remarriage

**Parenting**

- Family planning
- Prenatal development and care
- Child development and training
- Adolescent development and behavior
- Parent-child relationships
- Parent-teen relationships
- Working mothers
- Youth and drugs
- Special needs of the one-parent family

**Life and relationships in adulthood**

- Friendships
- Dating
- Selecting a life partner
- Never-married singleness
- Single again--divorce recovery
- Spiritually single (religious division in marriage)
- Coping with the “empty nest”(when children are gone)
- Mid-life concerns and crises
- Adjusting to aging parents
- Preparation for retirement
- Grand-parenting
- Handling grief, death, dying and other crises
- Adjusting to decreasing physical strength and health

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Adapted from Seventh-day Adventist Church, Department of Family Ministries. (2006). *The Special Needs of Families. Starting a Family Ministries Program*. Retrieved October 20, 2009 from [http://www.adventistfamilyministries.org/world/start\\_needs.htm](http://www.adventistfamilyministries.org/world/start_needs.htm).

## **Ideas for Family Ministries**

### **Sabbath School**

- Include occasional features in adult, children and youth divisions which deal with specific family themes.
- Invite fathers or mothers as guest speakers with features for junior, earliteen, youth Sabbath Schools on family life themes.
- Have a panel of parents and a panel of youth discuss family issues.
- When teaching the Sabbath School lesson, use family illustrations and make applications to fit family settings.
- Give opportunity for young mothers/parents to study their Sabbath School lesson together in a corner of the room where their children are being taught theirs.
- Give children opportunities to present special music, features or other presentations to the adult Sabbath School.
- Have whole families meet together for song service and a short multigenerational feature before dividing by age group.
- Organize parent support groups arising out of the Sabbath School context, such as a cradle mothers' group.

### **Worship Service**

- Preach sermons on specific family topics.
- Use examples from different family living situations as sermon illustrations. Listeners identify with the human interest aspect and receive encouragement to grow even if not all such illustrations have successful endings.
- Provide a "Children's Corner" during the worship service with children's stories or other features tailored especially for the young. Include points which can be discussed at home.
- Prepare a children's activity sheet or a special children's church bulletin which draws young people into the various aspects of the worship service.
- Take into account the needs of children, adults, singles and marrieds when planning the worship service and selecting music.
- Have couples or families lead various aspects of the worship-providing special music, reading scripture, announcing hymns or praying.
- Involve youth in leading congregational worship or serving as ushers or greeters.
- Insert a time of fellowship at the beginning of the worship service when worshippers may greet one another.
- Provide opportunity for members to give ideas and suggestions of sermon topics and other aspects of the service which could have a more positive effect on marriage and family living.
- Include a bulletin insert with special thoughts from Bible and Spirit of Prophecy on family living.
- Distribute a handout at the close of the sermon with practical ways the message of the morning can be put into practice at home.
- Throughout the church year acknowledge and affirm the various kinds of families—newlyweds, couples with small children, families with teenagers, couples in mid-life, single parents, divorced persons, step families, multigenerational families, widows and widowers, and singles who have never been married.



- Provide child-care from time to time for single parents so that they can enjoy the full blessing of the worship service.
- Build into the yearly worship program appropriate emphasis on the secular and church calendars of special days such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christian Home Day, Christian Marriage Day, Family Fellowship Day.
- Use responsive readings on the family from the hymnal or use other appropriate scripture passages.
- Have a special time of commitment for couples/families at the close of the worship service.

#### **Prayer Meeting or Mid-week Service**

- Study biblical marriage and family themes, i.e., marriage covenant, love, forgiveness, mutual submission, fruits of the Spirit in the home, using spiritual gifts in the family, family worship.
- Study accounts of Bible fathers, mothers, children or whole families.
- Select for study "family" portions of Spirit of Prophecy books such as *The Ministry of Healing*, *Education* or entire books such as *The Adventist Home*.
- Pray for specific church families by rotation.
- Invite testimonies of God's blessing in family living.
- If families with children do not regularly attend, plan a monthly mid-week family night with spiritual activities and features of interest to children and youth, perhaps beginning with supper together.
- Have a family worship demonstration as part of the mid-week service, with selected families demonstrating interesting and effective family worship ideas.
- Sing the special hymns for families from our hymn books.
- Feature a series on one of the family topics that is of high interest to the congregation and show how the Bible is practical to every day family living.

#### **Adventist Youth Meetings**

- Plan programs around topics of interest to youth regarding family living, building relationships/friendships, communication with parents, handling and resolving conflict, dating, preparing for marriage, etc.
- Have Pathfinders or other AJY groups earn the honor in Family Life.
- Plan some family-oriented events periodically at Pathfinder and other AY meetings such as socials or outings-camping, hiking.
- Have a panel discussion with two panels—one of teens and one of parents. Let them ask each other "What I've wanted to know but never dared to ask. . ." questions.
- Have a Pathfinder open house when parents are invited to see what the young people are doing.
- Invite parents to help on a short term basis, to teach a craft, a progressive classwork component, or an honor.

#### **Meetings With Church Board and Councils**

- At one of the regular meetings, plan a brain-storming session for the Church Board and/or Church Ministries Coordinating Committee (or the Sabbath School Council, the Youth Ministries Council, the Personal Ministries Council, the Board of Elders, etc.).

Assign this question: “How can the various departments of our church can strengthen families.” Make specific plans to implement ideas and suggestions that arise.

- Plan a few minutes periodically for in-service education of council members. Study topics such as communication, temperaments, self-worth, conflict resolution which will improve the quality of church family life and spill over to individual families.
- Provide opportunities for families of board/council members to fellowship together to build better bonds and feelings of “family” among leaders.

### **Church Social Meetings**

- Focus different programs throughout the year on various aspects of family living—marriage, mothering, fathering, grandparenting, and include programs that focus on family clustering groups (which might include all church members divided into “super families”).
- Build church social programs around family holidays in the calendar such as Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Valentine’s Day.
- Plan a round-robin social that moves among several homes with each family responsible for one game or activity and end up at the church for refreshments.
- Select films, videos and other programs carefully so as to convey and deepen Adventist family values.
- Sponsor a “Family Talent Night” with various families in the churches presenting the combined or separate talents of parents and children.
- Create a place mat for Sabbath potluck with activities and puzzles that will get the church family communicating multigenerationally.

### **Evangelistic Meetings**

- Present doctrinal messages around family themes such as the fatherhood of God, making our earthly homes a foretaste of our heavenly home, being faithful to our family promises and covenants as God has been faithful to His eternal covenant with us, presenting the Sabbath as a time for rest and renewal of relationships between God and ourselves and between family members, and family finance and Christian stewardship.
- Include talks on family life as a part of evangelistic meetings.
- Feature families during meetings (see above on the Worship service). Let families or couples present special music or give personal testimonies.
- Give special Bible studies on family living to candidates.
- Distribute handouts and literature on family life to evangelistic congregations.
- Plan some visitation time for families as wholes as well as visiting individuals within families. Endeavor to work for the family as a unit.
- Organize visitation using several from a family as a visitation team.

### **Communion Services**

- Designate a special place for couples and/or families who wish to share the ordinance of footwashing together.
- Explain to families with unbaptized children how to teach their children the meaning of the communion service.
- Plan a special time when children with their parents may sit together with unconsecrated emblems and sample them for the purpose of instructing their curious and inquiring minds.

- As children grow older, let fathers wash the feet of their sons and mothers the feet of their daughters to teach them and to give them a sense of specialness and inclusion in the service.
- Have a simulated passover meal as families before the communion, explaining the symbols and the meaning to the Hebrew family and the new understanding brought by Christ to the Communion.

### **Baptismal Services**

- Celebrate the candidate's membership in his/her own family as well as membership in the church family.
- Include the entire family in the preparation of a child for baptism, providing opportunity for parents to recommit themselves, siblings to look back or forward to their own decision as well as making sure the child to be baptized understands the step he is about to take.
- Give family members opportunities to share feelings about their loved one's baptism by song or personal testimony.
- When young people are baptized, meet with the family to pray and share ways in which all can be supportive of the newly baptized young person.
- Include a "welcome to the family" by giving each member some special paper as stationery on which to write words of encouragement and welcome to be part of a scrapbook keepsake for the new member.
- Where possible, baptize members of the same family together. Some find a special sense of unity in being baptized simultaneously.
- Encourage baptismal candidates to invite their extended family members to be present. Recognize the potential of this event to give renewal and stimulation to family relationships.
- Encourage families to remember and commemorate baptismal dates of family members at home.
- Remember in a special way at church the anniversaries of current members' baptisms.

### **Child Dedication Services**

- This is an occasion which naturally generates warm feelings of familiness throughout the congregation. It affords an excellent opportunity for a special message about the importance of a family, child-rearing, parenting, etc., in the sermon or in a special feature.
- Make the dedication service special with an appropriate charge and words of encouragement to the parents.
- Offer family members (siblings, parents, grandparents) the opportunity to share with the church family their joyful feelings over the presence of this little one among them.
- Record the dedication services and give the tape to the family. They will be able to remember and celebrate this event annually.
- Give the parents and child a special gift book (Child Guidance, The Adventist Home, or some other appropriate title).
- Prepare a special message for this dedicated child which he will later read (at age 11 or 12) which will encourage him to prepare for baptism.
- Give the family a folder which shows all the church has to offer in assistance to the parents and to their child as he/she grows.

- Make it a whole family event by including extended family as available in the dedication event.
- Make a scrapbook of photographs, the church bulletin of the day, dedication certificate, etc, that can be added to on the occasion of other significant events in the child's life.

### **Wedding Services**

- Encourage the bride and groom to think of their family when planning their wedding. Perhaps they can include special words or thoughts of tribute to parents or other family members during the ceremony or at their reception.
- Provide engaged couples with premarital guidance, helping them to identify issues which they need to discuss and to develop the skills with which to manage their relationship successfully.
- Select and train one or two couples who enjoy being married to meet with the engaged pair to talk about what marriage means to them.
- Build wedding sermonettes around scriptural passages about marriage with practical application for the new couple.
- Recognize the potential of a wedding to be a time of togetherness and renewal for each of the families concerned. Encourage them to invite family members to this event.

### **Funeral Services**

- Be sensitive to the special needs of the grieving family, anticipating their immediate and continuing physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs and providing for them in their time of loss.
- In preparing and delivering the various parts of funeral services, highlight those aspects of warmth and humanness in family living which characterized the deceased, giving relatives the opportunity to relive the treasured moments of family life together.

### **Vacation Bible School**

- Build the VBS theme around the topic "Family."
- Include family living features to help children learn how to live successfully in their families.
- Involve families of children in VBS graduation ceremonies. Give opportunity for church families to mingle with non-church families over a fruit drink or during a graduation dinner or banquet.
- Conduct VBS in the evening conjointly with a family life program for parents.
- Where possible, consider using father-mother or grandfather-grandmother leader/teacher teams in VBS for the modeling effect it will have upon the children.
- Have a "parent" component so the whole family attends together.

### **Church Campouts**

- Emphasize family strengthening at church retreats or family camps. Include special programs of Bible studies, nature studies, or social activities (games, recreation) which give parents and their children/youth opportunity to interact with each other.

### **Church Newsletters, Bulletins and Bulletin Boards**

- Share encouraging news from the various families within the membership.
- Include articles, columns and features on family topics.

- Post items on bulletin boards which encourage families.

**Church Library**

- Build a family life lending library which includes books, periodicals, audio and video cassettes, and possibly even films.
- Feature a family life book/cassette-of-the-month. Give a promotional preview and encourage families to read/listen to the specially selected library item.
- Encourage members to read/listen to a selected book/tape by passing copies through the church using an attached routing list of names.

**Lay Activities/Personal Ministries**

- Encourage families to work together as teams for missionary activity. As parents join with their children to distribute literature, to ingather, to visit new interests, or shut-ins at home, there is a double blessing, upon themselves and upon those they visit.

**Pastoral Visitation**

- Pastors and local elders who visit with members in their homes, can be alert to individual family needs and opportunities created by significant family events such as weddings, births, baptisms, funerals and other life crises. During the visit, minister to the needs generated by these circumstances. Put members in touch with people, programs or resources which they can utilize.
- Make arrangements to visit families at worship time through the week or on Friday or Sabbath evening. Offer to lead the family in family worship, sharing creative ideas and suggestions to encourage them in this daily experience.

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## **Family Ministries and Outreach**

The great invitation we have to extend to others is to a place in the family of God. What better way to begin than with entry events (which may merge into pathways) that speak to family needs and provide non-members with an opportunity to become more acquainted with the church, its message, and its people. Bridges between the needs of families and the sharing of the gospel are too natural to be left unbuilt. Here are a few ideas:

### **Seminars on Topics of Community Interest**

- Family finance
- Family stress management
- Caring for your aging parents
- Vacation Bible School
- You and your child (parenting classes perhaps associated with VBS)
- You and your teen
- Family health (This may take the form of fun runs, aerobics, etc., that whole families can participate in together.)
- Family nutrition
- Temperament testing
- Singles enrichment
- Marriage enrichment
- Video series on family issues

### **Accenting “Family” Aspects of Calendar Holidays**

- Mother’s/Father’s Day services (Poll the community for outstanding parents and honor them.)
- A family for the holidays (Match lonely people in the community with caring church families willing to share their holiday celebrations with them.)

### **Programs/Support Groups for Family Transitions**

- Prenatal classes
- In-laws
- Newlyweds
- Preparing for marriage
- Making the most of retirement
- Your family and your handicapped child
- Stress management for teens
- Coping with loss and grief
- Parents’ support group for chemically dependent youth
- Making it through mid-life
- Coping with divorce
- Helping children cope with divorce
- Meeting the challenge of single parenting

### **Acknowledging Special Family Events**

“When a baby is born, couples begin having 'sober thoughts of mothering and fathering, doctoring and proctoring, education and, for adults who do not belong to a religious institution, religion” (*New York Times*).

A family ministries outreach to parents with newborns might be the assembly of materials in an attractive folder which could include items such as:

- An introductory subscription to a missionary magazine.
- A Bible Course enrollment card or first lesson of an actual study guide series.
- A description of a Cradle Roll program at the local S.D.A. church with an invitation to attend.
- A coupon for a gift copy of a children's book such as *My Bible Friends*.
- A sample copy of *Our Little Friend*, the tiny tot's Sabbath School paper.
- An invitation to any parenting programs, nutrition classes, VBS programs, marriage or family enrichment programs, etc. being offered by the local church.
- An appropriate letter from the pastor giving congratulations on the arrival of their new baby.

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## *From Bottom to Top*

by Jallah Karbah, FM Director,  
West African Union Mission  
West-Central African Division

This is the story of two brothers who grew up in a family with six boys. Let's call these two Blama and Forfee. That's not their real names, but their story is real. As children, Blama and Forfee lived in a city in West Africa that is full of people—young people and older people, people always moving about the streets, shopping at the market, and making noise—lots of noise: honking car horns, noisy trucks and busses, shouting people, and all kinds of animals making noises. Their city is always busy and there seems to be no night; people are out at all hours.

Growing up in such a neighborhood was a challenge for Blama and Forfee. Most people there do not think it is wrong to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes or use drugs of whatever kind. In fact, it was normal in their city for people to do these things that Christians consider unacceptable. In their city, even children as young as six years old want to be special boyfriends and girlfriends—at ages far too young for children to be thinking about that.

Blama's and Forfee's parents were very simple people. They did not have a very good place to live, a car, nice clothes or shoes. Sometimes their parents had enough money to buy some better things, but they were among the very poor of their city. They were at the bottom of society.

One thing they did have—that was Jesus. A Christian lady from the Caribbean moved into their neighborhood when the boys were very young. She cared about the children in the neighborhood and she was especially fond of Blama and Forfee. She helped the children to

learn to sing and to give concerts in front of crowds of people. Most of all she told them about Jesus and taught them to love God.

Across the street from where Blama and Forfee lived was a Seventh-day Adventist church. Every Sabbath, a woman from the church would visit in the neighborhood, stopping by the homes and asking if the parents would let the children go to Sabbath School with her. Blama's and Forfee's parents didn't hesitate to allow both boys to go to church with her. The parents were happy to send their children when there was vacation Bible school, church picnics and church socials.

At church, Blama and Forfee learned to follow Jesus and to stand strong for truth. Whenever they were quizzed by people about why they didn't do the common things that others were doing, they would say, "It's just not right." As sometimes happens when children refuse to do things that are not right for Christians to do, Blama and Forfee were called names like "gbeleh" ("foolish person") or "tamlan" ("behaving like a little child"). Sometimes other young people called them "reverent" or "holy" because they went to church.

When Blama was 13 and Forfee was 14, both boys gave their lives completely to Jesus. They were baptized and became members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The challenges they faced became even worse. Now their friends ridiculed them and members of their family who did not accept their new found faith persecuted them. Their former friends made fun of them publicly and tried to make them angry.



They slapped Blama and Forfee in the face and said things like, "If you're truly following Jesus, you'll let us slap your other cheek."

But through it all Blama and Forfee did not give in. They held on to their newfound faith and kept trusting and serving the Lord. Though their parents did not attend church, they nevertheless did what they could to help the boys go to school. Eventually, both graduated from high school and entered university. One studied engineering and the other economics.

Then, a great civil war came to their country. Many people died in the violence. But Blama

and Forfee lived. They are sure God miraculously spared their lives. They both decided to change their careers and to work for God in a special way.

Today, Blama and Forfee are gospel ministers. One is a pastor in a church in their home country and the other is a pastor in another country. They both have received good education. When they tell their story to boys and girls, they tell how God has helped them from the bottom to the top. God will help us too, whatever our circumstances, whatever ridicule or persecution or trouble we may face to be faithful to Him like Blama and Forfee. To God be the glory.

## *“Won't Be's” in Heaven*

by Karen-Mae Trotman Mitchell

**Text:** “I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1).

**Theme:** Heaven will be a place of happiness.

**Props:** In a big bag have some band-aids, test/homework sheet, fireman's hat, drawing of a black cloud, pocket pack of tissues, padlock/cop's badge, damaged toy car, small pillow, medicine and a toy ambulance, thermometer and syringe.

In the Book of Revelation, the prophet John tells us that he saw Heaven (cf. Rev. 21:1). God gave him a chance to see the future—to see what Heaven will be like. I can hardly wait to get to Heaven! There will be so many things I want to see and do when I get there.

What are some things that you would like to see when you get to Heaven? (*Wait for children to respond.*)

Yes, there will be lots of great things in Heaven. But, you know, Heaven will also be special because of the many things that *won't be* there.

Can you tell me of some of the things you would not like to see in Heaven? (*Wait for children to list these.*)

I call the things we won't have to worry about in Heaven “won't be's.” In my bag, I have some things to remind us of some of the things that *won't be* in Heaven. I'll show them to you one by one, and you can tell me what “won't be's” they remind you of.

(*In any order, take out the items one by one and hold them up for the children to see. Then join with the kids as they give the answers.* )

Band-aid	<i>no cuts, bruises, skinned knees</i>
Test/homework	<i>no tests or homework</i>
Fireman's hat	<i>no fires or other tragedies</i>
Black cloud	<i>no storms, hurricanes, or other bad weather</i>
Pocket pack of tissues	<i>no runny noses, no crying</i>
Padlock/cop's badge	<i>no law-breaking</i>
Damaged toy car	<i>no traffic accidents</i>
Small pillow	<i>no bedtimes</i>
Medicine	<i>no tummy aches, etc.</i>
Toy ambulance, thermometer, syringe	<i>no sickness</i>

I'm glad we won't need any of these things in Heaven. Aren't you? Yes, the Bible tells us that Heaven will be a place of happiness and no sadness.

Listen to Revelation 21:4. (*You can ask one of the older children to read this text.*)

I like that. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be." How exciting!

But guess what. The best thing about Heaven is that Jesus will be there. I can't wait to see Him. I know you would love to see Jesus, too, right? Let's thank God for preparing this beautiful home for us where we can all be together with Him. Let's thank Him for giving us Jesus as our Savior so that we can all be there.

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Dr. Karen-Mae Trotman Mitchell is the married daughter of IAD FM Director, Jansen Trotman. She is an ardent children's leader and her work has appeared in Seventh-day Adventist publications. Karen-Mae currently lives in Texas with her husband, Ricky, a pediatrician, and their young daughters, Janae and Joya.

# Recipe for Success

by Karen-Mae Trotman Mitchell

**Text:** “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings . . .”  
(Proverbs 22:29).

**Theme:** The Bible gives us the recipe for living successful lives for God.

**Props:** Apron, mixing bowl & spoon, and several “ingredients.” (Use colored sand for “pretend” cookies—available from a craft store—in small, transparent plastic containers, each one covered until needed. Or, if you are adventurous, you could mix the actual ingredients for cookies—flour, sugar, baking powder, etc. Add the ingredients to the mixing bowl as you talk about them.)  
\*Optional: Provide a store-bought cookie for each child, such as oatmeal-raisin. Promise to give these to the children’s parents with napkins for them after church. Keep your promise!

How many of you have ever heard the word “success?” What do you think success means? Raise your hand if you would like to tell me.

Oh, those are all good ideas. Some people think success is having a lot of money, so they can buy lots of things. Some people think that it means having lots of friends. I think success is finding out what God wants you to do and being happy doing it. God wants us to live successful lives for Him. That is what we will talk about this morning.

How many of you like to help Mom or Dad in the kitchen? I like to cook and bake, and when my children were your age, I would get out a cookbook and they would make cookies with me. So today, I want to pretend that you are all my children and we are making cookies together. We are going to imagine that you can make “success” the way you make cookies. And we will see if we can find a recipe for our “success cookies” in the Bible.

In Matthew 6:33, the Bible tells us the first ingredient in success: “. . . seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these

things will be given to you as well” (NKJV). So let’s put this first in our mixing bowl. Our first ingredient is *seek God first*. That’s an important ingredient for our “success cookies.” (*Put in the first real or pretend ingredient.*)

Did you know that God has given each of us special gifts? Sometimes we call them talents. The Bible tells us that “each one has his own gift from God” (1 Cor. 7:7 NKJV). Each of us has special abilities, things that we can do well. Some of us sing; some of us draw; some of us can run fast; some of us read well; some of us are good at helping others. If we practice the things that we are good at, we become even better! This is called developing our talents. So the next thing we want to do in making our success cookies is *develop our talents*. 2 Tim. 1:6 tells us to “. . . stir up the gift of God which is in you . . .” (NKJV). So let’s stir the talents into our cookies. (*Put in the next real or pretend ingredient.*)

The next step in our recipe for success is to *aim high*, to plan. Let’s plan to do big things for God! God has promised that “I can do all

things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Phil 4:13, NKJV), and so can you! So let's put high aims and goals in our success cookies. It's kind of like the baking powder that will make our cookies rise instead of being flat. (*Put in the next real or pretend ingredient.*)

We'll use one more ingredient today. Its *do your best*. Col. 3:23 (New Century Version) tells us, “In all the work you are doing, work the best you can. Work as if you were doing it for the Lord, not for people.” God wants us to do our best. So let's mix that into our cookie dough. (*Put in the next real or pretend ingredient.*)

Wouldn't it be great if we could eat our cookies right away? But it takes time for them

to bake in the oven, doesn't it? Success also takes time. We must be patient. But we can be sure that God will bless our efforts when we are doing what He wants us to do. Let's remember one more Bible text. It's found in Proverbs 22:29: “Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men.” When we live faithfully as Christians there will be wonderful opportunities that open for us to share our faith and tell others about our God.

Jesus is right there beside us to help us live successful lives for Him. “I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20).

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# *Jesus Was Single Too*

by Dr. Roberto Badenas\*  
Family Ministries Director  
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For many different reasons, many of our contemporaries are single. “Single,” though, is not a popular word in many societies. “Bachelor” is usually perceived as meaning someone “not yet married,” as if marriage was the norm and celibacy only a transitional state through which one passes before “getting his/her life in order.”

Many people think the only valid answer to this “problem” of singleness is to marry off singles! However, as Christy R. Robinson says, “Singleness is not a problem or disease for which marriage is a cure. Singleness is a fact of life.”<sup>1</sup>

## **A Lesser Known Aspect of Jesus’ Life**

Jesus was single too. Have you thought about that? How did He react to the reality of His singleness? His choice to remain single had to have been a challenge to a very strong social taboo, for in the society of which He was a part when He lived on earth, to remain single was a very rare exception. By not taking a wife, Jesus transgressed the social practices of Judaism. Let’s explore this lesser known aspect of His life.

More than once Jesus surprised His contemporaries by His unusual teaching, His acts, and the way He interacted with His disciples and all kinds of people.<sup>2</sup> He was not reluctant to break new ground. His determination to bring about true freedom overcame all the resistance that He found. If there is an aspect of Jesus’ life, however, which stood the greatest likelihood of being embarrassing for Him in front of His contemporaries, it would have to be His celibacy. All that is recorded about Jesus’ life makes it evident that He had a single status in His society. By choosing not to be married, Jesus departed radically from the customs of the Jewish society of His time.

Based on what we know of Judaism in the time of Christ, celibacy as a religious vocation apparently did not exist, except among some Essenes, a strict Jewish sect living at the edge of society.<sup>3</sup> Before the Middle Ages, in fact, there is no record of any rabbi remaining single, except for Jesus, perhaps John the Baptist, the apostle Paul and a certain rabbi called Simeon ben Azzai.<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Ben Azzai explained his choice this way: “My soul is married to the Torah.”<sup>5</sup>

The Old Testament taught that priests had to be married. According to the oldest traditions, it seems that it was necessary for the high priest to be married in order to be eligible to proceed to the annual rites of the Feast of expiations, when he was required to offer a sacrifice on behalf of “his house,” that is to say, for his wife and his children.<sup>6</sup> Even the nazirs, men and women who consecrated themselves to God’s service for a period of time, were not required to be celibate.<sup>7</sup>

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\*I dedicate this article to all readers who are single, and especially to a personal and very precious list of single people for whom I pray every day.

### **“Be Fruitful and Multiply”**

Marriage was generally considered as the first of the commandments given by God to Adam and Eve, just after their creation, when He commanded them: “Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it” (Gen. 1:28). A late tradition comments on this order: “Every man is obliged to get married to accomplish the duty of procreation; whoever does not apply himself to perpetuate the human race is like a murderer because he does not allow the image of God to be perpetuated, and puts away from Israel the divine presence.”<sup>8</sup> Certainly the conviction that procreation was a divine exigency (and not just a privilege) made even more painful the experience of the biblical couples who could not have children.<sup>9</sup>

In order to insure that this procreation commandment was duly observed at the earliest possible opportunity, the Israelites used to arrange for their children to be married while they were very young, the girls even at twelve or thirteen years of age. The preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides proposed that boys be forced to marriage if they were still single at the age of twenty-five.<sup>10</sup> It seems, however, that force was seldom necessary.

One exception was tolerated: The man who consecrated his life to the study of the Torah could remain single for the duration of his formation, under the condition that he kept control of his sexual appetite.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Single Jesus**

We can see that Jesus’ choice to remain single was tantamount to transgression in the eyes of the religionists of His day; He did not submit Himself to the first divine commandment—regarding procreation—as it was traditionally understood. According to the mentality of the time, an unmarried man was just half a human being, unable to reach by himself full self-realization. The Babylonian Talmud contended: “He, who remains without a wife, has no joy, no blessing, no happiness, no learning, no protection, no peace: He is not truly a man.”<sup>12</sup> Even worse, without a wife after the age of thirty, Jesus ran the risk of being suspected either of impotence, which was perceived as a curse, or of homosexuality—an abomination in the eyes of the pious Jews (see Rom. 1:26, 27).

A statement in the gospels seems to unveil the suffering Jesus endured at His choice of celibacy: “But he said unto them, all men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” (Matt. 19:11, 12)<sup>13</sup>.

### **Towards the Choice of a Single Life**

These verses from the lips of Jesus contain an important teaching regarding the choice to remain single. For our Lord, celibacy is no longer related to a congenital sexual defect or to forced sexual mutilation (the first meaning of the word “eunuch”). For Jesus, celibacy may be the result of a deliberate choice, a personal vocation—“for the kingdom of heaven.” Celibacy may simply be an important stage in life.

Jesus, who knew the risks related to His earthly life and the demands required by His ministry, avoided marrying a wife who would have soon been a widow. While most of the disciples supposedly married (cf. Matt. 8:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:5), Paul remained single, integrating into his personal mission the new freedom proposed by Jesus. Paul discerned in the attitude of Christ toward marriage that it no longer was an obligation, nor did it convey a superior status upon men and women. Marriage is “honourable” (Heb. 13:5), an option for adults equally acceptable before God when it responds to a true vocation.

“The apostle Paul, the most visible of biblical singles, notes in 1 Corinthians 7 that single people may be able to devote more resources to God and to their spiritual mission.”<sup>14</sup> He advocates that to be single may be not only a choice but a good one, honourable and self-fulfilling, free of any suspicion of social marginalization: “Now concerning the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. . . . I would like that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God, one has this gift, another has that. I say therefore to the unmarried and the widows, It is good for them to stay unmarried as I am” (1 Cor. 7:1, 7, 8). The point that the apostle wants to make clear here is that single people, on a temporary as well as a permanent basis, may consecrate themselves to God and to their mission or vocation as well and perhaps even better than if they were married.

Christy Robinson rightly observes, “Some people *need* to be single for a time during their lives, to give themselves time to grow and mature into all that God has planned for them to be. Even if singleness is a temporary state, the time can be used wisely.”

Marriage and celibacy are both gifts of God. Jesus has opened the way of a new spiritual life in His Kingdom family where each member may freely choose to get married or to remain single. With either of these two beautiful options believers should feel free from social pressure to live in perfect freedom before God.

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<sup>1</sup> Christy K. Robinson, “Creating a Single’s Ministry in a Couples’ Church,” *AR* 21/11/96, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> See John 6:66; Luke 19:7, Mark 2:23, 24; 7:1-5; Luke 7:39.

<sup>3</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Bell* 2:120, 121.

<sup>4</sup> See “Celibacy,” *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, p. 191 (French edition).

<sup>5</sup> See Talmud, *Yevamoth* 63b.

<sup>6</sup> See Leviticus 21:7, 13-15; 16:6, 11, 17, and Talmud, *Yoma* 1:1.

<sup>7</sup> See Numbers 6:1-21.

<sup>8</sup> *Schulchan Aroukh*, EH, 1:1.

<sup>9</sup> See the cases of Sarah requesting the services of a surrogate mother (Gen. 16:1, 2), of Rachel and Leah trying to obtain children from Jacob (Gen. 30:1-3), and of Hannah, the mother of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:7, 8).

<sup>10</sup> *Schulchan Aroukh*, EH, 1:3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:4.

<sup>12</sup> Talmud, *Yevamoth* 62b, commentary on Gen. 5:2.

<sup>13</sup> A definition of “*eunuch*” here may include unfitness for marriage together with mere celibacy. “Physical inability by nature or castration is intended in the first two cases mentioned but this is improbable in the third . . . . It could be that Jesus is here reacting against a slander spoken against him and his disciples. Because he was unmarried he was perhaps accused of being a eunuch (cf. the change in Matt. 11:19, “a glutton and a drunkard”). Jesus answers by referring to the kingdom of God. One’s joy in it can be so great that one is prepared for the sake of the kingdom to renounce everything else, under some circumstances even marriage.” H.



Baltensweiler, "Eunuch," in *The NIV Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 560-561.

<sup>14</sup> Christy K. Robinson, *op. cit.* p. 17.

# *To Prohibit or to Permit?*

## *Towards A Healthy Balance in Parenting*

by José Antonio M. Moreno  
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Translation: Escuela Superior de Español de Sagunto (ESDES)

One of the challenges parents face is the decision whether to prohibit our children from participating in an activity or to permit them to do so. On the one hand we are afraid of provoking trauma or unnecessary anger in them if we deny their requests. On the other hand we worry that our permission might expose them to risky situations and misbehaviour. In this dilemma, as in many others, understanding the outcomes of our educative action toward our children is important.

It's a given that younger generations will introduce changes in the customs and practices of adult society. Young people often violate the traditional behavioural patterns of their parents. They talk, dress, and behave in ways that disregard the rules and standards adults consider reasonable and acceptable. They frequently worry us and provoke us—likely in ways similar to what we probably did with our parents when we were our children's ages. It has always been this way as far back as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. when Socrates wrote: "Our youth love luxury, they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and . . . tyrannize their teachers." On the other hand, our children inherit our shared worldview as well as our prejudices, our fears, and our miseries. A reflection on our ideas about parenting will shed light on the mistakes that we sometimes commit in our exercise of authority and how these translate into errors that, in reality, we do not want to commit with our children.

### **Fundamental Models of Education**

The term education comes from the Latin word *educare* which means "to direct," "guide" or "lead." Closely connected is the Latin word *educere*, whose meaning is "to bring up," "cultivate" or "extract." The fusion of these two etymologies explains the coexistence of two basic conceptual models of education: the *authoritative* model and the *developmental* model. Our concept of education depends on the basic idea we have about the development of human beings that springs from one or the other of these fundamental models. This basic idea will shape our approach to our duties as parents and our parenting style.

In all ages and cultures it has been understood that the main educational task of parents is to help their children to become nice people, well integrated in the community and good citizens. According to this view, the task of education is defined by many as teaching, training, conforming, correcting, preparing, leading and disciplining. If we think that our children are in danger of making a mistake when they dare to disagree with us, question our ideas, or disregard our rules, we are tending toward the authoritative model. Consequently we warn, discipline, repress, rebuke, and so on.

Some parents, however, sensing how important the transmission of values, models and habits of discipline are, not only try to mark the limits of an acceptable behavior, but also try to open the minds of their children and orient them towards the analysis of ideas and situations. These parents are not satisfied with their children ignoring the other sides of reality; on the contrary, they try to develop in them the abilities necessary to live in a society where different opinions coexist, sometimes contradictory to one another. They try to enhance their learning through contact with different ways of life. This is more the developmental model and we adopt it to the extent that we are not afraid of diversity and the challenges posed by alternative thinking. It is interesting to observe that the main advice of Paul to parents is not advice to protect them by all means, but he advises, “do not exasperate your children; instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

### **Choosing a Christian Model of Education**

As Christians parents, how should we raise our children? How should we try to teach them? Do we opt for a strict style with precise limits, to keep them in what we consider the right path? Or do we give them healthy guidelines and tools to prepare for their independence, so that they can learn how to critically evaluate everything the world offers throughout their life? If we want to help our children to solve problems that will confront them in the future, a wrong choice in our choice of educational model may cause numerous problems.

Most families with conservative religious beliefs tend to follow authoritarian and strict educational patterns. Trying to be protective, these parents set up excessive boundaries around their children. Their discipline criteria are narrow and their actions focus primarily on prohibiting, forcing, and directing. They want to avoid the influences that could be damaging to their children and protect them from what they consider to be negative. For them, the world has become an inhospitable, perverse place, packed with forces eager to manipulate the innocent minds of their children. These parents may look suspiciously at anyone who does not think like them, whose behavior they fear to be contagious and dangerous. Other parents are more concerned about stimulating critical thinking, autonomy and independence in their children and allowing them to be confronted by diverse world views and opinions.

To think of ourselves as protectors of our children in our role as parent educators is natural. Obviously, bad influences and evil social pressures do exist. These must be confronted. Our societies are secularized, but we are people of faith and want to rear our children with spiritual values. Our beliefs differ from the world around us, at times so much that parents and teachers feel they are teaching against the current, with their educational efforts often annulled by the cultural influences of the environment. Social standards that undermine our cherished values we find intolerable. The great diversity of view points that coexist in society creates a tension between the correct or right and the inconvenient or unacceptable. To live in a world like ours means that our children will constantly be confronted with contradictory standards and behaviors that threaten their dignity and values. As a result, it is necessary to be vigilant regarding the influences that press in upon children.

**Responsible guidance.** To let our children be confronted with alternative points of view that are contrary to our own is necessary in helping build in them a balanced and mature

character. Behavioral science helps us understand that constructing sound moral thinking is possible only when we face problems, obstacles or difficult circumstances which push us to think for ourselves and make choices. Thinking about issues and making choices are also the ways by which we firmly adopt for ourselves the values that are meaningful to us.

The solution, then, is not to prohibit, direct, or unreasonably restrict the ideas of our children and youth. Too many strict limits on their desire to learn reduce the possibility of their progress and personal growth. The education we provide will inevitably determine the amount of freedom the youth will be able to live with. Human beings should be able to form their own opinions, to look critically at reality and to have a solid capacity to understand what is good or bad for their personal development.

A parenting style that is characterized by the suspicion that anything unfamiliar is likely harmful can produce children who are narrow-minded, trapped in their own small world, and fearful of the outside environment with a fear that we helped create. While it is important to monitor children's reading and program viewing and prevent them from harm, it is also important to teach them how to critically evaluate the material they read and watch. To not help them develop their mental faculties in this regard is to miss the implication of this significant presupposition about humankind and especially about children which Ellen White has shared with us:

“Every human being, created in the image of God, is endowed with a power akin to that of the Creator—individuality, power to think and to do. The men in whom this power is developed are the men who bear responsibilities, who are leaders in enterprise, and who influence character. It is the work of true education to develop this power, to train the youth to be thinkers, and not mere reflectors of other men's thought. Instead of confining their study to that which men have said or written, let students be directed to the sources of truth, to the vast fields opened for research in nature and revelation. Let them contemplate the great facts of duty and destiny, and the mind will expand and strengthen. Instead of educated weaklings, institutions of learning may send forth men strong to think and to act, men who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, men who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions” (*Education*, pp. 17, 18).

### **Building the Strength to Think and to Act**

Many of us no doubt have been relentless protectors and strict censors of cartoons, fashion magazines and other popular media. Of course it is commendable that parents avoid granting access to certain images or allowing small children to witness acts that could be harmful. Even when their children are older though, some parents continue to insist on their avoiding contact with the supposed pernicious effects of toys, movies, and reading materials. Let's be clear. We can't always keep them from contact with the media around them. We cannot protect our children forever. Sooner or later they will come face-to-face with the same delicate, controversial and challenging topics that we confronted as we grew up. Whether we like it or not, eventually our children will have to fight their own battles and confront doubts. Only when they do this thoughtfully, prayerfully and carefully will they be enabled to grow.

**Facilitating critical analysis.** Facilitating the development of the ability to do critical personal analysis is an important part of our educational work as parents. It's unfortunate to see kids involved with video games that provoke aggressiveness, watching movies, or engaged with other media that proclaim messages so radically opposed to Christian values without anybody to help them evaluate these situations. As a result, they will inevitably misunderstand the messages.

Children pass through developmental stages. Every stage of a child's psychological development has determined characteristics; their cognitive, emotional and spiritual capacities develop in a progressive manner. In our parental education of our children we must keep pace with their mental and moral development. It is important to be sensitive to your child's developmental process and not expect a child to be able to process situations or resolve moral issues before they are mentally prepared.

When children are able to reason we can analyse together televised advertisements and help them understand the commercial interests hidden in them. In middle childhood and pre-adolescence we can help them process dilemmas and give their own responses to the challenges that they will face in the world.

**Be positive, not negative.** If we blame them for having doubts or give simplistic explanations to their questions, we will be transmitting our unfounded fear of new ideas, our preference for easier solutions, and our comfort with superficial and empty answers. Their desire to learn will be shattered and their minds left as an almost empty place with outdated ways of thinking to confront whatever appears to threaten their ideas. In this way, they will always carry the same fears and suspicions about what they do not understand.

Contrary to this restricted approach, children are better served by a parenting style that is neither fundamentalist nor sceptical, in which they are taught to evaluate critically, to be open to challenging ideas, to invent new solutions, to dialogue. Education for critical thinking implies avoiding biases or simplifications (judgments are not all black or white, nor all or nothing). The analysis of problems and situations require consideration of their different contexts, since few things can be solved in an absolute manner isolated from their context. It is also necessary to evaluate sources of information and to be sure of their implications. It is healthy to teach our children to look, listen, read, not only to decipher images, sounds, or spellings, but also to dig deeper into the different levels of understanding. They will learn to relate more effectively with others if they also listen, dialogue, and learn from the arguments of others.

It's not easy to carry out this kind of education. But the results make up for the efforts. By being careful with what we prohibit and not being too restrictive in what we permit our children to do, we will provide them with lessons in moral strength and decision-making that will last a lifetime.

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## *Parenting: The Early Years*

With Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott

Richardson, TX: BluefishTV, 2007. DVD video set including

*The Parent You Want to Be*

by Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott

Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2007. Book, 198 pages.

Reviewed by Hans and Julie Fairbank

Drs. Les and Leslie Parrott begin with the following question; “What kind of parent [do] you want to be?” In their book, they attempt to answer this “most important question you [as a parent] will ever explore.” As groundwork for this intimate self-evaluation, they help parents identify and categorize their ten “top traits.” Extensive surveys conducted by the authors have identified ten most important Christian parental traits such as: *affirming, patient, attentive, visionary, comforting, prayerful*, etc. The authors assert that a parent can identify their own strong and weak traits and in so doing better equip themselves to become the “parent you want to be.” Clearly, the ultimate goal is to train and nurture one’s children to become who you want *them* to be; yet the Parrotts have approached this goal in an unexpected manner. The sub-title of their book is revealing: “Who You Are Matters More than What You Do.” By focusing, not on the children and *their* behavior, but on the parent’s own character and behavior, the authors have provided an excellent resource for parents yearning to rear children who will reach their full potential in Christ.

The DVD video series, “Parenting: The Early Years,” features the Parrotts prominently and explains the “top traits,” with content similar to the book version but featuring real couples and families. Parents are shown dealing with the typical challenges faced in parenting young children. The families are diverse in their cultural and economic backgrounds, as well as in their demographics. Two-parent families, single-parent families, and blended families are featured, some with only one child, others with several. The interviews and in-home features are open, honest, and sometimes edgy.

The Parrott’s book and videos are excellent companions to each other. They are easily understood, concise and do not overload the reader or viewer with too much information at a given time. The study guide for the DVD series helps reinforce the information touched on in the videos. Those watching the series can dig even deeper into who they are, where they are in their parenting, and where they want to be.

In *The Adventist Home*, Ellen White says, “Give some of your leisure hours to your children; associate with them in their work and in their sports, and win their confidence. Cultivate their friendship. . . . Let parents become acquainted with their children, seeking to understand their tastes and dispositions, entering into their feelings, and drawing out what is in their hearts” (AH 192, 193). In *The Parent You Want to Be* Les and Leslie Parrott write, “During . . . times of simply hanging out with their parents, kids tend to open up more easily . . . and explore issues in greater depth.” This is just one example of how the themes of these different authors, though written over 100 years apart, mirror each other. Many of the “top traits” listed by the Parrotts—patience, affirmation, attentiveness, connection and prayerfulness—can all be found within Mrs. White’s counsel to parents. In *Child*

*Guidance* Mrs. White states that “fathers and mothers [are to] teach their children with kindness and affection. . . . [and to] instruct them patiently” (CG 33, 244).

The book and video series express the common-sense themes that parents should stop, listen, think, and speak softly. The Parrots’ material is well grounded in biblical principles. In fact, much of what they present for parents can be found in 1 Corinthians 13. The characteristics of patience, kindness, comforting, and attentiveness are found in Paul’s definition of true love. The truth expressed by James that we should be “swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath” (James 1:19) is also a prevailing message throughout the Parrott’s book and videos.

In summary, both book and video series do an excellent job in accomplishing what they set out to do. Through them we get a fresh look at parenting young children and glean valuable insights into raising children in a Christian home. By focusing more on who you are as a parent and “being” the kind of person you want your children to emulate, the Parrotts have laid out an excellent blueprint for parents to follow.

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Hans and Julie Fairbank with their children Kendra, Spencer and Nathaniel are members of the Manassas, Virginia Seventh-day Adventist church.

## *The Love Dare*

By Stephen & Alex Kendrick with Lawrence Kimbough  
Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2008, Book, 213 pages

*Fireproof*

AffirmFilms, DVD

Reviewed by Kathleen Sowards

On their wedding day, every couple “knows” their love will last and they will have the “perfect” marriage. They cannot imagine a time coming that would change the image in their heads of “happily ever after.” Yet in reality, a couple at the beginning of marriage have little or no concept of the realities of life: demanding jobs, long days, sleepless nights, mounting bills, distractions and temptations. They perceive only dimly that each human being is basically selfish and that—without constant effort and a renewing of heart, mind, and soul—selfishness takes over. They understand very little about love as patient, kind, and thinking less of self than of others, especially when changes or difficulties arise.

*The Love Dare* is a book that faces these realities of marriage and offers a structured program for marriage enrichment. Specifically, it presents a 40-day challenge to changing your marriage relationship. The challenges are not intended for a spouse who reads the book to use to change the partner so that he or she conforms, but instead represent a process that will change the reader and his or her attitudes about what being a “partner” is all about. For each of the 40 days, there is a discussion regarding a “unique aspect of love”—a “dare” assignment to be carried out that day and to be written up in a “journal” of your thoughts, feelings, and insights on how that day’s dare affected you, your spouse, and your relationship.

*Dare* is not a process to be undertaken lightly; this is serious and challenging work that requires commitment. Some “dares” will not be so difficult; others will challenge the determination to see the 40 days through to the end. Faithfully read and implemented, *The Love Dare* will lead to new discoveries of what love is all about. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 is quoted from the New American Standard Bible in the opening to chapter one:

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.”

As an example of the challenges thrown out, Day 1 takes up *patience*. The reader is asked to not say anything negative or unkind or to act impatiently. Day 40, at the end, presents the differences between marriage as a contract and marriage as a covenant. Writing for the day is on renewing your vows as a “living testament” to your love and the value God places on marriage.

Between Day 1 and Day 40, the “dares” become increasingly challenging: doing something nice and unexpected for your spouse; calling just to say hi; planning a romantic evening to give you an opportunity to talk. Other additional skill-building information is included, such as the 20



questions at the end of the book that you can ask to get to know your spouse better and jump-start communication.

*Fireproof* is the movie example of what *The Love Dare* can do for the life of a couple. The husband featured in the movie, Fire Department Captain Caleb Holt, is ready to violate in his personal life the firefighter's motto "Never leave your partner." The motto forms a perfect illustration of what the book is about, for firemen know that to leave their partner is a sure way that someone can be injured or killed. Caleb's dad gives him *The Love Dare* book and extracts a promise from him to commit to the 40 day "dares" before making any decision to end the marriage in divorce. *Fireproof* portrays the experience of Holt as he follows the program independently of his wife who has had divorce papers drawn up. In the 40 days, Caleb learns that it's just as important not to leave your marriage or spouse behind as it is to not turn your back on your firefighting partner. Although Caleb is ready on more than one occasion to give up on the marriage, he sticks to his promise. Eventually he surrenders to God and learns the key to being a faithful and trusting partner—to his wife.

In the climax to the film, Caleb and Catherine recommit themselves to their marriage and begin again.

*Fireproof Your Marriage* Couple's Kit is also available for small groups.

# *Family Is a Verb*

by Bryan Craig

Last Sabbath as I waited for the worship service to begin I looked around at the families in my congregation. I was surprised.

I had grown up with the idea that a “family” is a woman and a man who get married and stay married and eventually produce their average census quota of two kids.

This Sabbath my eyes were opened. More than half the people in my congregation didn’t fit that definition. Among us were solo parents with children, and some who had been married before and were now blending two families together. I also saw many singles—some never married, others were widowed and living alone, and a number were separated from their partners.

Then, during the “sharing and caring time” an elder announced that the church was planning a “family social”—for moms, dads, and their kids. He didn’t realize it, but he had excluded half the audience.

Families these days come in all shapes and sizes. It’s time to take a new look at what we mean by “family.”

Many people are worried about the way family has changed. We know that the family is central to society, and that through families our values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Families have tremendous power to build or to destroy. It is in our family that we gain emotional stability and well-being, or learn dysfunctional behavior with its long-term consequences. It is in a family that we first

develop our capacity for intimacy, both with God and with others.

As a Christian family counselor, I have often wished my Bible had “The Book of the Family.” I’d like some clearcut definitions. But no word corresponds exactly to our idea of a nuclear family in either the Old or New Testament.

The biblical concept of “family” portrays the extended family or kinship, and the emphasis is on “how we treat and value one another regardless of our marital status.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Christian family sociologist Dennis Guernsey concludes that “family” in Scripture is used “primarily as a verb rather than a noun.”<sup>2</sup> In Scripture, then, “family” is not so much a label to describe *who* we are as it is a way of describing *how* we care for one another.

## **Relationships Make or Break Us**

Because our personal identity is born within relationships, what happens to us in family, church, and friendship networks is crucial. These relationships make or break us personally. They also influence how we respond to and “family” one another.

The early church saw itself as an extended family, “the family of God” (1 Peter 4:17 NIV). It was made up primarily of kinfolk, but even where there were no blood ties, members became “brothers and sisters” in Christ. Paul pictured the church as a place where all would be nurtured, supported, and cared for—especially the disadvantaged (1 Thess. 5:1-8).

He calls on the “whole family” (Eph. 3:15) to demonstrate Christ’s love by caring deeply for one another.

For Paul, being *family* means that we will build our relationships on:

- Unconditional love and genuine respect (Eph. 4:2; 5:1).
- Tolerance and gracious acceptance of our differentness (Eph. 4:2, 3, 7).
- Open, clear communication in which we speak the truth in love, affirm one another, and respond to others’ needs (verses 15, 29).
- Honesty and truthfulness (verses 14, 15).
- A determination to resolve conflict and anger (verses 26, 31).
- Forgiveness for one another, just as we have experienced forgiveness from God (verse 32).

- Mutual submission based on love and commitment (Eph. 5:21, 31).

The Bible says this is how we “family” one another. Sociologists and family researchers identify these same characteristics as the essential building blocks for healthy relationships. No friendship or marriage, family or congregation, can remain healthy if these components are missing.

It is imperative, then, for both individual Christians and the body of Christ to seek to understand more fully the significance of what it means to be “family,” and to “family” one another. “Family” is not about counting noses, it’s about touching them, as in a Maori gesture of love.

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<sup>1</sup>“Family Is a Verb, Not a Noun,” *SAM* 95: 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*