



2020
PLANBOOK



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

MAKING DISCIPLES

— WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER —





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Preface

It was soon after the resurrection and just before returning to the Father that Jesus gave His disciples their marching orders as His representatives. This strategic focus is known in theological circles as the great commission. Matthew's gospel records the moving declaration in the following words:

“AND JESUS CAME AND SPOKE TO THEM SAYING, ‘ALL AUTHORITY HAS BEEN GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH. GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTISING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE.’ AMEN.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

While Matthew's particular audience was essentially Jewish, it is obvious that he meant for his publics to know that the good news of salvation was for everyone, transcending national borders, race, social class, gender, and religious affiliation. To be sure, Matthew begins his gospel by including Jewish and non-Jewish women with less than stellar reputations in the genealogy of Jesus (1:3), and ends his account by underscoring the dispatching of women with the good news about the resurrection of Jesus (28:5-8), and the authorizing of the disciples to take the message of salvation to all the world.

The theme of this year's Planbook is *Reaching Families for Jesus: Making Disciples*. The truth is, the entire 2015-2020 quinquennium has been focused on *Reaching Families for Jesus* in a number of ways. The focus of this year—the last of the ensuing administrative period—is *Making Disciples*, by leading people to choose Jesus and making a public declaration of their new choice through baptism.

V

We love to see people making a public confession of their faith by following through with the rite of baptism. The visual that immediately comes to mind—besides that of baptizing our children at the first international camporee held at Oshkosh, Wisconsin in 1999—was baptizing six persons in Molongotuba, a village on a tributary of the Amazon River in Brazil, July 2019. What an exhilarating experience that was—baptizing in the river at night. This beautiful night was made possible through the hard work of Pastor Reno Guerra, Natalia his wife, and the staff of the Amazônia Esperança boat church whose members shared the good news about Jesus for 35 continuous days with this receptive audience.

Many see the great commission to make disciples as one that calls us to missionary fields far away from our homes. Nonetheless, the imperative is to reach and teach all nations, including our own. We should especially target familiar surroundings and those who we know very well such as our children and relatives.

On that note Ellen White proposes: “Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods. There are many ways in which church members may give the message to those around them. One of the most successful is by living helpful, unselfish Christian lives” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 485).

It is our hope that during 2020 this resource will help Family Ministries leaders at every level of our worldwide church be purposeful about ***Reaching Families for Jesus*** and ***Making Disciples*** for the Kingdom of God. Trust Jesus to help you to be salt and light wherever you are.

Maranatha!

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How to Use This Planbook

The Family Ministries Planbook is an annual resource organized by the General Conference Family Ministries department with input from the world field to supply local churches around the world with resources for the special family emphases weeks and Sabbaths.

Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 8-15

Christian Home and Marriage Week occurs in February embracing two Sabbaths: Christian Marriage Day that emphasizes Christian marriage and Christian Home Day that emphasizes parenting. Christian Home and Marriage Week begins on the second Sabbath and ends on the third Sabbath in February.

Christian Marriage Day: Sabbath, February 8, (Emphasizes Marriage)

Use the Marriage Sermon for worship service and the Marriage Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Christian Home Day: Sabbath, February 15, (Emphasizes Parenting)

Use the Parenting Sermon for worship service and the Parenting Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Family Togetherness Week: September 6-12

Family Togetherness Week is scheduled in the first week in September, beginning with the first Sunday and ending on the following Sabbath with Family Togetherness Day. Family Togetherness Week and Family Togetherness Day highlight celebrating the church as a family.

Family Togetherness Day: Sabbath, September 12 (Emphasizes the Church Family)

Use the Family Sermon for the worship service and the Family Seminar for a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon and/or Saturday night program.

Within this planbook you will find sermons, seminars, children's stories as well as leadership resources, reprint articles and book reviews to help facilitate these special days and other programs you may want to implement during the year. In Appendix A you will find useful information that will assist you in implementing family ministries in your local church.

This resource also includes Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars and handouts. Seminar facilitators are encouraged to personalize the Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations with their own personal stories and pictures that reflect the diversity of their various communities. To download them please visit: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2020>

SERMONS

Hope for Today's Families

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

LUKE 8:40-56

(MATT. 9:18-26; MARK 5:21-43)

I. Introduction

Our world today is overflowing with religious conflicts and war, political polarization, refugees seeking safety, migrants fleeing despotic regimes, abject poverty, aging populations, economic distress, food and water insecurity, housing insecurity, lack of access to basic education, climate change, an increase in alternative family formations, debilitating and terminal illnesses, and much more.

Developing healthy families in this context is among the most challenging tasks human beings can undertake. Even when people are deliberate about developing healthy family relationships it is still challenging—despite our best intentions—because we are all human, and every human being is imperfect. Our failings make it very difficult to sustain healthy relationships.

Despite the difficulty of life in relationships there is *Hope for Today's Families*: from

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Abidjan to Aberdeen; from Berrien Springs to Buenos Aires; from Cairo to Cape Town; from Florence to Freetown; from Haifa to Hanoi; from Moscow to Mumbai; from Nairobi to New York City; from Sydney to Shanghai; from Taipei to Tegucigalpa; from Zanzibar to Zabrze; much can change for the better when we trust God to give us the patience, kindness, and love He wants us to have in our relationships, regardless of where in the world we live. As we embrace God's reasons for creating the family, it is possible to have stronger and healthier family relationships.

Our topic today is titled "**Hope for Today's Families.**" Let us pray.

II. The Text: Luke 8:40-56 A Girl Restored to Life and A Woman Healed

SO IT WAS, WHEN JESUS RETURNED, THAT THE MULTITUDE WELCOMED HIM, FOR THEY WERE ALL WAITING FOR HIM. AND BEHOLD, THERE CAME A MAN NAMED JAIRUS, AND HE WAS A RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE. AND HE FELL DOWN AT JESUS' FEET AND BEGGED HIM TO COME TO HIS HOUSE, FOR HE HAD AN ONLY DAUGHTER ABOUT TWELVE YEARS OF AGE, AND SHE WAS DYING. BUT AS HE WENT,

THE MULTITUDE THROGGED HIM. NOW A WOMAN, HAVING A FLOW OF BLOOD FOR TWELVE YEARS, WHO HAD SPENT ALL HER LIVELIHOOD ON PHYSICIANS AND COULD NOT BE HEALED BY ANY, CAME FROM BEHIND AND TOUCHED THE BORDER OF HIS GARMENT. AND IMMEDIATELY HER FLOW OF BLOOD STOPPED. AND JESUS SAID, "WHO TOUCHED ME? WHEN ALL DENIED IT, PETER AND THOSE WITH HIM SAID, "MASTER, THE MULTITUDES THROGG AND PRESS YOU, AND YOU SAY, 'WHO TOUCHED ME?' BUT JESUS SAID, 'SOMEBODY TOUCHED ME, FOR I PERCEIVED POWER GOING OUT FROM ME.' NOW WHEN THE WOMAN SAW THAT SHE WAS NOT HIDDEN, SHE CAME TREMBLING; AND FALLING DOWN BEFORE HIM, SHE DECLARED TO HIM IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL THE PEOPLE THE REASON SHE HAD TOUCHED HIM AND HOW SHE WAS HEALED IMMEDIATELY. AND HE SAID TO HER, 'DAUGHTER, BE OF GOOD CHEER; YOUR FAITH HAS MADE YOU WELL. GO IN PEACE.' WHILE HE WAS STILL SPEAKING, SOMEONE CAME FROM THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE'S HOUSE, SAYING TO HIM, 'YOUR DAUGHTER IS DEAD. DO NOT TROUBLE THE TEACHER.' BUT WHEN JESUS HEARD IT HE ANSWERED HIM, SAYING, 'DO NOT BE AFRAID, ONLY BELIEVE, AND SHE WILL BE MADE WELL.' WHEN HE CAME INTO THE HOUSE, HE PERMITTED NO ONE TO GO IN EXCEPT PETER, JAMES, AND JOHN, AND THE FATHER AND MOTHER OF THE GIRL. NOW ALL WEPT AND MOURNED FOR HER; BUT HE SAID, 'DO NOT WEEP; SHE IS NOT DEAD, BUT SLEEPING.' AND THEY RIDICULED HIM, KNOWING THAT SHE WAS DEAD. BUT HE PUT THEM ALL OUTSIDE, TOOK HER BY THE HAND AND CALLED, SAYING, 'LITTLE GIRL, ARISE.' THEN HER SPIRIT RETURNED, AND SHE AROSE IMMEDIATELY. AND HE COMMANDED THAT SHE BE GIVEN SOMETHING TO EAT. AND HER PARENTS WERE ASTONISHED, BUT HE

CHARGED THEM TO TELL NO ONE WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
(LUKE 8:40-56 ESV)

III. Explication And Application

The context of this narrative finds Jesus on the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee—probably in Capernaum—having just recently been in Gergesa,¹ a place on the Eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. It was in the country of the Gadarenes or Gergesenes (today's Golan Heights), where Jesus had recently healed a demon possessed man, according to Luke (Luke 8:26-27) and Mark's (Mark 5:1-2) accounts. Matthew (Matthew 5:28) claims there were two demon possessed men. With compassion Jesus cast out the demons who begged to be allowed into a herd of pigs (Luke 8:31-33). This action caused fear and anger in the people of that place who then urged Jesus to get out of their country and leave them alone.

It is possible the people on the Western shore of Galilee had heard about the wonderful miracles Jesus had just performed and wished for Him to do great things among them as well. Or, perhaps, they simply wanted to see the man who had accomplished such outstanding wonders to be able to boast to their friends that they had been with Him. Whatever the case, the biblical account declares in Luke 8:40 "the multitude welcomed Him."

A prominent man of great reputation and wealth and an unassuming woman—on the Western bank—carried their own heavy burdens and were among those who welcomed the presence of Jesus. The man's name is given—Jairus—but the woman is anonymous. Jairus was an affluent leader of the synagogue who with humility and courage came to Jesus to plead for the life of his child, even as his temple colleagues plotted to kill Jesus. She on the other hand was humble, a poor woman who had exhausted all her money attempting to get well, only to see her condition grow worse. She was desperately hoping to get assistance for herself. Jairus was

gratified for the twelve years of happiness he enjoyed with his daughter, but now he might lose her at any moment. The woman had endured twelve years of despair because of her condition; but was hoping Jesus could make her well.²

At once Jesus set out with Jairus for his home. And, while the disciples had experienced this gracious response from Jesus in the past, they were a bit alarmed by how amenable Jesus was to the request of the arrogant rabbi. Still, they went along with Jesus as the crowd followed enthusiastically and hopeful.

Although the home of Jairus was not far from where he had found the Master, progress was very slow because of the very large crowd of people pressing Jesus on every side. While the anxious father was concerned about the very slow progress being made; at regular intervals Jesus stopped to help someone in need or to bring consolation to a person in distress.

As they traveled to the ruler's home a messenger pushed through the crowd with bad news for Jairus. His daughter had died so it was no use to trouble Jesus anymore. However, Jesus heard the message and immediately reached out with comfort to the brokenhearted father, saying: "Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well" (Luke 8:50).³

The scene at the ruler's home was already one that would break any father's heart. The professional mourners were already onsite weeping and wailing, and a group of neighbors, relatives, and friends were also by this time there. The Jews of the day engaged quickly in sharing and showing their grief, given that the body was expected to be buried the same day after being washed and anointed.⁴

Put off by the noise, Jesus tried to quiet the crowd by telling them that the girl was not dead but sleeping. You can bet that this did not go over well with all those at the scene. Since for Jesus death is but a sleep,

He was being absolutely truthful in His statement. But the assembled group ridiculed Jesus because to them the girl was really dead. They did not realize that Jesus was "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). After all, was it not Jesus who had raised the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-15)? Had He not told John the Baptist that the dead were being raised (Luke 7:22)? Clearly, the mourners didn't believe these reports and thought Jesus to be a charlatan and a fool.

After moving everyone out of the house, Jesus took Peter, James, John, and the father and mother of the dead girl, into her room. Taking her by the hand, Jesus spoke to her in Aramaic, the language spoken at that home: "Talitha cumi! Little girl, arise!" These were not magic words but a command from the life-giver.⁵ Ellen White describes the subsequent this way: "Instantly a tremor passed through the unconscious form. The pulses of life beat again. The lips unclosed with a smile. The eyes opened widely as if from sleep, and the maiden gazed with wonder on the group beside her. She arose, and her parents clasped her in their arms and wept for joy."⁶

Of course, on the way to Jairus' home Jesus came in contact with a woman in the crowd. For twelve long years she had suffered with a disease that had made her life incredibly miserable. She was ceremonially unclean and felt physically inferior, unable to find spiritual fellowship with believers because her condition precluded her from making contact with them or making it to the synagogue each week. Her limited finances were spent on physicians and esoteric remedies without success.

In spite of her long night of trial, hope renewed in her heart one day when she heard about what Jesus had done for others. She was persuaded that if she could find Him she would finally be healed. Faint, feeble, and frail, she came to the Galilean shore where Jesus was teaching, attempting to press through the crowd without success. Her hope was beginning to wane when by

some providence of God, Jesus made His way through the multitude and came near where she was. In one last desperate move the suffering woman lunged in the direction of Jesus with what appears to be her very last ounce of verve and managed to barely touch the hem of His clothing. Instantly it happened! The feeling of being dry! Strength replaced weakness. Overwhelming joy swapped places with grief! Peace, tranquility, serenity, unspeakable ecstasy and happiness invaded her soul!

With a heart filled with gratitude and indescribable euphoria, the woman made an about-face from the crowd. With newfound vitality she was confident that she could quietly disappear and live the rest of her years with joy, peace, and freedom from the illness that had imprisoned her for so many years. But the voice of Jesus pierced the din of the crowd.

“Who touched Me?” He asked. You can imagine the look of amazement in the collective faces of the crowd. *Is He joking? Is He really asking that question? With all the people pressing about Him and He is asking who touched Him?* Peter, the impulsive and impetuous one; the one lacking emotional intelligence responded to Jesus with attitude in his voice. Looking incredulously at Jesus, Peter wondered, “Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’” (Luke 8:45). Jesus disregarded Peter’s somewhat mocking question and declared: “Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me” (Luke 8:46).

Intending to remain anonymous—a reality Jesus does not accept from anyone who comes to Him—rather wanting to affirm personhood and the unique qualities every human being has been endowed with from their Creator; desiring for this insecure and anxiety ridden woman to become assertive, confident, and self-assured; Jesus created an occasion for real interaction and communion, which this poor woman had lost for twelve long years. Sensing the spotlight on her, the now healed woman came forward

and confessed in public what had transpired in her life and what occurred when her need intersected the abundance of Jesus. “She was defiled, destitute, discouraged, and desperate; but she came to Jesus and her need was met.”⁷ It is one thing to *press* Jesus; it is another thing to *touch* Him.

IV. Conclusion

In a study published in the October 2011 issue of *Nature Neuroscience*,⁸ researchers at the Wellcome Trust Centre for Neuroimaging at University College London present evidence that people who are naturally optimistic learn only from information that reinforces that rosy outlook. The study actually suggests that many of us are hardwired for optimism as well. Some reporters have shorthanded this finding to describe *optimism as a “brain defect.”* Brain defect or not, optimism seems necessary for personal progress. *We have to be able to imagine better realities*, to press ourselves toward that goal.

Hope, however, is more than optimism. Biblically speaking, hope, along with faith and love, make up the “big three” of Christianity. They are the things that the apostle Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 13 that remain when all else fails. “And now faith, hope, and love *abide*,” is how he puts it, and he meant that when we look for the qualities that are distilled from the experience of the believing life together, these three things are the solid footing on which we stand—even if seen now only darkly as through a distorting glass.

What is your need today? Will it take humility and courage to approach it, such as that displayed by Jairus—an arrogant, big-headed, conceited, and self-righteous rabbi whose daughter was dying and in need of the *Resurrection* and the *Life*? Or are you like the anonymous woman who suffered in silence—avoided, ignored, rejected and shunned? Will it take renewed hope, not merely worldly optimism, but a real belief and confidence in God’s promises found in the Bible? Are you

still captives of hope? Does hope still burn within your hearts?

Jesus is walking through your village today and with Him comes healing for every dreadful disease, even when death has already become a reality. Regardless of what you are facing in your relationships today, remember there is still **Hope for Today's Families** through Jesus Christ our Lord. Trust Him today, tomorrow, and forever; and make Him the Lord of your life.

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

Notes

- ¹ White, E.G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. p. 342 Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- ² Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1, p.202). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ³ White, E.G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. p. 342 Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- ⁴ Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1, p.203). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ⁵ Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1, p.203). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ⁶ White, E.G. (1940). *The Desire of Ages*. p. 343 Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.
- ⁷ Wiersbe, W.W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Vol. 1, p.204). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- ⁸ (2011). *Nature Neuroscience*, vol. 106 (3), 1601-2103.

Sometimes it Hurts When You Are a Mother

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Text

ISAIAH 66:13

The *Reader's Digest* magazine published 12 short stories about moms. Readers were invited to share in 100 words or less their poignant tales of the bond between mother and child. One of those stories, written by Robin Hynes, from Slingerland, New York, caught my eye.¹

“My mom had a great sense of humor and a knack for making everything fun. One thing that resonated with me, even as a small child, was how much she seemed to enjoy her own company and found ways to entertain herself. As a kid, I remember her giggling while paying bills. What was so funny about bill paying? She would put humorous notes in the reference section of the check: For the electric bill, she might put “You light up my life,” and for the mortgage she’d write “Four shingles closer to owning it all.”

We all probably have our own stories about our mothers. Some funny, some sad, but more often than not the stories we tell about our mothers are punctuated by love. In fact, most

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of us can agree that the most important thing our mother taught us was love, that no matter how bad their child may turn out, mom still loves them. Which is why a mother’s love reminds us of God’s love—no matter how we turn out, God still loves us. “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you” (Isaiah 66:13).

That’s why someone wrote, “Mothers are like fine collectibles. As the years go by, they increase in value” (Unknown author).

The premise of today’s message is that **being a mother is not easy. In fact, sometimes it hurts when you are a mother.** We’d like to illustrate that premise through four cases.

I. It Hurts When You Are The Mother Of An Unborn Child

There are many women who have no children but have the heart of a mother. Women who yearn to have a child to hold and to whom to give love. Women who melt at the sight of a baby and long to have one of their own to hold, cuddle, feed, change, and sing to.

The Bible tells us about one mother like that. Her name was Hannah. She became the mother of Samuel, the prophet. The Bible account says that “she *was* in **bitterness of**

soul, and prayed to the Lord and **wept in anguish**" (1 Sam 1:10,11). *The Living Bible* renders verse 10 this way: "She was in **deep anguish** and was **crying bitterly** as she prayed to the Lord."

We cannot minimize the pain, the anguish, the bitter tears of those mothers who have not yet been able to have a child of their own.

And then we must also remember those mothers who have lost a child before they were born, those who have had miscarriages or stillbirths. Yes, it hurts when you are the mother of an unborn child.

II. It Hurts To Be A Single Mother

The best example of this kind of mother is Mary, the mother of Jesus. Her experience as a single pregnant woman before she married must have been most difficult. Think of the embarrassment, think of the shame, think of the uncertainty which she must have felt. For even though she was joyous to know she had been chosen to be the human vessel to carry God's Divine Son, she knew very well what people would think and how they would treat her.

Sad to suffice, things have not changed all that much, at least in religious circles. An unwed mother is often still looked down upon in many churches.

Mary was not only a single mother when she became pregnant, but later she became a single mother again after the death of Joseph. Sometime between the twelfth birthday of Jesus and the beginning of His ministry at the age of thirty Joseph, the husband of Mary, must have died.

And so, Mary watched Jesus grow and helped Him grow as a single, widowed mother. We see her maternal love still protecting and watching for Him even after He had grown up. The mother of our Lord watched with growing uneasiness as her son slipped from her maternal grasp. The apron strings to which

Jesus was tied became longer and longer, and before she knew it He was so far away that she could hardly see Him.

It all began during the wedding at Cana in Galilee (John 2:1-11). Among the guests were Jesus and Mary, who was understandably quite proud of her Son's growing popularity. The anxious nature of a Jewish mother's relationship to her son is legendary. Depending on his profession, a Jewish mother will introduce her son as "my son, the doctor" or "my son, the lawyer" or something similar. There is even a story of one such mother whose son had entered the Catholic priesthood. She introduced him as "my son, the father."

On this particular occasion, Mary would soon be able to introduce Jesus as "my son, the miracle-worker," but of course she didn't realize that upon their arrival at the wedding. When she discovered that the master of the wedding banquet had run out of wine, she told Jesus about it. Apparently she felt that he would somehow be able to handle the emergency.

His response sounds harsher in translation than the writer originally intended: "Dear Woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come." He was simply warning His mother, gently but firmly, not to interfere in His affairs. His rebuke was the ancient reflex of another mild (but more modern) word of reproach: "Please, Mom, I'd rather do it myself!"

Jesus was indicating to Mary that He neither needed nor desired her help. He was a grown man now, and He wanted to establish His independence in no uncertain terms.

Whatever deeper theological significance one might seek in His answer, He surely meant to suggest at the very least that His vocational concerns were now solely His own and that He wouldn't be willing to share His burdens or be able to share His triumphs with His mother—or with anyone else, for that matter.

For the rest of His life the loneliness of His prophetic office would force Him to alter

His previous relationship with His mother. The apron strings had now been cut, and the separation created a crisis. I can imagine how that must have hurt Mary. For even as proud as she must have been of Jesus, it hurts to have to cut the apron strings.

How do you fill the aching emptiness left behind when that completely self-sufficient Son leaves the nest forever, Mom? If you really want, you can tag along after Him, dogging His steps and hampering His progress. In that case He'll be your friend as well as your Son, and you'll be like the mother the wise man described: "Her children arise and call her blessed" (Prov. 31:28).

A Wise Mother

Mary's response to Jesus' fame and popularity was different. As soon as Jesus made it clear to her that she was meddling, however harmlessly, she retreated into the shadows. When she spoke again it was to some servants rather than to her Son.

After Jesus had changed the water into wine, she became only one member (the most important member, to be sure) of the group that accompanied him back to Capernaum. By agreeing to His increase while accepting her own decrease, Mary once again proved that she was teachable and had Jesus' best interests at heart.

God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit all care for single mothers, for widows. Over and over in the Sacred pages we find directives and commands to take care of the widows and the fatherless.

Deuteronomy 10:17,18: "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the **widow**, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing."

Psalm 146:9: "The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and **widow**."

Jesus, and the gospels, pay special attention to the widows. Luke makes it a point to mention Anna who was 84 years old and a widow, as a prophetess and one who welcomed Jesus in the Temple when His mother and husband brought Him to be dedicated. Jesus raises the son of the widow of Nain because He cares for mothers and hurts when they hurt, and wants to alleviate their pain. Jesus also calls attention to the widow who gave all that she had, two pennies, "for the cause she loved."

Time and again, the Bible calls attention to God's love and concern for mothers who must battle alone to raise children, make a livelihood, and maintain the family together. It's hard, it hurts, but Jesus knows. He understands mothers, and He loves you.

Yes, it hurts when you are the mother of an unborn child. And, it sometimes hurts when you are a single mother, struggling to do it all alone.

III. It Hurts When You Are A Mother And Your Child Is Mistreated

Sometimes we get what we deserve, but Mary suffered when she saw her son, Jesus, who was guiltless and totally innocent, suffer unjustly for things He had not done. And it all started for Mary before her child, Jesus, was even one year old.

Luke 2:34,35 states: "Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, 'Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.'"

Just these words of warning must have stung Mary's ears. Perhaps she replayed them over and over. Not very long after this prophetic warning Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt to protect Jesus from the jealousy and hatred of Herod, the Great. As she fled she must have remembered those prophetic words.

That was just the beginning of the fulfillment because Mary saw how the people of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown, rejected Him and nearly stoned Him to death on a Sabbath morning during a church service. She heard all the accusations, the criticism, the hatred. She saw the looks, the upraised hands of the priests, the teachers of the law, and other leaders of the people. She sensed the negative atmosphere that seemed to follow Jesus in spite of all the good he was doing to help people.

Mary heard of His arrest, the unfair trial, the mocking, and the beating. She was witness to her Son being nailed to a cross, his naked body exposed to everyone's view so as to increase the shame. She saw Him bleeding to death, gasping for each breath of air, and then she saw Him die.

How tragic it is to see your own child die. How painful it is to see your child die a horrible death and to be completely helpless, unable to do anything to help him. [Note: You may wish to read the book *They are all Dead, Aren't They* by Joy Swift, a book about the tragic death of all her children]. To have your child killed unjustly, unnecessarily, must be most painful. Mary knew that feeling because she experienced it at the foot of the cross where her Son was murdered.

Even then, Jesus demonstrated His love for His mother—for all mothers—in that He made provision for her care by asking His best and closest friend to care for her on His behalf.

Yes, it hurts to be a mother when your child is mistreated. Jesus understands that pain and knows it very well because He saw His own mother suffer that pain, that agony. Mothers, rest assured that God knows your pain. He has not ignored your pain, your suffering, or your agony.

It hurts when you are the mother of an unborn child. It hurts when you are a single mother. And, it hurts when you are a mother and your child is mistreated.

IV. It Hurts When You Are A Mother And Your Child Leaves The Right Path

Of course, we have the parable of the prodigal son in the Bible, the story of the son who forsook his father and walked away from it all. Yet, I also think about the mothers of King Saul and the betrayer Judas.

Saul had been chosen to be the first king of Israel. It seems as if he had all the qualifications for that office. He was tall, strong, and handsome. Just by his height he commanded attention. He would have been the people's choice—maybe that's why the Lord chose him. God simply gave the people the leader whom they wanted.

It may have been one of those times when God answered prayers against His will. Because, from the moment he was anointed, King Saul followed the path of slow descent to the place where he was doing everything that was contrary to God's will and command.

If his mother was alive at that time or not, we are not told. If she were, you can imagine the joy to see the child you raised chosen to be the king of Israel, and you can also imagine the pain she must have felt to see him grow farther away from the God she taught him to love and believe. She must have been distraught to see him rejected by his/her God. Imagine her agony in seeing her child, the fruit of her womb, following the path that leads to destruction.

The writer of the proverbs wrote, "A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is the grief of his mother" (Proverbs 10:1). And again, Proverbs 15:20 says, "A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother."

It could have been the same situation with the mother of Judas. To see her talented son going full speed ahead to becoming a great teacher in Israel, a faithful follower of Messiah, would have filled her heart with pride, joy, satisfaction. But imagine how she felt when she heard how he betrayed the only One who

can give salvation to humanity? It must have torn her soul to pieces.

Perhaps the reason I thought about these two men is because of their tragic deaths and the after-thoughts they must have created in people's minds. Mothers, have your children left the right path? If your child or children are walking in the wrong path, does this cause you great grief and concern? Have you felt the pointed fingers of well-meaning brothers and sisters suggesting that if you had done your job properly, your children would be in the church? How unfair!

Many mothers not only experience the pain of seeing children wander away from their only source of salvation, but they also deal with the guilt added by those who should be supporting them.

It hurts when you are the mother of an unborn child. It hurts when you are a single mother. It hurts when you are a mother and your child is mistreated. And, there is pain when you are a mother and your child leaves the right path.

And it may be because of this pain that God loves mothers in such a very special way because they, more than anyone else, portray the tender care, the warm love, that God has for us.

God too suffers when children die before they are born. God too suffers when His children are mistreated. God too suffers when His children leave the right path. And like a mother, God loves His children, no matter what. Jesus loves mothers and has a tender place in His heart for them.

In referring to the experience when mothers brought their children to Jesus, Ellen White wrote:

“AS THE MOTHERS PASSED ALONG THE DUSTY ROAD AND DREW NEAR THE SAVIOR, HE SAW THE UNBIDDEN TEAR AND THE QUIVERING LIP, AS THEY OFFERED A SILENT PRAYER IN BEHALF

OF THE CHILDREN . . . JESUS SPOKE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE MOTHERS IN REFERENCE TO THEIR WORK, AND, OH, WHAT A RELIEF WAS THUS BROUGHT TO THEIR MINDS! WITH WHAT JOY THEY DWELT UPON THE GOODNESS AND THE MERCY OF JESUS, AS THEY LOOKED BACK TO THAT MEMORABLE OCCASION! HIS GRACIOUS WORDS HAD REMOVED THE BURDEN FROM THEIR HEARTS AND INSPIRED THEM WITH FRESH HOPE AND COURAGE. ALL SENSE OF WEARINESS WAS GONE”
(*THE ADVENTIST HOME*, P.273).

And then she closes with these words:

“THIS IS AN ENCOURAGING LESSON TO MOTHERS FOR ALL TIME. AFTER THEY HAVE DONE THE BEST THEY CAN DO FOR THE GOOD OF THEIR CHILDREN, THEY MAY BRING THEM TO JESUS . . . AND AS THE MOTHER'S HEART YEARNS FOR THE HELP SHE KNOWS SHE CANNOT GIVE, THE GRACE SHE CANNOT BESTOW, AND SHE CASTS HERSELF AND CHILDREN INTO THE MERCIFUL ARMS OF CHRIST, HE WILL RECEIVE AND BLESS THEM; HE WILL GIVE PEACE, HOPE, AND HAPPINESS TO MOTHER AND CHILDREN. THIS IS A PRECIOUS PRIVILEGE WHICH JESUS HAS GRANTED TO ALL MOTHERS”
(*THE ADVENTIST HOME*, P.274).

Mothers, have you experienced the pain that comes from not having a child or losing a child before they are born? Do you know the agony of being a single mother—be it before marriage, as a result of divorce, or because of your husband's death? Can you remember all the times when your child was mistreated? Are you concerned, maybe even in deep sorrow, because your child/children have left the right path and are now away from the faith? Don't despair! I want to tell you today that Jesus loves you with an unconditional love. I want to tell you today that He understands you like no one else possibly can.

Discipleship begins at home. Never stop praying for your children. Never stop lifting their name heavenward. A mother's prayers can and do make a difference. Don't give up! Take all that pain and lay it at the foot of the cross. Continue to be a disciple-making mother. Continue to reflect Jesus to your child. You may only realize the impact your prayers have had when you reach heaven.

I invite you to offer your children again and again to Him in prayer. Then, rest yourself in God's everlasting, ever-loving arms. Mothers, Jesus loves you. And this morning we want to tell you, that as a church family, we love you too! We are committed to kneeling down alongside you and joining you in prayer for your children!

Notes

- ¹ 12 Short, Sweet Stories About Moms (That Will Make You Want to Call Yours). <https://www.rd.com/true-stories/inspiring/mothers-day-short-stories/> accessed February 22, 2019

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Unconditional Self-Acceptance in Christ

KAGELO AND BOITUMELO RAKWENA

Texts

JEREMIAH 1:4-10; JEREMIAH 29:11-13
 “THEN THE WORD OF THE LORD CAME TO ME, SAYING: ‘BEFORE I FORMED YOU IN THE WOMB I KNEW YOU; BEFORE YOU WERE BORN I SANCTIFIED YOU; I ORDAINED YOU A PROPHET TO THE NATIONS.’ THEN SAID I: ‘AH, LORD GOD! BEHOLD, I CANNOT SPEAK, FOR I AM A YOUTH.’ BUT THE LORD SAID TO ME: ‘DO NOT SAY, “I AM A YOUTH,” FOR YOU SHALL GO TO ALL TO WHOM I SEND YOU, AND WHATEVER I COMMAND YOU, YOU SHALL SPEAK. DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THEIR FACES, FOR I AM WITH YOU,’ SAYS THE LORD. THEN THE LORD PUT FORTH HIS HAND AND TOUCHED MY MOUTH, AND THE LORD SAID TO ME: ‘BEHOLD, I HAVE PUT MY WORDS IN YOUR MOUTH. SEE, I HAVE THIS DAY SET YOU OVER THE NATIONS AND OVER THE KINGDOMS, TO ROOT OUT AND TO PULL DOWN, TO DESTROY AND TO THROW DOWN, TO BUILD AND TO PLANT.’”

“FOR I KNOW THE THOUGHTS THAT I THINK TOWARD YOU, SAYS THE LORD, THOUGHTS OF PEACE AND NOT OF EVIL,

TO GIVE YOU A FUTURE AND A HOPE. THEN YOU WILL CALL UPON ME AND GO AND PRAY TO ME, AND I WILL LISTEN TO YOU. AND YOU WILL SEEK ME AND FIND ME, WHEN YOU SEARCH FOR ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART.”

Introduction

Reaching one’s full potential will depend on how one views or accepts oneself. Jeremiah 1 introduces a young man hesitant to accept God’s call, unable to go forward in carrying God’s mission until he agreed with God that he was worth more than his excuses; until he began to accept himself in God. We can be high achievers—physicians, professors, engineers, psychologists, etc.—and still have issues with self-esteem and self-acceptance, and hence unable to reach the potential God intended for us. In our work places or in other settings, we see people going through pain and suffering due to lack of self-esteem and self-acceptance, despite their education or status. For most of these individuals, past pain and negative messages continue to control them despite their academic successes.

Therefore, before one is able to go further, it is important to determine self-esteem and self-acceptance in God. Self-esteem is how one feels and thinks about oneself. It is based on other people’s evaluation as well as our own view of ourselves. It can be either negative or positive.

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With self-acceptance, however, this is where one simply says, “I am worth more than my evaluation and people’s evaluation of me, because God values me. Circumstances and people may change, but God does not change in His evaluation of me.”

The Call of Jeremiah

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, to speak on His behalf. Jeremiah instead looked at himself, to his abilities as he thought of the task he was called upon to do, and declared, “Not me.” Said another way, the conversation between God and Jeremiah could sound like this:

God: Knocks at the door of Jeremiah’s house, then...

Jeremiah: “Who is there?”

God: “Jehovah, the God of Israel.”

Jeremiah: “How can I help you?”

God: “I am looking for a prophet. I am calling you to be a prophet to Israel and to other nations, to speak on my behalf to my people, Israel.”

Jeremiah: “You came to the wrong house. Go next door. For I am but a youth and I can’t speak.”

God: “Before you were born, I knew you. Before I formed you in your mother’s womb, I knew you. I set you apart and sanctified you to be a prophet. Jeremiah, you are a man for this time and I am counting on you.”

In this conversation, God answers all of Jeremiah’s excuses and points Jeremiah to Himself, as one who has unlimited resources for His servant. Jeremiah is left to accept God’s call, to accept himself and view himself as heaven views and accepts him. As Jeremiah places himself in the hands of the all-powerful God, he consequently becomes powerful and invincible, as God enables him.

In the same manner, God is saying to each one of us: “You are not an after-thought. You are special and unique, created with a mission, a position to fill. I knew you before you were born and I knew that you would be a teacher, a nurse, a doctor, a pastor, a lawyer, etc.” “And

while your father was still thinking about how to propose to your mother, I knew you. And while your mother was wondering whether to say yes to your father’s proposal, I knew you. You are not an accident. You are not a surprise to me.”

God is personal. He addresses each one of us individually. You are His and He is yours. He thinks positively about you (Jeremiah 29:11-13). Further, in Psalms 139:

- 2-3 He knows you very well.
- 7-9 you cannot hide from Him.
- 14 you were created to praise Him.
- 13-18 you were fearfully and wonderfully made; beautiful and handsome (He does not create ugly people).
- You were born with a purpose in God’s mind; born for success.
- You are an asset for mission. You are capable of reaching the sphere of your influence, your family and friends.
- The question is: do you believe God, or do you believe your fears and self-doubt?

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Believing What God Says About You

- In the midst of other voices that may put you down, do you see and value yourself as God sees and values you? By seeing and valuing yourself as God does, you get a sense of belonging, of being accepted and empowered by the merits of God Himself, rather than through what we have done or who we are. It no longer matters where we come from, but rather whom we belong to. As we continue to grow in His grace and love, He continues to mold us for His glory and will.
- In Christ, are you beautiful/handsome (fearfully and wonderfully made), or do you feel sorry for what He did in you? This would change the way you live your life and change your habits to please the One who loves and accepts you.
- As you serve or minister to others, will they see/feel His grace flowing through

you as you have accepted yourself in Christ (giving part of yourself in the process, as you minister to others)? This would change the way you relate to others, family members and friends, seeing them as God's beautiful creation who need to be respected, saved and accepted.

Your Thoughts and Words About Self

- Manage your thoughts and your words about yourself. Think positively and speak positively about yourself. Ellen White states that:

“NO ONE BUT YOURSELF CAN CONTROL YOUR THOUGHTS. IN THE STRUGGLE TO REACH THE HIGHEST STANDARD, SUCCESS OR FAILURE WILL DEPEND MUCH UPON THE CHARACTER AND THE MANNER IN WHICH THE THOUGHTS ARE DISCIPLINED. IF THE THOUGHTS ARE RIGHT, THEN AS A RESULT THE WORDS WILL BE RIGHT; THE ACTIONS WILL BE OF THAT CHARACTER TO BRING GLADNESS AND COMFORT AND REST TO SOULS.” (*OUR HIGH CALLING*, p. 112; *MIND CHARACTER AND PERSONALITY*, VOL. 2, p. 655).

- “The more you talk faith, the more faith you will have. The more you dwell upon discouragement, talking to others about your trials, and enlarging upon them, to enlist the sympathy which you crave, the more discouragements and trials you will have.” (Manuscript 102, 1901).
- Further, Ellen White concludes:

“BUT THE WORDS ARE MORE THAN AN INDICATION OF CHARACTER; THEY HAVE POWER TO REACT ON THE CHARACTER. MEN ARE INFLUENCED BY THEIR OWN WORDS...HAVING ONCE EXPRESSED AN OPINION OR DECISION, THEY ARE OFTEN TOO PROUD TO RETRACT IT, AND TRY TO PROVE THEMSELVES IN THE RIGHT, UNTIL THEY COME TO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE.” (*THE DESIRE OF AGES*, p. 323).

- What you say about and to yourself, whether positive or negative, travels to your brain, and the brain then influences the whole being to actualize these concepts.
- Your thoughts and words about yourself should be centered on the word of God and what it says about the value God places on you.
- Do not allow the look of circumstances to determine your worth, whether you succeed or not at what you attempt.
- Words are creative. And you determine your day and your mood by your thoughts and words.

Self-acceptance And Self-respect

- When it comes to self-acceptance and self-respect, Ellen White submits:

“IT IS NOT PLEASING TO GOD THAT YOU SHOULD DEMERIT YOURSELF. YOU SHOULD CULTIVATE SELF-RESPECT BY LIVING SO YOU WILL BE APPROVED BY YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE AND BEFORE MEN AND ANGELS...THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THEM WHICH ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO WALK NOT AFTER THE FLESH, BUT AFTER THE SPIRIT’ (ROMANS 8:1). WHILE WE SHOULD NOT THINK OF OURSELVES MORE HIGHLY THAN WE OUGHT, THE WORD OF GOD DOES NOT CONDEMN A PROPER SELF-RESPECT. AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD, WE SHOULD HAVE CONSCIOUS DIGNITY OF CHARACTER, IN WHICH PRIDE AND SELF-IMPORTANCE HAVE NO PART.” (*OUR HIGH CALLING*, p.143).

- “When the sunlight of God's love illuminates the darkened chambers of the soul, restless weariness and dissatisfaction will cease and satisfying joys will give vigor to the mind and health and energy to the body.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 247).

- “Man knows not his own value...He who comes to Jesus, he who believes on Him and makes Him his Example, realizes the meaning of the words ‘To them gave He power to become the sons of God.’” (*Mind Character and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 10).
- This would mean that as we accept ourselves in God, as God has accepted us in Christ, we ought to respect ourselves in Christ, respect the price that God paid for our redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. Accepting Christ as our personal Savior changes both our status and our class. We are now kings and queens in the kingdom of God. We are now shining stars in the sky, never meant to be drawn down by the weight of earthliness and its evils.

Challenges Due to Poor Self-acceptance

Poor Self-acceptance Affects:

- *Spiritual Life:* leads to a lifeless spiritual experience, rampant self-doubt, and fears. When God says that you are accepted and loved as you are, you doubt His Word. As a result, doing so unknowingly following the voice of Satan and you unconsciously do his will instead of God's will for your life.
- *Relationship Difficulties:* contributes to feelings of inadequacy, which leads to an inability to love and accept others because of your failure to love and accept yourself.
- *Physical Health Issues:* people with poor self-acceptance are more likely to have high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, poor sleep patterns, anxiety and depression.
- *Emotional and Psychological Problems:* poor self-acceptance affects the brain, creating low levels of cortisol, which contribute to lower levels of frontal lobe functioning, affecting reasoning and decision making. Consequently, impairing our capacity for forgiveness and empathy. Also, when one fails to accept oneself, one develops negative

feelings associated with shame, guilt, lack of confidence, depression and anxiety.

Facing Life Each Day – Prayer

- As you face the challenges of life, having accepted yourself in Christ, your daily prayer is more likely to be: ‘Heavenly father, thank you for Jesus Christ, who is my Savior and friend. As I go into the world today I do so as your beloved daughter/son, may Your Spirit work in me miracles of love, patience and humility, that Christ may be glorified in my life today. I go out to face life as a conqueror, as a victor in Jesus’ name, Amen.’
- There are times when you may have to prostrate yourself before God and declare, “I am nothing without you.” But as you go out to face life and its challenges each morning, go out as a child of God, with hope and courage that God is with you and is interested in your welfare. Internalize His words for you. Believe what He says about you and know that His presence is with you. Let His words direct your thoughts, your words and your actions throughout the day.

Mental Exercise

- Write a list of negative thoughts you are prone to think. For example: “*I am unlovable;*” “*I am ugly;*” “*I can’t do anything right;*” “*I am worthless;*”
- Now write and replace that negative script with a positive one. For instance: “*I am loved and cared for by God;*” “*I am beautiful/handsome, created in the image of God;*” and “*I am somebody, special and unique, God has given me talents and gifts.*”
- Now take this positive script and let a close family, friend, or neighbor say it or read it to you.

May God bless you to this end is my prayer.

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Rivers in the Desert

RON AND LISA CLOUZET

The Texts

ISA 43:5-7; 18-19; JOHN 4:1-42;
JOHN 7:38; ZECH 9:12

Message

When our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.

Introduction

The prophet Isaiah was closing in on almost 50 years of ministry. He had already served under kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa 1:1). His words were listened to because the Lord God of heaven spoke through His servant. And now, he would speak for God one last time, but this time things seemed hopeless.

King Manasseh, perhaps the worst king Judah had ever had, had risen to the throne. The Bible says Manasseh rebuilt the high places of pagan worship his father had torn down. He erected altars to Baal and Astarte, “and worshiped all the hosts of heaven.” He even built pagan altars dedicated to demons inside

God’s temple in Jerusalem! Manasseh practiced witchcraft and sorcery, engaged with mediums and spiritualists, and even sacrificed his sons in the fire for the sake of strange deities (2 Chron 33:1-9). In 2 Chronicles, chapter 33, we read in verse 2, that Manasseh did “evil in the sight of the Lord.” In verse 6 we read that he did “much evil,” and in verse 9 we’re told he did “more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before the sons of Israel.” That’s not a good trend—evil, much evil, more evil.

In his old age, the prophet Isaiah had plenty of reasons to feel discouraged. The worst possible king was currently leading God’s people. Days were dark. The Assyrians had already taken the northern tribes—Israel—captive because of their unfaithfulness to God. Judah was getting very close to the same destiny. It wouldn’t be the Assyrians this time, but the Babylonians who would plunder Judah and take their sons and daughters to exile. Since God’s people did not respond to Him in times of prosperity, God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, would try yet again by allowing them times of adversity.

Was all hope lost that Israel could be redeemed?

The Promise of Isaiah

At this point in Judah’s history is when Isaiah wrote some of his most wonderful

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prophecies. Isaiah 40 to 66 is so full of hope that scholars have for years doubted this could come from the same author. They call this section of Isaiah “Second Isaiah,” as if this was a different prophet. But it wasn’t. This was the same man that responded to God’s call in his youth (Isa 6:1-8). And in the worst of times, he wrote the best of words.

“FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH YOU; I WILL BRING YOUR DESCENDANTS FROM THE EAST, [FROM BABYLON AND MEDO-PERSIA] AND GATHER YOU FROM THE WEST [FROM GREECE]; I WILL SAY TO THE NORTH, ‘GIVE THEM UP,’ [THE NORTH: THE SELEUCID KINGS] AND TO THE SOUTH, ‘DO NOT KEEP THEM BACK,’ [THE SOUTH: THE PTOLEMAIC KINGS] BRING MY SONS FROM AFAR, AND MY DAUGHTERS FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH— EVERYONE WHO IS CALLED BY MY NAME, WHOM I HAVE CREATED FOR MY GLORY; I HAVE FORMED HIM, YES, I HAVE MADE HIM.”
ISAIAH 43:5-7

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One hundred years before Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took the Jews captive, God prophesied through Isaiah that He would bring them back. Not only them, but also other captives from future enemies.

Do you know people who are captives of the enemy? Do you have loved ones right now who are not walking with the Lord, who seem distracted with the world or consumed with worry or overwhelmed by the cares of life? Have you been praying for those close to your heart, day after day, week after week, month after month, even year after year without apparent results? Do not despair: *when our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.* God knows what He is capable of. He loves those whom we love with an undying love. Though even we may forget, from time to time, He will never forget them. As Isaiah said, they are all “inscribed . . . on the palms of [His] hands” (Isa 49:16).

How can we know God is at work when we fail to see our loved ones return home?

We know it because of what Isaiah says later in that same chapter. Isaiah 43:18-19:

“DO NOT REMEMBER THE FORMER THINGS, NOR CONSIDER THE THINGS OF OLD. BEHOLD, I WILL DO A NEW THING, NOW IT SHALL SPRING FORTH; SHALL YOU NOT KNOW IT? I WILL EVEN MAKE A ROAD IN THE WILDERNESS AND RIVERS IN THE DESERT.”

Rivers in the desert? A road in the wilderness? What is that about?

The Promise Realized

God is alluding to His mighty acts in the past. When the people of Israel were slaves in Egypt, God in His mercy made a pathway for them through the Red Sea. But that was “the former things. . . the things of old.” He is now planning “a new thing.” Instead of causing dry land in the midst of the sea for Israel to cross to freedom, He will make rivers in the desert for Judah to return home from Babylon. You see, Babylon was East of Palestine, in modern-day Iraq. But in between those lands was forbidding territory: such dry desert and mountains that anyone attempting to cross it would certainly perish. Instead, anyone coming from the east or going there had to go north. They had to circumvent the desert. But God, who is not limited by anything, promises a “river” road through the midst of the desert, in order to get home more quickly.

A beloved servant of the Lord, Ellen White, once wrote: “Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service of God supreme, will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 481). In other words, when we run out of options, God still has many at His disposal. And when it comes to bringing people back to Him, He still has plenty left

in His arsenal. Here is another “thousand ways” promise: “What is it that brings man to repentance? It is Jesus Christ. How does He bring man to repentance? There are a thousand ways that He may do this” (*Faith and Works*, p. 64).

I often think and pray with this in mind: “Lord,” I pray, “use one of Your thousand ways to help my beloved ones open their eyes to see their need of you. You have many ways to accomplish this. Use one of them for their sake!”

Our vision is very limited. We see just what is in front of us; and even then, we often misinterpret what we actually see. But God sees in front, in back, on each conceivable side, and beyond for miles and millennia. He sees all there is to see to assess the situation. And even though He will not bend the will of human beings to follow Him, He can work effectively all around them to help them see what He sees so well.

Years ago, one of us was walking early in the morning, thinking about what the psalmist had said in the longest of the psalms: “You established the earth, and it abides. They continue this day according to Your ordinances, for all are Your servants” (Ps 119:90-91). The verse is talking about Creation and the fact that the laws of creation continue to obey Him to this day. Why? Such laws are His servants. In another version it simply reads: “All things are Your servants.”

God will not infringe on the will of our loved ones. He will not force His love and grace upon any who refuse to accept it. But everything else that surrounds them is subject to His command. “All things” are His servants. That’s why He knows of a thousand ways available to solve problems. *When our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.*

The Woman of Samaria

In John 4, we are told about a time when Jesus needed to travel from Judea in the

south to Galilee in the north. Between Judea and Galilee was Samaria. Hundreds of years before, Samaria was the central area of the northern tribes of Israel who walked away from God and adopted the customs of pagan nations following other gods. When the Jews came back from Babylon, they were cured from idolatry, and they determined that what happened to the Samaritans would never happen to them. They grew to despise the Samaritans. They considered them worse than the Gentiles—and they called the Gentiles dogs!

So, in Christ’s time, no self-respecting Jew would willingly walk through Samaria. The quickest route from Judea to Galilee was through Samaria. Instead, however, they would walk east, cross the Jordan, and walk north through Perea—a foreign land—until they crossed the river again to enter Galilee.

Jesus often did what no one expected, or even understood, at the time. But He was guided through His ministry by the Holy Spirit (Matt 4:1, 17). He walked through Samaria and His disciples obediently followed. When He reached the outskirts of a town called Sychar at noon, it was hot, and He was thirsty. While His disciples went to town to get some food, He rested by the city’s well. You probably know the story. A Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. This caught the attention of Jesus because the time to draw water was either early in the morning or evening, never at noon. And it was a social practice: women did this together. But this woman was alone, and clearly, she was avoiding other women.

As the story unfolds (John 4:1-42), we learn that the woman had had relationships with five different men and the relationship she was involved in at the time was with someone who was not her husband. That may be one reason why she avoided other women. It became obvious to Jesus that she was very alone, ostracized, and very lost, even in her own city. So, the Master offered *her* water: “Whoever drinks of this water [from the well] will thirst again,” He said, “but whoever

drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (vv.13-14).

The story ends on a glorious note. The woman accepts Jesus as the Messiah, thus drinking from the true Well of Life, and in turn she *becomes* “a fountain of water” as she eagerly shares with others what she learned from the Savior! John recalls that “many” people from the city believed in Jesus “because of the word of the woman” (v.39). Her life was dry, ready to expire. But in a single conversation, God awakened the woman to a new beginning. She saw what she’d never seen before. And she grabbed on to the hope that Jesus offered to her.

This can happen with our children who are far from home. This can happen with our siblings wandering “in the desert.” This can happen with our loved ones seemingly lost in the world. In one sensible conversation with Jesus, they can become “rivers of living water.” Isn’t that what Jesus said? “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). *When our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.*

Coming Home

In one of his books, Roger Morneau tells of a couple who had separated four years before. The man was talented and worked for a multinational corporation. As he was given more and more responsibilities at work, he stayed away from home more and more. He began to adopt the lifestyle of the corporate world, including partying, drinking, and buying expensive jewelry. He stopped going to church, criticized those who did, and argued with his wife all the time. Eventually, he began having an affair with his secretary, and moved out of the home.

His drinking turned to gambling and then to drug use. He made some poor decisions at work which cost the company a lot of money,

and they fired him. His life now a mess, he seriously thought about committing suicide, but decided he was too much of a coward to carry it through.

What would you do if you were the wife? What *could* she do but pray? And that’s just what she did. She realized that only the mighty power of the Holy Spirit could overturn her estranged husband’s life. One evening, while cooking, she heard a familiar voice on the TV. A reporter was interviewing a homeless man living under a highway overpass. It was her husband. She could hardly recognize him! The former corporate executive was reduced to eating food from garbage cans behind restaurants.

The woman learned where the interview had taken place and went looking for her husband. She found him inside an 8- by 10-foot shack, lying on a pile of broken-down cardboard boxes. She begged him to come home, but all he could think of was how far he had fallen. His mind was deeply affected. He was seriously depressed. After numerous visits, he agreed to come home, but he still lived like a tramp.

She began to pray for Jesus to heal his mind. It took some time to see results, but they came. The man eventually decided to clean himself up, to cut his hair, and to look again for a job. Today, they are together again and have moved to another city to begin a new life, after four years in “the wilderness.”

Jesus never forgot that man. He knew where he was, He knew what he endured, He knew the depth of his own despair. At the right time, and since all things are His servants, He led his wife to recognize her husband’s voice on TV. *When our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.*

Do not despair. Do not give up. Jesus will do “a new thing” in your midst! He will make a river in the desert to speed up the return of your exiled son, your daughter, your brother, your sister, or your friend. *He* will bring them back! He will do so for the honor of His name

and the benefit of His people. *He* will never leave them nor forsake them! (Heb 13:5). *When our loved ones are far from home, Jesus is still at work to bring them back.*

“RETURN TO THE STRONGHOLD, YOU PRISONERS OF HOPE. EVEN TODAY I DECLARE THAT I WILL RESTORE DOUBLE TO YOU.” ZECHARIAH 9:12

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CHILDREN'S STORIES

In My Father's House

DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

Text

“LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED; YOU BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE ALSO IN ME. IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE ARE MANY MANSIONS; IF IT WERE NOT SO, I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU. I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU. AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF; THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO.”

JOHN 14:1-3

Props

Come walking in a hurry from the back of the room with a suitcase packed with items for a trip. Some nature pictures of flowers, mountains, and waterfalls to show the children. Steve Green's song, *In My Father's House*.

“I'm sorry I'm late; I'm coming! I was packing for a trip.”

“Now let me see what I have here. I need to check if I have everything—Purse, money, passport, phone, clothes, books, Bible, jacket, blanket, and snacks!” (*pull these items from your suitcase*)

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“I bet you are probably wondering where I am going, aren't you? This is the most exciting trip I have ever planned. You see, I'm getting ready to go to heaven. Do you want to join me?”

“The Bible has lots to say about heaven, and God has given us some hints about what Heaven will be like. However, a lot of it is still a mystery to us because God is still preparing this special place for us. At least that's what Jesus told his disciples before He went up to heaven.

“Jesus said he was preparing a place for us with many rooms or mansions. This makes me think that if God created the world and everything in and around it in six days, how amazing will heaven be since he has been taking so much time to prepare it for us? Can you think of a beautiful place where you have been? Maybe it was a mountain, a waterfall, or beautiful gardens with lots of flowers (*show pictures*). Well, as beautiful as our world is, heaven is even more amazing than anything that we could ever imagine!

“God can use whatever He wants to prepare the heavenly city—Gold to pave the roads, sparkling diamonds and other beautiful gems to decorate we haven't even seen on earth. Maybe that's why the Bible doesn't give us a complete description of heaven because we would not even be able to understand how amazing and beautiful it really is.

(*Look and point to suitcase full of stuff*)

“Hmmm. . . now that I think about it, I guess I won’t need to pack for heaven. It might seem strange that we won’t need any of our things like blankets, favorite toys, or even a change of clothes! God will give us everything we need plus much, much more. What we can pack to get ready for this amazing trip is His word in our hearts. Then we must share His word and love with others so we can “pack” our friends and neighbors as well! We bring people to heaven! Isn’t that exciting? Oh, heaven is going to be just wonderful! And there is a special place being prepared for each one of us. God knows what we need and He’s getting it all ready for us.

Our text today is John 14:1-3 NKJV. (Optional. Play Steve Green song, “In My Father’s House.”) In it Jesus says, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

I want to go to heaven, don’t you?

Compassion in Cuba

RICHARD AGUILERA

Bible Verse

“FINALLY, ALL OF YOU, BE LIKE-MINDED,
BE SYMPATHETIC, LOVE ONE ANOTHER,
BE COMPASSIONATE AND HUMBLE”
(1 PETER 3:8).

Props

Stalk of sugar cane (if available) and photos of Cuba and the Viñales Valley

When my boys were young, I organized a mission trip to one of the most difficult countries to travel to—the island nation of Cuba. I planned a 12-city outreach trip focused on helping kids and families. Because we were traveling as missionaries, we were able to obtain the necessary visas to enter Cuba from the United States.

After landing in Cuba we began our trip in the western city of Pinar del Rio, then started our slow 700-mile trek across Cuba to the eastern city of Guantanamo. Along the way we stopped at one of the neatest natural wonders of Cuba; the Viñales Valley, which is about 7 miles long by 3 miles wide. The valley floor is flat and lush with palm trees and plantations. There are also amazing towering limestone outcroppings, known locally as “mogotes.”

Richard Aguilera, is the Founding Director of Mustard Seed Ministries in Berrien Springs, MI.

They shoot straight up hundreds of feet off the valley floor and can be found only in this part of Cuba. (show picture if available)

At that time in Cuba it was difficult to find a restaurant. If you needed to eat while traveling, you had to pull over in a town and ask for the nearest “paladar.” These aren’t restaurants but homes of people who have a patio or dining room for guests. Travelers can pay them to cook a meal. During our trip we stopped at a “paladar”. The cost was very reasonable, and the home cooked meal was fantastic. The owner of the home was a woman who treated us like family and served us a huge banquet! Our time there reminded us that one day in heaven God is also going to host an amazing gathering for all his children, a huge banquet feast!

Traveling across Cuba was not easy, however. Sometimes gasoline for our vehicle was not available. To get gasoline we sometimes had to find a person to sell us some, or maybe trade something of ours that they wanted to get gasoline. One time we traded a box of fruit for a 5 gallon jug of gasoline. Another time we traded gas for a spare car part we had in the trunk.

Our boys brought great joy to the other kids we met along the way because they would give out chewing gum and a smile to all the children they encountered. Every day they gave out hundreds of pieces of gum which was a rare treat for the kids in Cuba.

In one town we were trying to arrange for some more gasoline when we saw a small boy and his mother walking on the other side of the street. My eldest son jumped out of the car and ran over to them. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a pack of gum and gave it to the boy. As my son was turning to leave, the boy stopped him and reached into his bag, pulled out a mango and handed it him. It was so nice to see that they could be kind and generous to each other with “no strings attached.” Jesus did similar random acts of kindness all the time. He was always thinking of others before thinking of himself. My boys never forgot about that experience.

Another city we visited was Trinidad; a wonderful colonial city in Cuba and one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites. Walking through the streets made us feel like we had time-traveled hundreds of years into the past. (show picture if available) That’s when we came across a vendor selling *guarapo*. *Guarapo* is a drink that is very popular in Cuba and the process of preparing this drink is interesting. I told the man that we wanted to buy four cups of *guarapo* for my family. The man reached around the corner and grabbed four stalks of sugar cane; each stalk was about eight feet long. (show sugar cane if available)

Next, he went over to a large metal machine and pushed a button and wheels started turning before a loud noise followed. He took one of the stalks of sugar cane, fed it into the back part of the machine which proceeded to smash it. As it went through the machine, the

liquid sugar cane juice would run out into an ice-filled pitcher near the front of the machine.

After the sugar cane went through once, the man put it through the machine again, and again to be sure that he had captured all the juice. He did this to all four of the stalks as we curiously watched his every move during the juicing process. After the man finished juicing, the floor in his shop was covered with the stalks which had been smashed so hard that they had become like dry flakey hay all over the floor. He then filled up four cups of the *guarapo* and gave it to them.

The juice was cold and delicious. Everyone was amazed that in just a few minutes the man had transformed those long stalks into a yummy, sweet drink. As we thought about it, we were reminded that when we get baptized, we are also transformed, and our lives are changed. Having Christ in our hearts is even sweeter than *guarapo*!

Eventually our family made it across the entire island to Guantanamo before returning back to Havana. Each step of the way we were met by amazing people and unique experiences.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us, “Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8). Let’s look for ways to be compassionate to everyone we meet, just as my family did by sharing smiles, chewing gum, gasoline, a mango, a home-cooked meal, and some sugar cane juice. What can you share with someone today?

The Talking Saw

STORYTIME: CHARACTER-BUILDING STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Sam was using his favorite tool. As he pushed the saw back and forth, he watched the teeth bite evenly into the board. Sam and Joe were building a birdhouse. Sam's dad had helped them draw the plans and had told the boys they could use his tools to build it. "Where can we put the birdhouse when we've finished it?" Sam asked. "We could put it on that pine tree next to the garage," Joe suggested.

Just then Sam's mother called, "Dinner's ready, Sam!" Sam straightened up with his hand on the saw. "We'll have to stop now and put the tools away," he said. "I promised Dad I'd be careful with his tools and put them back where they belong." "Leave the saw," Joe said, "and I'll finish cutting that board. I'll put the saw away when I'm through. I have to go home too."

"All right," Sam replied. And the left Joe to complete the work on the board and put the saw away.

After dinner, Sam did his homework and got ready for bed. Just as he was brushing his teeth, it began to rain outside. It was only a sprinkle of rain, but Sam thought about the saw. *Joe said he would put it away*, he thought to himself. *Surely, he did*. Joe was Sam's best

friend, but Sam knew that Joe didn't always follow through and do what he said he would do. He almost went out to the garage to make sure the saw was safely in its place, but it was late. And after all, Joe *had* said he would take care of it.

The next morning Sam went out the back door on his way to school. To his surprise, there lay the saw on the back step right where he and Joe had been working the evening before. *I should have known I couldn't depend on Joe to put it away*, Sam thought. He was angry with Joe, but he also felt in was somewhat his fault as well because he hadn't put the saw away carefully himself. After all, he had promised Dad to take good care of his tools. Sam picked the saw up and looked at it closely. It was dry and seemed to be all right. *I'll put it away now, and Dad won't ever know it stayed out all night, he thought to himself*. After school that afternoon Sam and Joe were busy once more working on the birdhouse they were building. They nailed the pieces of wood together, and then they painted the birdhouse a bright blue. When the paint was dry, Sam's father came out to see their work.

"Can we put it on the pine tree next to the garage?" Asked Sam. "Ok," Dad said. "Let's see how it looks there." He held the birdhouse up against the trunk of the pine tree. "That looks fine," Joe said. "But it needs to go just a little higher—right where that small branch

is growing,” Sam said. “We can cut off that branch and then nail the birdhouse to the tree right there.”

“I’ll cut it off,” Sam’s dad offered, and he went into the garage to get his saw. In a moment he was back. His face was frowning as he looked at the saw in his hand. “I thought you boys were going to take good care of my tools,” he said. Sam looked at Joe, and Joe looked at Sam. Then they both looked at the ground. Neither boy said a word.

Finally, Sam said, “the saw was left out overnight. There was a little rain, but the saw was dry this morning. I didn’t think it was hurt, so I didn’t tell you. Who *did* tell you, Dad?”

His father held up the saw so that Sam and Joe could see it. There were tiny dots of red rust all over the blade. “The saw told me,” Dad said. “I can clean it and oil it, and it will be OK. But just remember: When you do something you shouldn’t have done, it’s always better to admit it and not try to cover it up. Now, let’s get that birdhouse fastened to the tree!”

SEMINARS

Marriage: A Divine Design

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Introduction

As God was completing the end of the sixth day of Creation, He looked over all that He had created and saw that “it was good” (Genesis 1:25). Then God created Adam in His image, but this time He said “it is not good,” (Genesis 2:18). In spite of all that Adam possessed—beauty, wealth, health and power—God declared it was not good enough (Mueller & De Souza, 2015).

SO THE LORD GOD CAUSED A DEEP SLEEP TO FALL UPON THE MAN, AND WHILE HE SLEPT GOD TOOK ONE OF HIS RIBS AND CLOSED IT UP WITH FLESH; AND THE RIB WHICH THE LORD GOD HAD TAKEN FROM MAN HE MADE INTO A WOMAN AND BROUGHT HER TO THE MAN. THEN THE MAN SAID, ‘THIS AT LAST IS BONE OF MY BONES AND FLESH OF MY FLESH; SHE SHALL BE CALLED WOMAN, BECAUSE SHE WAS TAKEN OUT OF MAN.’ THEREFORE, A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH. AND THE MAN AND HIS WIFE WERE BOTH NAKED AND NOT ASHAMED
(GENESIS 2:21-25, ESV).

So it was that the God, the Creator, performed the very first wedding at the culmination of Creation week. Then, “God saw everything that he made and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31).

This passage of scripture lays the foundation for a Christian view of marriage. Marriage is the first institution designed by God. Great institutions remain in place when there is a clear understanding of their origin, nature and purpose. In Part 1 of this seminar we will give an overview of God’s original intent for marriage. Part 2 will offer essential principles for building and maintaining a strong and healthy marriage; one that is based on God’s original design.

PART 1

Marriage: An Order of Creation¹

When we read the Creation story, we clearly see that marriage was a part of the order of events in the Creation week. This is very significant for a Christian worldview of marriage because it is a departure from a contemporary view of marriage. Marriage, as designed by God, is not rooted in an evolutionary process or one socially constructed by human beings. It was purposefully orchestrated and planned by the Creator.

Marriage is not just any relationship; it is the foundation of all relationships—first with God,

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then with each other. The notion of human bonding was first understood and reflected in the marriage relationship. Adam and Eve were the first couple and they established the first family. All of us first learn about relationships from our families, whether that family be biological, adopted, or foster. Some of these relationships were good and some not so good. But the point is, all relationships begin within the family.

The family is not only a cornerstone of society, it is the foundation of society. It is so much a part of society's foundation that civil laws designed to protect marriage and the family have been enacted. History has revealed that strong nations are built on strong and stable marriages and families.

“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.”
(WHITE, 2001)

While marriage is God's ideal, we must also recognize that sometimes the ideal does not work out as planned. However, people of faith must continue to stretch toward God's ideal plan for marriage and family, while recognizing that there is brokenness experienced in marriages and families in a fallen world. While holding up the ideal we continue to extend the “good news of God's saving grace and the promise of growth possible” through the power of Christ.²

The Nature of Marriage

Oneness

Marriage defies mathematics. Usually one plus one equals two but in Genesis 2:24, two become one. Marriage unites two individuals who come together to share the same residence,

finances, and other resources. Sometimes marrieds even share the same name. Essentially, husband and wife become a unit. They belong to each other exclusively, not from the perspective of ownership or possession, but as a new couple identifying as “we” instead of “I.”

Part of the mystery of oneness in marriage is that it is unique to every couple. Research about successful marriages reveals that there are a myriad ways in which a couple can express their oneness and have a happy and satisfying marriage that glorifies God and respects the sanctity of marriage. To be sure, every couple has to strive towards finding ways to enjoy their marriage. They must earnestly look for ways to maintain joy in being together.

The notion of oneness goes beyond physical oneness, although physical oneness is a very important aspect of oneness. Oneness is a merging of mind, body, and soul. It is a deep sharing and giving of self that emerges when there is a safe climate to share thoughts, desires, goals, pains, and hurts. Oneness does not mean that one person loses their identity. In true oneness both individuals feel heard and understood as they bring their individuality to the marriage. At the same time, oneness does mean that there will be a compromise of autonomy as the two individuals learn how to accommodate their similarities and differences and form a new couple identity—the “we” or the “us.” Oneness in marriage means you are no longer single—we stress again that “I” becomes “we.”

Monogamy

The Bible clearly and uniquely endorses marriage sealed with monogamous exclusivity. At Creation, only one Eve was created. The repeated refrain “two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4, 5) stressed the union of one husband with one wife. This was God's ideal plan for marriage.

Marriage as an exclusive monogamous relationship is often used as an analogy of the relationship between God and humans, which is a reflection of the unity of the Trinity.

“Following the pattern of relationships in the Godhead (John 17:24), meaningful existence for human beings needed to have a social dimension. . . The ideal expressed in Creation was for man and woman to form a whole in which they were to be mutually complementary and interdependent.”³

It is within the confines of this monogamous exclusivity that the deepest and most intimate of human relationships becomes strengthened and sealed.

Permanence

In Matthew 19:6 Jesus states, “So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” This statement clearly indicates that marriage is to be a relationship that lasts forever, and it is common for most couples to recite this acknowledgment in their vows, “until death do us part.” When the marital relationship is built on a solid foundation of lasting commitment and permanence, there is stability in the relationship.

Without this total commitment it would be difficult to achieve true oneness because the relationship would not be a safe place to explore and reveal one’s true self. It would be difficult to be vulnerable in the relationship. Commitment conveys to each spouse that the relationship is a safe place to share their needy side and feel that the other person will stand by them and not take advantage of them. Even when the inevitable offenses come, each spouse can still trust that the relationship is sturdy enough and can be healed.

Sacredness

When God performed the first wedding He “blessed them” (Genesis 1:28). This first couple had God’s approval for enjoying all the rights and privileges of marriage. And this is true for all marriages that have come afterwards who follow God’s original divine plan for marriage. The marriage blessing of Adam and Eve was brief. However, there are elements of the first marriage blessing that are later found in Old Testament and New Testament weddings. The marriage ceremony was a public event where

family, friends, and community were called together to witness and ratify the setting apart and blessing of a newly married couple. The wedding ceremony is not just a cultural or social event but puts on public display a couple who is making a covenant before God and other witnesses. Marriage is sacred and holy and should always reflect God’s glory.

At the wedding each spouse promises to give his/her self to the other. This giving of self should not be understood as right of ownership but as stewards of God’s property. Marriage should not be slavery. Any guise of this type of ownership in marriage is a manipulation of God’s original intent and is a sin.⁴

COUPLE OR GROUP DISCUSSION

- By couples or in groups of 4-5, read Genesis 2:18-25.
- Discuss the essential elements found in this passage and Part 1 of this seminar. (*Notes for Facilitator*: Marriage as a part of Creation, leaving parents and cleaving to wife, two becoming one flesh (emotionally, spiritually, and physically), monogamy, and permanence/commitment, sacredness).
- Discuss how this Christian view of marriage is similar or different from how weddings and marriage are seen today in society and the church today.
- Discuss strategies for maintaining a biblical worldview of marriage despite competing worldviews.

PART 2

How to Prevent Marital Distress and Divorce⁵

In part 1 of this seminar we mentioned that research reveals there are, essentially, a million ways in which couples can have a happy and satisfying marriage. On the other hand, research tells us there are distinct patterns that create barriers to oneness in marriage and lead to future distress and divorce. In addition to these negative patterns, many couples today

water down their marriage vows to protect themselves should things not work out as planned. It seems that some couples are setting lower expectations just in case they are not able to live up to the level of permanence or commitment required for a lasting marriage.

So how does a couple build a marriage that will last a lifetime, one that is not only stable but satisfying? Is it possible to prevent distress and divorce? The good news is that couples can stay happily married for a lifetime, minimize distress in their marriage, and prevent divorce. However, couples who aspire to staying married for a lifetime have to be deliberate about and committed to removing destructive patterns and increasing positive behaviors in their marriage.

Eliminate Negative Patterns

Let's get the negative things out of the way first, then we will give a few positive things you can do to keep your marriage stable and happy. We begin with the negative because if couples can remove just one negative pattern to begin, they will immediately experience positive growth in their marital relationship. The happiness dividend is almost instant.

Negative patterns of communication are the most destructive to every marriage. We get married to enjoy companionship and friendship, so when communication becomes burdened with bitterness, contempt, putting each other down, and other hurtful forms of communicating—or lack of communication—one spouse or both get tired and frustrated with the marriage. This reality destroys the marital bubble of safety and trust in which both spouses are confident that the other is there protect their feelings.

Couples who recognize they are reacting rather than being proactive in regular daily interactions will begin to see changes in the way they relate to each other. Instead of responding immediately to something you don't like or resorting to harsh words; spouses must learn to pause and take a deep breath; to think about what they should or shouldn't say, and consider what impact certain responses will have on the

relationship. Spouses should ask: "Is what I'm about to say going to enhance our oneness and glorify God or will it just add fuel to the fire and make the situation worse?" Most relationships⁶ need only one person willing to be a hero for the relationship to work. No doubt, it is even better when spouses take turns being the hero—the person willing to humble him/herself and taking the initiative to deescalate tension—as necessary.

Another negative pattern that couples struggle with is trying to solve problems that are not really problems. These are the problems that are really just personal idiosyncrasies such as how towels should be folded, or which way to hang the toilet paper, or how to squeeze the toothpaste from the tube. Too often these personal preferences become major causes of contention in marriage because we forget about the "we" and resort to the selfish "I." The truth is, every marriage relationship requires a compromise of autonomy. Couples must learn to make room for each other's differences and accept the fact that neither is perfect. We must learn to put aside sin and selfishness in our relationship and freely give grace to each other.

The last negative pattern we will discuss is dysfunctional attitudes. Couples who think and speak negatively about their relationship will reap the results of a poor marriage. We truly are what we think! Our brain believes what we tell it. So, couples who regularly think negatively about their marriage will have a bleak outlook on their marriage. On the contrary, if the overall outlook of your marriage is positive, even when there are challenges, you will believe there is hope for your marriage.

Commit to Having a Strong and Happy Marriage

Having a successful marriage is possible and highly probable, but only if couples are intentional about doing so. Good marriages require a plan and commitment to do a lot of hard work. Here are a few essential steps any couple can use to get their marriage back on track and stay on a strong foundation.

Build your marriage on real love. The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 what real love is, “Love is patient and kind” When couples practice this type of love, their marriage will reflect God’s glory and His divine intent. Real love requires a genuine regard and respect between spouses, and being willing to practice self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Real love requires sacrifice and a commitment to seeking the best for the marriage or the “we” or “us”.

Become an active listener. Healthy and positive communication begins with active listening. This form of listening involves listening with your ears, your eyes, and your heart. It conveys to your spouse that you really hear and understand what they are saying, even if you don’t always agree. Listening is not problem solving. When each spouse in the marriage feels heard and understood, they draw closer together as a couple. It is much easier to solve problems and resolve conflict when each spouse feels heard and understood. This one small act enhances intimacy, builds trust, cultivates commitment, and strengthens the relationship altogether.

Forgive often. The Oxford Dictionary has these definitions of forgiveness: 1. To stop feeling angry towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake. 2. To no longer feel angry or wish to punish. 3. To cancel a debt. In Mark 11:25 Jesus gives a directive, “and whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.”

If your marriage is going to thrive and flourish, forgiveness must be a regular ingredient in your relationship. Forgiveness serves as the path for healing and reconciliation in every relationship. In every marriage couples will inevitably hurt each other. When you choose to forgive, you give up your perceived right to punish the other person or to retaliate later on. When you fail to forgive, resentment and bitterness grow in the relationship which leads to a negative pattern or destructive cycle. Of course the more severe the infraction, the more difficult

it is to forgive. However, forgiveness frees us so healing can begin. Most marriages suffer from an accumulation of small infractions that have been left unforgiven. Forgiveness preserves the hope in your marriage.

Cherish each other. Another phrase of the marriage vows that is too often and easily forgotten is “to love and to cherish.” We have already spoken about the phrase “to love” but what does it mean “to cherish?” When we cherish something, we care so much for it that we protect it, respect it, are grateful for it, and we hold it dear. To have a happy and healthy marriage we need to cherish each other. We need to treat our spouse as if he or she is our most cherished treasure. We need to be more tender, loving, respectful, and protective of the precious gift that God has given us in our spouse. Marriage is indeed a wonderful gift from God and a reminder of how much He loves and cares for us.

Conclusion

Marriage was created by God, first to help human beings better understand His need to be in relationship with us, then to satisfy the human need for love, intimacy, and stable companionship. Hence, marriage is divinely designed, sacred, and holy. Couples who strive to have sacred marriages that seek to reflect God’s character will build a marriage that will weather the storms of life. Not only will your marriage survive, but it will thrive and experience a “little heaven on earth”⁷ as you enjoy married life.

COUPLE OR GROUP DISCUSSION

- By couples or in groups of 4-5, identify negative patterns in your own relationship or that you see in relationships on tv, social media, etc. Discuss how these negative patterns contribute to the distress in marriage. What pattern can you remove from your own marriage or other relationship that will help your relationship grow?

- Discuss ways in which couples can cherish each other in public and in private. If you are a couple, share with each other what your spouse can do to make you feel loved and cherished.

Notes

- ¹ Part 1 of this seminar is framed by chapter 11, “The Institution of Marriage” by Miroslav Kis and Ekkerhardt Mueller, from the book: *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects* (E. Mueller & E. B. De Souza Eds. Vol. 1). Silver Spring: Review and Herald.
- ² See family.adventist.org for more on the mission and vision of Family Ministries.
- ³ Aecio E. Cairus, “The Doctrine of Man”, in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12*, ed. Raoul Dederen, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 210 in *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects* (E. Mueller & E. B. De Souza Eds. Vol. 1). Silver Spring: Review and Herald.
- ⁴ See p. 254-255, *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects* (E. Mueller & E. B. De Souza Eds. Vol. 1). Silver Spring: Review and Herald.
- ⁵ This section is based on the chapter “How to Prevent Marital Distress and Divorce” from the book, “Hope for Today’s Families”, Willie and Elaine Oliver, 2018, Silver Spring: Review and Herald.
- ⁶ We recognize that some relationships might be struggling with violence and abuse or mental illness. These strategies may help alleviate some of the distress in these situations, however, we strongly recommend that those who find themselves in such situations seek professional help.
- ⁷ Adventist Home, p. 15.4.

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Disciple-Making Parenting: Helping Our Children Develop a Moral Compass

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

Scriptural Principle

“CHOOSE FOR YOURSELVES THIS DAY WHOM YOU WILL SERVE, WHETHER THE GODS WHICH YOUR FATHERS SERVED THAT WERE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER, OR THE GODS OF THE AMORITES, IN WHOSE LAND YOU DWELL. BUT AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD.”

JOSHUA 24:15 (NKJV)

- How do the words, “choose for yourselves” relate to parenting?

3. Reflect

- Take a moment and reflect on today’s teenagers.
- How can parents help teenagers personalize their faith?

Overview

Your teen is now at an age where they may begin questioning faith and values. Perhaps they are asking questions such as: Why is faith important anyway? Am I following the faith of my parents or is it my faith? Our challenge as parents is to find ways to guide our young people through this time. How do we assist our teens through this time of reflection and questioning? How do we help them internalize their beliefs? Is this a time to teach or preach less and listen more?

Creating a moral compass in our teens is not something that we will accomplish once a week with church attendance. Rather, studies indicate that teens most likely to mature in faith are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life. In other words, passing the torch of spiritual beliefs and values to our children comes about through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are

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ICEBREAKER- GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Remember

- Remember when you were a teenager. Did you ever go to church or participate in spiritual activities because you wanted to meet your parents’ expectations that you do so?
- When did you make a personal decision for Jesus Christ?

2. Review

- As you consider the spiritual principle verse, what message do you glean from it?

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firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines—eating and sleeping, cleaning and organizing, talking and sharing, loving and caring. Faith development and internalizing spiritual values and beliefs happen on a day-to-day basis as we incorporate Jesus into every aspect of our home life and make Him the center of our family.

As we look at the challenge of helping our teens to internalize and live their faith, we will consider the following topics:

- Modeling
- Talking Faith
- Outsourcing your Teen’s Spiritual Growth
- Personalizing Faith

Modeling

According to Smith and Denton (2005), “the most important social influence in shaping young people’s religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents” (p. 56). It has been said that more is “caught” than is “taught” and perhaps this has never been truer than on faith issues. Consider this statement, “Teens tend to choose faith when they live in families that ‘talk the walk’ and ‘walk the talk’” (Lytech, 2004, p. 14). In other words, your speech and your actions are both important and must both be in harmony.

Have you ever asked, “Why me, Lord?” when contemplating the challenge of developing faith in your children? After all, you’re no expert when it comes to faith development. You are not a trained theologian. Shouldn’t this be left up to the experts? Why trust parents with something of so much eternal value?

Do you often think that your teen needs a faith makeover? The truth is that any makeover that needs to happen in your family needs to begin in your own heart. If you want your child to have a personal relationship with Christ, you need to have a personal relationship with Christ. If you want Jesus to live in your teen’s heart, He must live in yours first. Our children watch us closer than they listen to us. It’s important to both walk and talk our faith!

The family is the first community of faith and the most powerful influence on the faith of our children and teenagers. Modeling faith-based behavior at home is an essential aspect of helping your teen understand their faith and how to live it. As we have the conversation about the moral compass in our children, perhaps the best place to start is with a mirror. It is only after looking into our own hearts that we, as parents, will be able to look within the hearts of our children.

Practical Ways to “Walk the Talk and Talk the Walk”

1. Nurture a continued connection to the church.

The parents’ role of linking the child to the church continues to be important in the teen years. Parents influence teens in what they believe and how they practice their faith by maintaining a church attendance rule even into the teen years. Choose a church that is attractive to teens. If parents choose a church that attracts teens by the sense of belonging, meaning, and competencies that it offers, parents facilitate the link between the teen and the church that is crucial for developing religious loyalty (Lytech, 2004, p. 199). Your teen should feel that it is their church and not just the church of their parents. Church should be a place to participate and not just a spectator sport. Talk with your teen about ways they would like to serve and be involved in the activities of the church and then discuss those ideas with your youth director or your pastor. If church attendance is not important to you now then it will not be important to your teen later. So, how important is it to maintain a connection to the church? Does it matter? Look at these reasons why church involvement and maintaining that connection to the faith community indeed matters: (Adapted from: Stier, G., 2015).

- *Teenagers need models and mentors.* In the Jewish culture it wasn’t just parents who poured into the younger folks. Older men taught younger men and older women likewise mentored younger women (Titus

2:1-8). Of course, you as a parent are called to be the primary spiritual mentor of your own teenager but he/she also needs other godly adults as influencers in their life!

- *Teenagers need community.* In an age of bullying, gossip, slander, and hatefulness (which can destroy a teenager's self-identity), young people need other young people who can lift them up, encourage them, and challenge them in all the right ways. Time spent in a community of like believers strengthens our faith fortress.
- *Teenagers need mission.* When Jesus challenged his most-likely teenaged disciples to "go and make disciples of all nation," he was tapping into the activist wiring of these young men. In the same way, your teenager needs to be challenged with the mission to reach their peers with the good news of Jesus in a loving and contagious way. The church community is a place where they can be equipped to share the good news of Jesus with their own peers. This opportunity of helping your teen see their mission and then equipping them to live out that mission will accelerate the discipleship process in their life in ways you could never imagine!
- *Teenagers need theology.* Youth group is a place where teenagers can have spiritual beliefs and values reinforced. This should result in your teenagers knowing and owning their faith on a deeper level. Youth groups should be places where teenagers can ask tough questions. Skilled youth leaders can take questioning teens back to God's Word as the source of authority and help them process through all of the Biblical truth you are praying they grasp, believe, and live. Great youth groups build on the foundation that godly parents have already laid.
- *Teenagers need a safe place to confess and confide.* Often teenagers who struggle with sin and temptation have nowhere to confess and confide. They feel trapped by their sins. But a healthy youth ministry can create a safe space for teenagers to open up and talk honestly about their struggles. They can rest

with the knowledge that others are going through the same struggles and can pray for and encourage them.

2. Maintain daily family worship.

Do not let this slide because of busyness. It is important to be consistent and to make it age appropriate. Your teenage child is old enough to help lead out and choose the activities for family worship. You must model an intentional time to have a daily connection with Jesus. And, remember, make your daily worship fun and interactive instead of making it seem as if it were another chore.

3. Participate in service activities as a family.

Participating in Christian service has a powerful impact in the faith-life of teens. Christian service experiences make faith real and alive for young people. These experiences foster growth in faith and often change the lives of young people. And, participating as a family unit helps to strengthen those family bonds. It may be tempting and easier to let your child go and do a community service project with a church or school group. However, when you do it together as a family team you are modeling a caring, compassionate, and giving spirit. Engaging in service with one's family can be a powerful opportunity for growing in faith. Both children and adults are more likely to have a growing, strong faith when their family serves others together. When parent and child participate in service activities together, the child sees the parent's faith and values in action. The cross-generational bond takes place not only in the service event, but also in the retelling of the event through the years as it becomes a cherished and shared family memory.

4. Grow through family conflicts.

Every family will encounter conflict among members sooner or later. It is important to use these as opportunities to grow in faith. Conflicts among those we love the most need to be solved with prayer, repentance, and forgiveness. This is another opportunity for our children to learn and grow in faith.

5. Grow through family challenges.

Every family has challenges: finances, job loss, death of loved ones, illness, etc. These

challenges and trials can be faced through shared faith. Your child needs to see you, as parents and heads of the household, turning to God for support, guidance, and strength.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the following questions with your group.

1. Do you agree with the statement that your child's faith is a mirror image of your faith? Explain your answer.
2. What does your faith look like when you look in that mirror?
3. What are some practical things you can do to enhance the faith you see reflected in the mirror?

Talking Faith

“Listen to Moses as he shares a command of God to the children of Israel: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, The Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates’ (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). . . Intentional repetition of God’s love and our response to that love was part of the divine strategy. This text is descriptive to a fault. The activity of sharing faith with one’s children was to take place over and over: when talking casually with them, when walking with them, when getting ready for the night’s rest, and when rising up in the morning. Passing on the value of God’s love, care, and provision to one’s children was essentially to be a full-time activity, an all-encompassing obsession” (Oliver, W. & E., 2016, p. 25).

So, when was the last time that you had a conversation with your teen that revolved

around faith? In today’s world, time is one of our most precious commodities. In our busy lives, we must make the best of the time that we have. The reality is that you do have time to talk about faith with your teen. You just need to take advantage of some of these slices of time. Yes, you’re busy, but keep in mind that time is what you make of it. So when is the best time to discuss our faith with our children? The only reasonable answer is anytime. Here are some ideas (Adapted from Holmen, 2007):

- **Devotional time.** One of the best times to talk about faith is during your family devotional time each day. Share the high and low experiences from the day and then take time to pray for each other. With teenagers you can ask, “What’s on your schedule tomorrow that I can pray for? Do any of your friends need prayer for anything?”
- **Car time.** Doesn’t it often seem that the most time you spend together as a family is when you’re in the car, on your way to the next thing you have to do? Try turning off the radio, unplugging all technology, and having a conversation with your child. Ask questions that require more than a one-word response. Also, take a moment to pray for the event that you’re headed to or for the people with whom you will be meeting.
- **Sick time.** Another significant block of time that you have with your teen occurs when they are sick and have to stay home from school or other activities. While no one looks forward to his or her child being sick, it does provide time to have a healthy conversation. Sick time may give you a chance to watch a DVD, listen to music, or play a game together. So why not choose an activity that will naturally lead to talking about issues of faith and life?
- **Mealttime.** Taking a moment to give God thanks and praise before eating establishes a ritual that remains with children into adulthood. In talking to God during prayer, you are also passing on a faith lesson to your teen. Just as a meal was central to the ministry of Jesus, the family meal can be a

central faith experience for family members. It is a daily opportunity to acknowledge and discover Jesus' presence in the midst of busy family life.

- **Vacation time.** Traveling together over a long distance or just getting away on a long weekend trip can be a great time to reestablish faith-talk in your family. Tithing ten percent of your vacation time to God. Do a family service project, take some quiet time to read the Bible together and have a family devotion each day. On the final evening of your vacation, spend time in prayer and worship. This doesn't have to be elaborate. Simply take some time to give thanks for the time you've spent together. Take turns sharing one thing that you were thankful for on the trip and one thing you look forward to when you get home.
- **One-on-One time.** One of the best things that you can do as a parent is to establish the ritual of one-on-one time with your teen. It can be weekly or monthly, but it needs to be built in to your life rhythm. A failure to establish this time will leave you saying later in life, "I should have done that." Spend a weekend alone with each of your children, or establish a monthly date night together. The particular activity is far less important than your commitment to spend time together with your teenager. This practice may continue into adulthood.

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Outsourcing your Teen's Spiritual Growth

Did you stop to consider the words of Deuteronomy 6 cited above? Who were they directed to? The Hebrew leaders? The Levites or priests? Or was Moses addressing all the parents? Who has the primary responsibility of developing a child's moral compass or in aiding in their spiritual development? Is it the pastor, the Sabbath School teacher, youth group leader, or perhaps the church school? No, the truth is that YOU, the parent, have the primary responsibility of discipling your child. Too often we "pass the buck." We convince

ourselves that we are not the experts. Others can do a better job than we can.

While there is no denying that church and school may assist parents in the work of spiritual child development. In fact, we have discussed how important it is to maintain a positive relationship with the church, the faith community. In addition, having our children attend Seventh-day Adventist schools also reinforces the principles and values we are trying to instill in our homes. Surrounding our children with those who have like-minded values is priceless and this three-fold approach of home, church, and school helps strengthen and fortify children's faith development. The more support that we have in this regard, the better. The church and the school are indeed powerful tools that should be utilized to the utmost; however, this in no way minimizes the place that the home plays in a teen's spiritual growth. The home continues to be the primary source for the faith development for children.

Have you ever considered why God planned parents to disciple their children? Why did God give the task to us "rookie"? The pastor is the expert. Why not let this task fall on his/her shoulders? There are two key reasons for us to not "outsource" this responsibility. First, the home is the best vehicle to transfer faith values. Second, while doing so we grow our own faith. Nothing develops our own faith more than seeking to grow our children as disciples of Jesus. This transfer of faith actually transforms us into the image of Jesus as we seek to reflect Him to our children.

We have been given the highest calling and the holy task of partnering with God to grow our children into His image. There is no task that we will be called upon to do that is of greater importance. And, there is no parenting responsibility on which we should place a higher priority.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What tasks comprise the role of parenting? If you were to write a job description for a parent what would it

look like? List the top 3 roles in order of importance. Explain why you listed them as you did.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Personalizing Faith

Is your teen borrowing your faith or developing their own? As a small child your little one may have participated in daily worship with you and went with you as a family to worship in church every week. But, what happens when it becomes their choice to make? What happens when those values are tested as a young adult? How do we make sure the faith of our fathers becomes the same faith of our children?

Perhaps one of the best things you can do to help your teen personalize his/her faith is to equip them with the knowledge and tools to understand their faith and apply it in a relevant and meaningful way to their daily life. It is your responsibility to help them connect the “rules” and your expectations to faith values. “Because I said so” is not a good explanation to give when you try to explain the reasoning behind your expectations. Incorporate faith values into your expectations for your teen’s behavior and explain why choices, behavior, and public persona need to reflect and adhere to the tenets of your faith. Encourage them to make decisions from a faith-based perspective. It will only be when they internalize the “why” answers that faith becomes an individual and personal one.

Questioning is a normal part of internalizing faith. This can be a very challenging time for parents but do not despair. Asking questions means that they are moving from “borrowing” your faith to “personalizing” it for themselves. What can you do and how do you respond when the faith questioning starts?

Tips to Deal with Teen’s Questioning Faith Values

1. **Do not panic.** Rejecting the religious beliefs of your upbringing is different from simply asking questions. If you act angry or upset then your child will shut down and stop the faith conversations with you. This only means that they are thinking and reflecting on their faith and that is a positive thing.
2. **Encourage questioning.** Engage in honest communication with your teen about his/her feelings, values, morals, and faith. This can be a great opportunity to build a better relationship with your child.
3. **Listen more than you talk!** Answering their questions may be important, however, the most important thing you can do is to listen. Listen to their heart.
4. **Love unconditionally.** Reassure your teen of your unconditional love for them. Continue to let them know that you are a safe place for them to take their concerns and questions.
5. **Pray with and for your teen.** Encourage them to take their concerns, questions, and even doubts to God in prayer. Pray for them that God would lead and guide them during this questioning time.

Wrap Up

Above all else, continue to be intentional in making Jesus the center of your home. In Deuteronomy, God instructed the Jewish people to make Biblical teaching part of the rhythm of their daily lives (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Do you talk about God at the dinner table? Do you spend time reading the Bible to and with your children? Do you pray with them? Do you have daily family worship? Do you point out the wonders of creation? Do you encourage critical thinking and genuinely listen to their views? Are you passionate about your own relationship with God?

The research clearly indicates that spiritual practices, beliefs, and values are most often

passed on to our children when they are woven into the very fiber of home life. It needs to be a total immersion, a way of life. The daily round of everyday family activities must somehow be brought into the very presence of God. This involves parents praying, families eating together, conversations with your teens focusing on faith beliefs, doing service projects together as a family team, praying before meals, and engaging in daily family devotions.

Remember, the home remains the primary place where faith values are passed on to our children. Maximize the use of the short time you have them under your roof. Soon they will pack their few belongings and head off to college. It's important that their faith becomes a personal one now, a faith they will carry throughout their life.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read the following statement and discuss it with your group.

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“You want a household for God; you want your family for God. You want to take them up to the gates of the city and say, ‘Here am I, Lord, and the children that Thou hast given me.’ They may be men and women that have grown to manhood and womanhood, but they are your children all the same; and your educating, and your watchfulness over them have been blessed of God, till they stand as overcomers. Now you can say, ‘Here am I, Lord, and the children.’”
(White, Child Guidance, p. 565)

A Prayer You May Say

Dear Father, please lead and guide my child through this time of personalizing their faith. May you be real to them. Walk with them and talk with them. Help them to develop a forever friendship with you. Impress Your will upon their hearts and minds. Bless them in the decisions they make and may they always hold onto Your hand. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Parenting Adolescents in Today's World

ALINA BALTAZAR

Introduction

Adolescence can be a scary time for many parents. This is the when children become more independent and parents aren't always able to keep an eye on them. This is also the time when parents reap the benefits of the discipline that was taught through childhood. Everything learned up to this point finally starts coming together. Try to see this as a time of opportunity. By the time children reach adolescence, they are well on their way to becoming the person they are going to be. It is in the teenage years that they begin to experiment with different ways

of expressing themselves which helps with the development of their identity. Though it appears you are no longer needed, this is the time you are needed most, but just in different ways.

- The first goal of this presentation is to help you better understand where your teen is coming from and the unique challenges that he/she faces.
- The second goal is to share biblical wisdom from multiple sources that can better equip you for the challenges you will face as a parent of a teen.

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APPLICATION EXERCISE

What fears do you have about parenting teenagers? Discuss as a group or with a partner.

This table gives a summary of the development that happens during the teen years (Popkins, 2009).

Pre-Teens (about 8-11 years old)	Young Teens (about 12-14 years old)	Older Teens (15-18 years old)
Puberty begins (girls 8-13; boys 9-15)	Mood swings	Physical and sexual development is complete
Growing sense of independence and self-sufficiency	Identity exploration begins	Develop ability to think more abstractly
Develop close same-sex friendships	Start worrying what others think of him/her	More aware of how the world should be compared to what it is now
Develop more concrete logic skills	Can think more critically, but still thinks he/she is invincible	Able to identify with other people's situations

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1. Adolescent Development

Though people often talk about teens' "raging hormones" and their effect on adolescent behavior, research does not support these views (Shirtcliff, 2009). This is due to the slow gradual nature of hormonal changes. Hormones can however exaggerate an individual's tendency to act in certain ways. A child who is easily angered and acts out with physical aggression may act out in more extreme ways when puberty starts and actually do damage to property or harm an individual.

In addition to the hormonal changes, the brain continues to grow and change (Popkin, 2009). The development happens in order:

1. Begins with the part of the brain that controls physical coordination and sensory processing.
2. Next the part that manages motivation.
3. The seat of emotions.
4. The last part (which isn't complete until the mid-twenties) is the executive functioning part of the brain that manages:
 - Decision making
 - Empathy
 - Being aware of consequences
 - Regulating emotions
 - Self-awareness
 - Morality

Having this knowledge can help explain some of the stupid things you did as a teen and what you have observed about your own children. This is why guidance and supervision are so important.

EXERCISE

What are the implications for parents regarding adolescent development, especially as it relates to brain development?

2. Know Thyself

Many parents approach the teen years with fear and trepidation. They may think back to the fights they had with their parents or the mistakes that they made. Parents ready themselves to battle their teens in order to keep them from the many temptations they will face and protect them. In actuality, what is happening is a spiritual battle, a battle for the heart (Tripp, 2001). Satan wants a child's heart and he will use all of his powers of persuasion to pull your teen away from God.

Teens and adults all have faced temptations. There are temptations to which you are more susceptible than others. Though you may think your teen isn't watching you, he/she is watching more than you know. Research has found that parents are the biggest influence on a teen's development. Part of that influence is role modeling. A parent's struggles may become their teen's struggles. It is good to be open about our challenges and the negative consequences that we have experienced. We should also talk about and show the ways in which we cope with temptation so our teens can learn from us. This is a good time to address bad habits or addictions. If we are unable to address these between us and God, there are plenty of resources available to help. These resources are listed later.

It helps to be aware of our parenting style. Baumrind identified three basic parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative (1967).

Authoritarian Style: The Dictator

This is the old school way of parenting where father knows best and children should be seen and not heard. The parent is the one in charge with teens kept in line by threat of punishment. Teens are told what to do and how to do it. Many of us were raised this way and may have followed this parenting style when our child was young. When a child raised in this environment reaches the teen years, unfortunately it can also lead

to rebellion. In the U.S. today the focus is more on equality than hierarchy so your teen is going to increasingly expect to be treated with respect (Popkin, 2009). Teens resist the restrictions put on them and they start to challenge what they have been told. In addition, teens raised with this parenting style often struggle to know what to do when faced with challenges, especially when parents are not around to tell them what to do.

There are cultural variations in how children respond to this type of parenting style. In cultures where this style is the norm, parents and older adults are treated with high regard, and the culture is more oriented towards the community and less towards the individual. Children in these cultures tend to have less negative reactions than teens who live in the U.S. or those who have a European background. It bears noting, however, that excessively harsh and abusive parenting is harmful to all children regardless of culture.

Permissive Style: The Doormat

This parenting style is the opposite of the authoritarian style. With this style teens are allowed to do their own thing and have the freedom they so often desire. Few restrictions if any are put on the adolescent. Teens typically don't have a curfew and no responsibilities are expected to be fulfilled.

Parents don't typically plan to be a doormat to their child. Parents who develop this style of parenting often do it as a reaction to being raised in a harsh environment where the parent wants to be different than his/her abusive parent(s). Another scenario that characterizes this parenting style is seen when busy or overwhelmed parent has to deal with a child who has a strong and defiant personality. It is easier for the parent to default to a permissive style. Though the permissive style of parenting seems easier initially, it leads to unintended and sometimes very serious consequences.

Children and teens raised with the permissive style have higher rates of behavioral problems. They are more likely to be involved in risky behaviors, such as sexual activity, drug use, and criminal behavior. Since restrictions have not been put on them at home, they do what they feel like. These teens have a hard time being aware of the potential dangers and overestimate their ability to handle problems that may result. Teens raised in the permissive household can also be more anxious because they haven't learned how to manage their own behavior and desires. Teens need limits set by a more knowledgeable adult who cares about them.

Authoritative Style: The Active Parent

This parenting style is the middle ground between the authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting. The active parent gives the freedom teens so often desire, but within limits. The parent is the leader of the household, but the teen is entitled to respectfully express thoughts and feelings to his/her parents. The Active Parenting method of parenting acknowledges the importance of equality in the household where everybody is treated with respect (Popkin, 2009). Think of the parent as "benevolent dictator." The parent is still in charge, but he or she will listen to requests for reasonable adaptations and accommodations.

Research has found this parenting style to be the best for child development. There is typically a closer bond between parent and child than the authoritarian style, but the teen can feel secure knowing the parent is in charge and watching out for him/her. Children and teens raised in this environment know they are being guided and monitored so they are less likely to get involved in risky behavior because they are aware of the consequences when rules are broken. They are more likely to follow your rules even when you are not around because the reasons for the rules are known.

The downside to this parenting style is that parents are not the ultimate authority. Teens will argue and may not take no for an answer right away. It can be hard for to see teens being distressed with the punishments he/she receives because of the parents close relationship with them, but the parents know that it is for the best. It is not too late to switch to this style of parenting if you are a permissive parent. Teens who have been raised in the permissive environment will initially resist this parenting style, but once he/she realizes that their parents are doing this out of love, they typically buy into it.

EXERCISE

What parenting style do you tend to follow? What are the pros and cons you have noticed about your parenting style?

3. Unique Challenges

We live in a sinful world. All have experienced the horrible results of sin. The teen years are not exempt from that fact. Satan is a liar and tempter and will take advantage of your teen's natural inclination to want more freedom, strong desire for pleasure, and their limited awareness of the consequences. Some of the challenges teens face are not new, but others are new or have intensified in recent years.

Alcohol and drug use

Alcohol is the most commonly used legal substance. Though legal and potentially very harmful to adults, it does even more damage to teens. Teens who become addicted to alcohol become emotionally and often cognitively stuck at that age. They basically don't grow up and continue to make the mistakes teens make without awareness of consequences throughout adulthood. It is also much harder to maintain sobriety. Even if not addicted, when alcohol is abused it increases the chance teens will participate in even riskier behavior than they do when sober. This is particularly problematic during the college years where college students are more likely

to abuse alcohol than non-college attending peers. Though Adventist college students have much lower rates of getting drunk, there are still some who feel alcohol use is just part of the normal college experience.

Marijuana is the most commonly used illegal substance in the U.S. and the world. With more states in the U.S. and countries around the world legalizing marijuana there will be more marijuana available for teens to find and try. Since it is legal in many places, especially medical marijuana, it is seen as being less harmful. Though technically less harmful than alcohol, it is not without risk.

Teens are particularly vulnerable to the side effects of regular marijuana use. They are more likely to experience a cognitive decline that can be permanent especially when used regularly at a younger age. Marijuana is also known to be associated with increasing depression and anxiety and school drop-out rates. It is linked to triggering schizophrenia in those with a genetic tendency towards the disease.

One positive trend regarding teen substance use is the decreasing use of cigarettes, but that substance has increasingly been replaced with e-cigarettes or vaping. This is seen as less harmful and more socially acceptable than cigarette smoking due to the more pleasant aroma. Though it doesn't have the cancer-causing chemicals that cigarettes contain, they still have chemicals with unknown consequences. Since they contain nicotine, they are still addictive.

The opioid epidemic, though scary and increasing over the last few decades, classic heroin addiction is relatively rare in teens. That doesn't mean your teen won't be affected. Opioid addiction typically begins with pain medicines being prescribed for an actual injury or medical problem. Once that prescription runs out, some don't want to go without the benefits received from the pain medicine. Though teens aren't known to suffer from chronic pain, they do experience sports injuries or have wisdom teeth removed that

require pain medications to be prescribed. It is important to monitor and limit the use of these powerful painkillers as much as possible.

Teens are also known to abuse other prescription drugs, especially medication that treats anxiety or depression. It is recommended that you keep an eye on your medicine cabinet for any unusual change in the amount of pain or psychiatric medicines you may have. You should safely discard of any old pain or psychiatric prescription bottles you have at home in order to better protect your teen from this life-altering and potentially deadly addiction. Your local drug store can give you guidance. If necessary, you may even need to lock up the medications you have that could be abused by a teen or his/her friends. If you are concerned your teen may be abusing drugs or suffering from addiction, there is help. See the resources listed later.

Technology and entertainment

In today's modern world we often think of technology as a blessing and a curse. This is true for your teen as well. Your teen is able to access information and resources that help with academics in ways we never had when we were teens. It is also easier for parents to stay in touch and monitor teens' behavior.

The growth of technology has also provided more entertainment opportunities using various devices. You probably grew up with at least one television in your house that your parents complained was rotting your brain when you watched it too much. Parents back then were told to limit television usage to less than two hours per day. That advice is still true today, but it is harder to monitor all the different devices available for our teens to be entertained. Pornography is especially dangerous due to its easy accessibility, addictive quality, ability to damage sexuality, and put teens at risk of being victimized. There are systems that can be purchased that will help you monitor and restrict your teen's access to dangerous websites and entertainment options. Today's teens do have lower rates of engaging in risky behavior, probably due to increased use and easy access to a variety of

enjoyable entertainment options (Twenge, 2017). The downside is its addictive and socially debilitating qualities.

Social media is a wonderful way to stay in touch with friends and make new friends from every part of the globe. The downside is the more time spent on social media, the higher chance your teen will experience depression and anxiety. In fact, your teen's generation, called Generation Z or iGen, experiences more anxiety and depression than previous generations (Twenge, 2017).

This generation is growing up with easy access to Smart phones so they spend more time in front of a screen and less time in face to face interactions, but humans still have the same human contact requirements as always. This isolation can lead to depression and anxiety and makes teens more vulnerable to bullying that happens in-person and on-line. You can't get away from the bully by leaving the school; the bully can follow you 24/7 on-line. Not only is this generation more isolated, but this isolation leads to gaining less real-world life experience, which is required to be successful in adulthood. Our kids are not the only ones spending more time in front of the screen, parents are increasingly sucked into its addicting qualities as well. Parents aren't engaging with kids and giving them the undivided attention they often crave. Our teens need more face to face interactions with their peers, parents, and other caring adults, but there are other activities that absorb our attention.

Gaming is a favorite activity for many teens. There is a good chance you have had many arguments with your teen on the dangers of computer/video games. Generally, the biggest concern is the link between violent video games and increased aggression in children and adolescence, depending on the type of game and the amount of time spent. Recent research has found that teens who play meant for mature audiences that glorify risk-taking with anti-social heroes have higher rates of reckless driving, substance use, delinquency, and risky sex (Hull, Brunelle, Prescott, &

Sargent, 2014). Generally, the more violent the game and the more time spent playing it, the more problems a teen might experience. Also, with more time spent gaming comes the risk of becoming addicted. This then leads to increased chance of academic failure and mental and physical health issues because the game becomes more important than anything else. Generally it is best to limit gaming time and not to allow playing the more violent games. Ideally, all forms of screen entertainment should be limited to no more than two hours per day, even if it is educational. Teens benefit most from face to face interactions, real life experiences, and time in nature.

Sexual Issues

Our teens' reproductive organs are typically mature by early adolescence, but young people are getting married at later years. In the US the average age of first marriage for women is almost 28 and men it is almost 30 (US Census, 2018). That doesn't mean young adults are waiting until that time to experience sexual intimacy. The average age of first sexual intercourse is 18 years old in the US, with 16 years old being the legal age of consent in most states. Teens in the U.S. have higher rates of pregnancy than any other industrialized nation because of lower rates using birth control, though pregnancy rates have been steadily declining. Sexually transmitted diseases are also common during adolescence.

Though Christian teens are less likely to participate in risky sexual behaviors, that doesn't mean your teen isn't at risk. Sex is a difficult subject for many parents to talk to their teens about, but this is a must. The discussion should actually start in childhood when children are naturally curious where babies come from. As children get older the subject becomes more taboo, especially in Christian households. Just because you don't talk about it, doesn't mean your teen is not interested. They are just finding out about it from other sources, which you may not like. Your teen needs to know your values and

how you coped with sexual urges when you were young. A close father-daughter bond and open communication about sex has been found to delay sexual activity among girls. Another thing you can do is to get your teen involved in extra-curricular activities. They have been found to delay sexual activities, as long as the activities are properly monitored by responsible adults.

Recently we have seen a trend in the widespread acceptance of different sexual and gender identities. This has been helping to address the high rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide among these minority populations, but has led to some increasing identify confusion for many adolescents. There are higher rates of teens identifying as bisexual or not having a gender identity. It is during the teen years where teens explore different identities and modern times are allowing for a larger variety of identities for experimentation. The worst thing you can do is to reject your child if they choose a gender outside of their biological gender. It won't change the behavior and it leads to resentment and emotional pain. Do your best to be patient and understanding and show unconditional love, but also share your concerns with his/her chosen identity. This should be done with love and not out of anger or embarrassment.

Peer relationships

Peer relationships become increasingly important as children age, especially as our teens start to be less dependent on their parents. This is a healthy sign of maturity. The scary part is not always knowing who your teen is spending time with and what he/she is doing. It helps to guide your children to peers who will be a positive influence, but if you push your teen too hard away from some peers and towards others, he/she may resent you and engage those relationships behind your back. This can be a trying time, but don't give up. Take advantage of sharing observations regarding your concerns in subtle and less direct ways. You have more influence than you realize.

Mental health challenges

As mentioned earlier, this generation has higher rates of anxiety and depression. In addition, suicide rates have been steadily increasing every year for the past 10 years among teens. Social isolation, substance use, and social media saturation are partly to blame. Family conflict can be especially problematic during the teen years, especially between the teen and his or her parents and between the parents themselves. Teens need to know their parents will be there for them when they need them. Your love for your child should be demonstrated and communicated clearly. If he/she feels rejected by a parent, it can be devastating.

Another issue teens face is trauma. Teens who experienced abuse at younger ages or for the first time during the teen years may also struggle emotionally. If you notice your teen withdrawing and exhibiting strange behavior, don't be afraid to get professional help. (See resource list below)

Academics

Academics have become increasingly problematic for many teens. There is now more pressure than ever to succeed academically due to more competition to get into good colleges in order to land high-paying, secure jobs. Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities make it difficult to succeed the farther one gets in education. Teens can learn to adapt, but what used to work in elementary school may not work in high school. More teens are going straight to college after high school, but a large percentage drop out after the first year for multiple reasons. Teens worry about being unsure of what they want to do with the degree, and most have great concerns over student loan debt. Do what you can to be supportive and find the resources your teen may need to succeed academically.

EXERCISE

What challenges have you noticed your teen face (don't give details)? Share

with the group what you have found that helps your teen cope with his/her challenges.

4. Parental Role in Guiding Teens

The relationship between parents and children changes in the teen years. As mentioned earlier, they begin to pull away and identify more with peers. For parents who had a closer relationship with their younger children this can be an upsetting time. At some point during your child's adolescence he/she may say terrible things to you, but this is all part of the detachment process. Don't be discouraged, the bond you formed when your child was young is still important even now. Showing unconditional love is vital to his/her development.

Though teens are often busy pursuing their own interests and you may start getting busier in your career, parents should have regular communication with them. Teens spend more time with family than with peers so you have many opportunities to share your wisdom, you just need to be strategic. There may be some topics that can be difficult for teens to talk about, you may just have to wait until the right time. Remember hating parental lectures when you were young. It works best to dole out guidance in short spurts, with a healthy dose of listening included. Teens are more likely to open up to parents when they feel heard and supported when they talk. Take advantage of those times to clearly communicate your values regarding the challenges your teen is facing.

Teens are increasingly living with just one parent or in a shared custody situation. This can be a challenging time for teens feeling torn between loyalty to one parent over the other. Estranged parents might fight over rules and values they want taught to their teen. This can be a struggle for teens who are already wrestling with the issues mentioned earlier. Do what you can to find a middle ground with your child's other parent and be civil to one another. If there isn't another

parent, particularly a same-gender parent to your child, encourage a connection between your teen and a same-gender mentor. That mentor can give unique guidance to your son or daughter on how to become a man or a woman. Take advantage of mentoring programs at your local church or with Big Brothers Big Sisters program in your area.

Though teens desire and benefit from increasing freedom as they age, they still require monitoring. Research studies have shown that teens fare better when they know that their parents are monitoring their behavior, especially risky behaviors. While a parent may not catch him/her doing everything, chances are they will be aware when there is potential danger. Parents walk a fine line of being too nosy or being too hands off. Teens are trying to figure things out for themselves so they require space in order to do that. This will take some trial and error and may differ from child to child, but parents should remain engaged with their teens.

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Spiritual Development

Spiritual development in the adolescent years seems to be like a roller coaster that mostly goes down, but it can be an incredible time of growth and spiritual development that makes parents proud. Modeling a healthy spiritual life, taking your teen to church, and encouraging involvement in youth programs are things you can do to help your teen's spiritual growth. The adolescent years can be a time of questioning and curiosity that scares some parents into thinking their child won't be prepared for the Second Coming of Christ. Have patience and realize this is a normal part of spiritual development. Baptism is more like a birth certificate than a graduation diploma. It is just the beginning of your child's spiritual walk that develops over a lifetime.

EXERCISE

What role do you see yourself playing in your role as a parent in guiding your child through adolescence? What have you found to be the most helpful, share with the group.

In summary, here are some dos and don'ts of parenting teens in today's world.

1. **Don't control.** As much as you may not like your teen's choice in music or dress, this is not the time to force them to comply with all of your expectations. Establish rules and expectations for your teenager, but if you are too strict and bent on controlling every situation and decision, they will probably just do it behind your back without your guidance.
2. **Don't discourage.** Colossians 3:21 states, "Fathers [parents], do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (NKJV). Paul gave specific instructions on how family members should treat each another. Don't constantly express disapproval of your teen's choices or frequently lecture them on what they should or should not be doing. They will make mistakes. This is the best way for them to learn and prepare for life. Be there when they fall in order to provide encouragement and guidance.
3. **Do give them some freedom, but continue to monitor.** It is in the adolescent years when parents increasingly leave teens alone at home or in public places. This freedom is important to develop the independent thinking skills they will need as adults. However, parents still need to monitor adolescent behaviors, because teens can be impulsive and not likely to think through how severe the consequences may be to risk-taking behaviors. Parents of teens walk a fine line of allowing a certain amount of freedom while keeping an eye out for potential danger.
4. **Do be there for them.** Though your teen wants you to "back off," he/she does want you there when you're needed. Your teen wants someone he/she can turn to for guidance when difficult times come or when they get in trouble. This is not the time to lecture, this is the time to listen. Being a teen today is different than when you were a teen. They are facing pressures

you never had to deal with. Listening is the best way to understand and show you care.

5. **Do pray!** You can't always be there, but you know the Lord is watching out for them. It may seem like your teen is pulling away from God, but the foundation you laid when they were children will always be there. When you become discouraged with your teen, remember as long as there is life, there is hope. Never give up on your child no matter how far he or she may seem.

To find professional help in your area, within the U.S., if you have substance abuse and/or mental health concerns go to this website <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

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Keeping Our Homes Abuse-Free

KATIA G. REINERT

Introduction

Peter grew up in an Adventist home. His dad was first elder and highly respected at church. At home things were different. His father's charming personality at church turned into a raging demeanor at home when things did not exactly please him. He physically abused Peter's mom periodically, as well as Peter and his brother. He demanded respect and submission as the leader of the home, and he used the Bible to support his views. No one in the family was allowed to speak of the father's behavior outside of the home, or else. Peter carried wounds of physical and verbal abuse through childhood and into adulthood.

John had something to say, but he had to build up the courage to tell Abigail, his wife. He finally told her that he's been thinking about going back to school for further his education and hopefully get a better job with more income. "Why would you even consider that?" Abigail yelled. "You failed the last courses you took, so you're obviously not going to make it this time. You are stupid. You'll never last through the program, and we're not wasting our money on that. As it is, I am the one working and managing the bills." No punches were thrown in this conversation, but

deep wounds of verbal/emotional abuse were created.

Joan grew up in a lovely Adventist home, but fell in love with the wrong guy. He seemed very charming and in love with her. He cared so much, it seemed. He wanted to know where she was all the time and with whom. Slowly their relationship became the focus of her life. She had no more time for friends. He did not want her to work outside the home. She married him, but came to learn that he had many unusual requests for their sexual encounters. She was not comfortable but had to comply or else he would get enraged and force himself on her. She felt violated. Joan was deeply wounded by her husband's sexual abuse.

Andrea's father is actively involved in Adventist mission work around the world. He has a passion to reach the world. At home his disciplinary methods were very severe. Since early in her childhood, Andrea remembers episodes of heavy spanking which would sometimes lead to bleeding. Her emotional trauma resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder, panic attacks, and depression. She is still trying to deal with her emotional wounds and seeking to heal the mental health conditions she is experiencing. She dreams to serve God, but has found her mental health is an obstacle that she must overcome. She is seeking emotional and spiritual healing.

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We could go on retelling many stories of child abuse, intimate partner violence, and elder abuse which unfortunately happen in Adventist families much more than we would like to admit. Why does it happen? Aren't we supposed to be Godly people, preaching the gospel to the world and living an exemplary life? How can we keep our homes abuse-free?

What is Domestic Violence

Domestic violence and abuse includes any attempt by one person in an intimate relationship or marriage to dominate and control the other, whether they are the spouse, the child, or the parent. Domestic violence and abuse are used for one purpose and one purpose only: to gain and maintain total control over another. A perpetrator of an abuser uses fear, guilt, shame, and intimidation to wear the other down and keep them under their thumb.

Domestic violence and abuse do not discriminate. Abuse occurs within all age ranges, ethnic backgrounds, economic levels, and religious affiliations. And while women are more often victimized, men also experience abuse—especially verbal and emotional. The bottom line is that abusive behavior is never acceptable, whether from a man, woman, teenager, or an older adult. Everyone deserves to feel valued, respected, and safe.

Domestic abuse often escalates from threats and verbal assaults to violence. And while physical injury may pose the most obvious danger, the emotional and psychological consequences of domestic abuse are also severe. Emotionally abusive relationships can destroy one's self-worth, lead to anxiety and depression, and make the victim feel helpless and alone. No one should have to endure this kind of pain—and the first step to breaking free is learning how to recognize when a relationship is abusive.

Prevalence of Abuse

Although violence and abuse impacts everyone, women, children, and elderly people

seem to bear the brunt of nonfatal physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.¹ Here are some numbers:

- 1 in 4 adults report having been physically abused as children.
- 1 in 5 women reports having been sexually abused as a child.
- 1 in 3 women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her lifetime.²
- 1 in 17 older adults reported abuse in the past month.
- Women report higher rates of lifetime exposure to rape, physical violence, and stalking than do men.³
- More than 1 in 3 women and 1 in 12 men have experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime.⁴
- In one study among Adventists, 67% of adult participants stated they had at least one of the following types of child abuse (physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, witnessing abuse among parents).⁵

Principles to follow for an Abuse-Free home

We know based on studies that the cycle of abuse seems to go on into adulthood, making child abuse survivors sometimes more likely to engage in abusive relationships as adults. Unhealthy boundaries are often a problem. Likewise, perpetrators of abuse have wounds of their own, often the result of childhood experiences of abuse, neglect, or dysfunction in the family. For instance, Peter—the child mentioned earlier who was abused by his father—could become a perpetrator of abuse if he does not find a way to deal with the wounds that he carries.

So how can we who live in a sinful, imperfect world while growing up in imperfect families

prevent domestic violence and live in an abuse-free home?

Here are 7 principles to consider:

1. Evaluate potential wounds from childhood. Before getting married, it is critical that each individual takes time evaluating their own background and any potential dysfunction or abuse which they may have experienced. Ideally they should talk with a counselor about these experiences and evaluate how they have impacted their mental and emotional life and well-being, as well as their behavior towards others in intimate relationships. Do they have anger issues as a result of what they endured? Do they use healthy boundaries towards themselves and others? These and other questions are important to evaluate. The first step is to identify the source of any deep wounds.

2. Seek Emotional and Spiritual Healing for identified wounds of abuse. Once the wounds and the sources of these wounds are identified, it is important that each one seek psychological and spiritual counseling. Healing from these past wounds is critical if the new home being formed is to be abuse-free. Understanding what forgiveness really means, and finding emotional healing is a must for anyone who has been wounded by abuse.

3. Know the signs of abuse. Too many people have difficulty identifying when physical, emotional, or sexual abuse has taken place. When people grow up in an abusive home sometimes that is the only “normal” they know. This helps explain why many survivors of abuse end up with an abusive partner. Sometimes violence can begin early in a relationship and other times it may take years to appear. The critical issue is knowing how to identify the warning signs. Below are some examples of warning signs:⁶

Does your partner, parent or child:

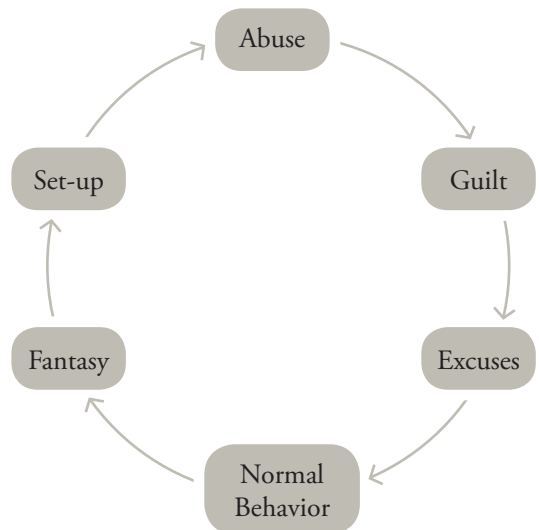
- have a bad and unpredictable temper
- hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you
- threaten to commit suicide if you leave
- is jealous of your friends/family or time spent away from him/her

- embarrass or shame you
- control all financial decisions even though you are an adult
- make you feel guilty for all the problems in the relationship
- prevent you from working
- Intentionally damage your property
- threaten violence against you, your pets or someone you love to gain compliance
- pressure you to have sex when you don't want to
- intimidate you physically, especially with weapons
- act excessively jealous and possessive
- control where you go or what you do
- keep you from seeing your friends or family
- limit your access to money, the phone, or the car
- constantly check up on you

Do you:

- feel afraid of your partner, parent or child much of the time?
- avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner, parent, or child?
- feel that you cannot do anything right for your partner, parent, or child?
- believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
- wonder if you're the one who is crazy?
- feel emotionally numb or helpless?

Identify the cycle of abuse:⁷



Abuse – Your abusive partner, parent, or child lashes out with aggressive, belittling, or violent behavior. This treatment is a power-play designed to show you “who is in control.”

Guilt – Your partner, parent, or child feels guilt after abusing you, but not because of their actions. They’re more worried about the possibility of being caught and facing consequences for their abusive behavior.

Excuses – Your abuser rationalizes what they have done. The person may come up with a string of excuses or blame you for provoking them—anything to avoid taking responsibility.

“Normal” behavior – Your abuser does everything in their power to regain control and ensure that you’ll stay in the relationship. A perpetrator may act as if nothing has happened, or they might “turn on the charm.” This peaceful honeymoon phase may give you hope that the abuser has really changed this time.

Fantasy and planning – Your abuser begins to fantasize about repeating the abuse. They spend a lot of time thinking about what you’ve done wrong and how they’ll make you pay for it. Then they form a plan for turning the fantasy of abuse into reality.

Set-up – Your abuser sets you up and puts their plan in motion, creating a situation where they can justify abusing you. Your abuser’s apologies and loving gestures in between the episodes of abuse can make it difficult to leave. They may cause you to believe that you are the only person who can help them, that they will change their behavior, and that they truly love you. However, the dangers of staying are very real.

4. Don’t ignore the signs of abuse. Once you identify the first signs, don’t pretend that everything is okay, or that things will change for the better on its own. Many people tend to think this sign is an anomaly, and they rather believe it will go away. Sometimes they blame themselves for their abusive family member’s behavior (parent, child, or spouse). The tendency is not to confront the

issue. Pray earnestly and talk to someone you trust, maybe a pastor who understands, a friend or a counselor, and seek guidance. If you are a church member or leader who have noticed signs of abuse do not ignore it either. Approach one of the family members with kindness, offer friendship, make yourself available to pray for and with them anytime, or help in any way.

It is often helpful to document what you have experienced and the situations where you see the signs of abuse, so that you can recall the details later. Include the date, time, location, any injuries, and the circumstances of the abusive incident. This information could be very useful as you talk with your partner or a counselor, or even later on if needed for police reports and court cases, both criminal and civil.

5. Talk to the partner or family member.

Pray about it and explore how best to approach the family member about the abuse that you experienced. It could be a parent, a spouse, or a child who is the perpetrator. If the family member is willing to recognize the problem and seek help, explore how best to seek guidance. Sometimes couples’ therapy may be helpful, but often individual counseling is also critical, especially if the other person is not willing to seek help or denies any problems. If the situation has escalated or your fear of retaliation is high, then perform a danger assessment.⁸ If you have a high danger score, take precautions for your safety and that of any children. Seek a shelter, the police, or someone you trust.

6. Explore resources that could help you be a better parent/spouse/child and prevent abusive behaviors in your home. There are many resources available to help parents learn healthier ways to discipline or guide a child, and also cultivate healthy ways to communicate among family members. Read and seek these resources. The Adventist church has published extensively on this topic and offers many guides for parents, as well as other resources for developing a healthy marriage.

Pray as parents, and as couples, for God's wisdom. Read the inspired counsel given us in books by Ellen G. White.

7. As a church member or leader, learn effective ways to help and how to get involved in prevention. Whether you are a church member, leader, or pastor, you can pray for the family in crisis. Though prayer is critical and cannot be underemphasized, we must also ACT. It is critical to reach out with love and compassion using wisdom and kindness as we offer help, but it is equally critical that we educate ourselves to recognize signs of abuse and refer people to professionals who can help.

Here is how to recognize signs of abuse in families:⁹

People who are being abused may:

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner
- Go along with everything their partner says and does
- Check in often with their partner to report where they are and what they're doing
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness

Warning signs of physical violence. People who are being physically abused may:

- Have frequent injuries, often using the excuse of "accidents" when questioned
- Frequently missing work, school, or social occasions without explanation
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises or scars (e.g. wearing long sleeves in the summer or sunglasses indoors)

Warning signs of isolation. People who are being isolated by their abuser may:

- Be restricted from seeing family and friends
- Rarely go out in public without their partner
- Have limited access to money, credit cards, or the car

The psychological warning signs of abuse. People who are being abused may:

- Have very low self-esteem, even if they used to be confident
- Show major personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn)
- Be depressed, anxious, or suicidal

As a pastor or church leader, make sure your church is participating in the ENDITNOW¹⁰ Sabbath every year as a way to educate your church and community. There are excellent materials prepared each year, which include sermons, children stories, seminars, etc. Be intentional about raising awareness and referring people to appropriate experts who can help guide the family.

Refer people to appropriate experts who can help guide the family. Make yourself available and identify counselors in the church (if available) or in the community who are experts and can be trusted to help.

In cases of child abuse, witnessing or learning of a dangerous situation for anyone in the family, call the police or social services. In the case of spousal abuse, you may help save a life. In some places females are killed by their partner twice as much as males.¹¹ Unfortunately this has happened among Adventist families when pastors or other leaders have ignored victims calls for help.

As church leaders or individuals we can also become more involved in our community and partner with other ongoing domestic abuse prevention programs. We may assist a local shelter or domestic violence organization in their efforts to raise awareness in our community.

In other words, use your influence and refuse to support the culture perpetuated in music, movies, television, games, and the media that glorifies violence, particularly against women and children. When cases come before the church board, take it seriously and do not condone or protect the abuser because of his or her position in the church. Instead, use discipline appropriately and seek to refer both the victim and perpetrator for counseling.

God's Ideal for families

God has left us plenty of counsel in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy to help us live in a home where angels and His love abound, and where there is no room of violence or abuse.

Consider this counsel:

Tenderness

Ellen G. White writes in *Signs of the Times*:

“In many families there is a great lack in expressing affection one for another. While there is no need of sentimentalism, there is need of expressing love and **tenderness*** in a chaste, pure, dignified way. Many absolutely cultivate hardness of heart and in word and action reveal the satanic side of the character. **Tender affection** should ever be cherished between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters. Every hasty word should be checked, and there should not be even the appearance of the lack of love one for another. It is the duty of everyone in the family to be pleasant, to speak **kindly**.”¹²

Respect

Ellen G. White writes in *Adventist Home*:

“Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for **rulership**. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church. And the wife is to **respect** and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other. . . . **Do not try to compel each other** to do as you wish. You cannot do this and retain each other's love. Manifestations of **self-will destroy** the peace and happiness of the home. Let not your married life be one of contention. If you do, you will both be unhappy. **Be kind in speech and gentle** in action, **giving up your own wishes**. Watch well your words, for they have a powerful influence for good or for ill. Allow **no sharpness** to come in.”¹³

That is our duty. To have a home that is a little Heaven and where God and the angels can abide in. But here is the good news! Even when the relationship has not been healthy, abusive patterns exists there is always hope!

Seeking Christ as the Helper

Ellen G. White writes in *Ministry of Healing*:

“Men and women can reach God's ideal for them if they will **take Christ as their helper**. What human wisdom cannot do, **His grace will accomplish** for those who give themselves to Him in loving trust. His providence can **unite hearts in bonds** that are of heavenly origin. **Love** will not be a mere exchange of soft and flattering words. The loom of heaven weaves with warp and woof finer, yet **more firm**, than can be woven by the looms of earth. **The result** is not a tissue fabric, but a **texture that will bear wear and test and trial**. Heart will be **bound** to heart **in the golden bonds of a love** that is enduring.”¹⁴

Hope for you too!

If you recognize that you are in a dysfunctional abusive relationship, remember to see yourself in the context of Biblical truth. You may not be able to talk to anyone about this yet. That is understandable. Don't believe what your abuser says about you; focus instead on what God says about you: “I have **called you by your name**, you are **Mine**” (Isaiah 43:1, NKJV).

May each of us, men and women, young and old, seek wisdom from God in our family relationships. May we humbly allow God to teach us how to relate to each other in the way that is pleasing to Him and in ways that reflect His character. More importantly, may the words of our mouths and the actions our heart honor Him as we share His love with one another. For that is how the world will know we are true disciples of Jesus Christ.

* Items in boldfaced type have been added for emphasis and do not appear in the books from which these quotations have been drawn.

Notes

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- ⁷ HelpGuide. (n.d.). *Domestic Violence and Abuse*. Retrieved from <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/abuse/domestic-violence-and-abuse.htm>
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LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Marriage Counseling

CURTIS A. FOX

Automobiles are complex mechanisms. They require care and attention, servicing, and specific grades of fuel in order to function optimally. Fluids must be checked and not allowed to fall below the desired threshold. Tires need to be rotated regularly, and maintenance appointments kept. The manufacturer's recommendations have to be followed or problems are almost sure to come up. If automobiles require constant care, vigilance, and tune-ups to maximize their longevity, why wouldn't infinitely more complex couple relationships require even more attention to function as the Creator intended?

Before she became my wife, my girlfriend told me of an experience that she had one Friday afternoon. Returning from an errand about 40 minutes from her home, she realized that her car was behaving strangely. Further, she saw the temperature gauge moving swiftly in the wrong direction signaling that the engine was overheating. She knew immediately that it was time for urgent action, so she found the nearest exit and got off the highway in search of someone who might be able check out the problem with as little hassle as possible. She made it off the highway, but the "smoke of her torment" was now visible, rising from the

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engine compartment in plumes. To her great dismay, the engine was fried. There was nothing that any auto technician could do at this point. She had sought help too late.

This short article will address the following important points regarding marriage counseling: The value of counseling; attitudes that impact how people experience counseling; how counseling is conducted; and factors that affect the success of a therapeutic relationship between a couple and a marriage counselor.

What is Marriage Counseling?

Marriage counseling refers to the help one or two persons see from a professional therapist when they are unable to manage their present relationship issues in a way that leads to a reasonable and workable solution. Often, the counselor is able to sit with them—usually an hour at a time—for a number of sessions over weeks or months. He or she listens carefully while remaining unbiased, helping the couple to explore the patterns of their interactions, set goals for treatment, and showing how they can take steps toward their goals. If it works right, all the above can happen and the couple can then go on to enjoy a more optimal relationship. Challenges are sure to come in the future, but the couple has hopefully learned better coping strategies during counseling and how to apply the lessons of healthy conflict

resolution to continue to push for change and positive outcomes on their own.

When we are in a couple relationship, we quickly get into a pattern of functioning that becomes fixed and it is difficult to change that pattern once it is set. The pattern is often functional, but the pattern can be dysfunctional and threatening to the stability and wellbeing of the relationship. With all the emotions involved—the desire to blame or to defend one’s sense of self, the inability to relate well to her or his partner, to experience forgiveness for some offense, the loss of interest in her or his partner, or real physical safety issues—often it is difficult to tell where the problem began or why it continues. Before long, it may feel impossible to change the pattern of negative interaction and the couple finds themselves stuck. When they become immobilized, all of their efforts lead to worse outcomes, leaving them dissatisfied, overwhelmed, and hopeless.

Feeling the need to discuss the issues, some people turn to close friends, relatives, former loves, family members, or others to find help. Usually the person they seek out has some emotional connection to one or both persons in the relationship, and because they may not have the training to help people resolve such difficult problems, disaster comes even closer to home because of the close proximity of the person attempting to help. Seeking help from such persons when a relationship is in a severe crisis is rarely a good idea. Good counseling is best done by a person who is not too close to anyone in the couple relationship, is a trained counselor, has established ethical boundaries, and is sought out at the right time before the relationship begins to unravel. Many therapists suggest that marriage counseling is typically pursued six years after the time that help should have been sought.

Why do people delay coming in for counseling until they are near the end of the relationship? Many people like to believe that they can handle their issues without seeking help. Further, a significant number of people grow up with taboos about counseling that prevent them from seeking help from anyone,

much less a professional therapist. They may believe that seeking counseling is a sign of weakness, lack of faith, or simply an admission of a problem. Some erroneously believe that once a person or a couple believes in God, they could not have problems that they themselves could not solve with God. That is a false notion and one that has taken many couples down the road to discouragement, disaster, disruption, and divorce. It makes sense to admit the issue and seek professional help early rather than to play tough and invulnerable, over-spiritualizing the challenge while the problem festers.

How Counseling Works

How does marriage counseling work? When someone or a couple calls to make an appointment with a marriage counselor, the therapist listens to the reason for their seeking help. She or he knows that each person is likely to explain the problem from her/his point of view. The therapist wants to know who is initiating the counseling, observes them when they come in, how they sit, how they talk or do not talk to each other, how they respond to each other, their mood, their eye contact, past and present attempts to solve their problems, who else might be involved in the problem situation, the patterns of their interaction, their willingness to change, and more. All of these behaviors are observed as the counselor talks with them, ask questions, laughs with them, gives assignments, recommends readings, bonding activities, encourages space between them, reworks relationships with children or parents, and keeps them focused on their goals for treatment. It can become tense at times during the session and after leaving, but keeping the goals in mind is crucial.

Changing any behavior or pattern of functioning is never easy. We often reject change or the prospect of change. Many people feel like they want to quit therapy because change feels uncomfortable. It is interesting to note that even though a couple may not like having a problem, they are likely to resist change, and often find reasons for not coming back to therapy to process change in their

relationship. Their excuses range from issues with their schedule, finances, or claiming that the problem is solved or cannot be solved. Some stop going because they dislike the therapist or believe the therapist is taking side of their mate against them. These are some of the typical reasons people manufacture to resist having to change.

Marriage counseling may not always work as desired. The goal of therapy is not always realized for a couple. Some may ask, what are the factors that make for successful marriage counseling? These are important to note and here they are:

1. **It is necessary to have a good fit between the couple and the therapist.** For some people, issues such as age, race, ethnicity, life experience, socioeconomic status, therapeutic approach, religious or spiritual values, appreciation for human diversity, and other factors may influence the “goodness-of-fit” between clients and therapist. Therapy works best when the client is comfortable with the therapist and believes that she or he will deliver the best quality of care. Human biases are an unfortunate reality of human life. They exist. On the other hand, there can be issues that the therapist has as well. For the therapist, it is not ethical to begin or to continue treatment if biases are standing in the way of their providing quality care. In that case, a therapist is advised to consult about their issue with a professional peer, a professional therapist, work through the issue that he or she has with the client, or to refer the case, if necessary, to another therapist who may be able to provide more optimal care.
2. **Another factor that can affect the outcome of therapy is any distraction that keeps a client from being present, attentive, and motivated for therapy.** What does this mean? If a person comes to therapy but really does not want to be there or is not motivated, they are likely to be listless, defensive, dismissive, and unwilling to try anything that may be suggested as an attempt to help. There

are other ways a person may be distracted during therapy as well. For example if a person is under the influence of alcohol or other substances they may not be in a sound mind while they are in therapy and so minimize the potential for positive results. Therapy is ill-advised in that case. Also, if a person is in couple’s counseling but is in an affair outside of their relationship (with a person at work, church, etc.), they will not have the energy to direct toward change or improvement. He or she has to be encouraged to put aside all distractions in order to give counseling their best effort.

3. **The inability to forgive one’s partner or to receive forgiveness from her or him after a failure or shortcoming usually leads to a stuck position and it is almost impossible to move forward or experience improvement in that relationship unless forgiveness is applied.** There are some who go to therapy, even different therapists, but who fail to experience growth because they are simply stuck due to some unresolved failure of the past. Until they can release a person from some failure or accept forgiveness for what was done, they will live under a cloud that will impact the weather or the climate of their relationship. Yes, we often pray, “Forgive us of our debts, as we forgive also our debtors” (Matthew 6:12), but that prayer is often prayed long before an offense happens in the relationship. Many people find it impossible to grant forgiveness when they are personally affected by some action of their mate. How we experience and internalize God’s grace—or fail to do so—can have a tremendous positive or negative impact on the outcome of therapy. Thank God that His love and grace shine into, and then out of, our hearts. In experiencing His love toward us, we can give the same to another. So, God’s grace applied in a couple’s life can impact the outcome of marriage counseling. The truth is, many people fail in their ability to integrate grace in their personal lives and relationships.

4. **I have found that the loss of hope is a significant factor that determines the outcome of therapy.** Some just give up on their relationship. They think that it no longer makes sense to go on. They feel that they have tried all and nothing has worked, and therefore nothing else will. Some lose the perspective on time. They want things to work out immediately and forget that they have a lifetime together to work out their issues. That leads to their impatience and discouragement. Some want a perfect relationship but do not have one so they give up. Many people give up their relationship when they cannot see a future beyond their present disappointment and pain. A therapist would do well to ensure that the sessions are not spent just ruminating on the negative and unrelenting situations of the couple's life. Rather, she or he would guide them to look beyond their present experience to hope beyond their present horizon. If or when hope revives, a favorable outcome is more possible for them.
5. **It must be noted that a professional therapist is one who has the training, experience, and skills to understand couple and family dynamics and apply them to therapy and in the lives of the couple.** Counseling is both a science and an art. When a marriage counselor can connect with two persons, remain centered, and help them through their present issue,

the experience can be a most beautiful one. I have met many people that have remarked about the blessings that marriage counseling was for them. They recognized their need for help and support, took the leap, fought against the prevailing taboos, made the sacrifice, applied themselves to the experience, and learned a lot of skills to manage or solve many of the situations that they confront in life from time to time. Now they know that in life real people can have real problems and that other real people can help them overcome their problems. Now they know that God uses some professionals as His instruments of healing in crucial times in their lives, and that in some therapeutic environments, God's works out His will in our lives.

Marriage is a wonderful blessing and nurturing the one with whom one is blessed is a great decision. Sometimes it is easy but not always. If the wheels are spinning in mud, desperate attempts may lead one to overrev and become more stuck. Some help from outside of the relationship may be just what is needed. You can make that call or encourage another to do it when that is what is needed. Recognizing that need for help or support as early as possible is the best course of action and may help a couple have fuller and richer experiences for the duration of their marriage.

Balancing Marriage, Motherhood and Ministry

ELIZABETH PULE

“Bend down on one knee and then after I dip you down into the water, stand straight up on your own.” This was the instruction I gave to the 6 foot teenage boy I was baptizing. I knew I’d never be able to lift him out of the water on my own. Two wonderful things happened that day: 1. A young man gave his life to Jesus and 2. He asked me, a 7-month pregnant female pastor to do it. Not something you see every day.

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God invited me into ministry during a transformative year-long mission trip to New Zealand. Being a pastor was nowhere on my radar growing up. Sure, I enjoyed volunteering at church and serving God was important to me, but me? A pastor? I had just completed my undergrad in political science and was preparing to apply to law schools. That’s when God opened doors for me to serve as a volunteer pastor in New Zealand. My year away was filled with adventure, anxiety, affirmation of my calling, opportunities to share Jesus’ love, and even a warrant for my arrest. (*The arrest was for a hefty speeding ticket that was unpaid. I know this reads quite scandalously, but my infraction was an honest misunderstanding. No judgement, please.*) In short, the mission trip changed my life. I was certain that God wanted me to be a pastor. Now I just needed to figure out how that was going to happen.

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At the time there were no female pastors in Ontario, Canada. The Conference office was not about to send someone without a theology degree nor any formal training or pastoral experience in Ontario to seminary. For about two years I struggled with whether or not I heard His calling to ministry. Perhaps I had misunderstood those opportunities because it seemed that God had become quiet. Then, out of the silence God saw it fit in His perfect timing for the Ontario Conference to send me to the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University—fully sponsored. Can I get an Amen?! I still have the sponsorship letter from the Conference. It is a framed reminder of God’s providence in my life. The impossible had happened and I was on my way to getting my Masters of Divinity degree.

17 Years Later

Fast forward 17 years and anyone looking at my life has to conclude that God has done much to confirm his calling. I have had the privilege to serve in pastoral ministry, chaplaincy, and as co-director for Family, Singles, Women’s and Men’s ministry for the Ontario Conference. Life as a female pastor has been a combination of beautiful mountain-top experiences and the roughest of desert valleys. I know that dichotomy exists for most pastors, but my ministry journey has had added challenges. What brings some uniqueness to my pastoral experience is that I am also

married to a pastor and we have been working together for the last seven years. My husband, Orlando, is an incredibly patient, kind, and hard-working man. God gifted Orlando to me many years ago when we met in seminary. My mother's fears of her only daughter never getting married because she was a pastor vanished when I introduced my parents to Orlando.

We have three sons, Samuel (6), Isaiah (11) and Gabriel age (12)—solid biblical names for God's blessings. I am pretty sure the boys have an extra helping of energy cells and vocal chords because our home is loud and full of movement on most days. Because we had two kids immediately after we got married, balancing work, marriage, and family was demanding. I struggled with post partum depression after having Gabriel and distinctly remember being bitter for having to change diapers on my office floor while pregnant with our second son. "Why am I doing this all by myself?" I wondered disgustedly. I was sweaty, uncomfortable, and trying desperately to calm my wiggly baby. I fought through the tears that sabbath as Gabriel fussed. In that moment I felt overwhelmed as my pastor/mom worlds collided.

At the time, Orlando and I pastored different churches which meant we hardly saw each other. Although the churches were fairly close in proximity, the demands of ministry crept into our family time and put a strain on our newly married-, new baby-, pregnant-again-life. (*Long exhale.*) I did that a lot, actually. I exhaled from being tired, I exhaled from not communicating effectively with my husband, I exhaled from not having time with my friends, and I exhaled from having the dark cloud of postpartum depression hanging over me. I knew we could not go on successfully with both of us pastoring separate churches.

The Struggle is Real

For a couple of months I agonized about how I could be wife, mother, and pastor simultaneously. How would I manage to raise the boys, be a supportive wife, and be healthy while organizing ministry initiatives, giving bible

studies, and running meetings? I questioned if God's call to ministry was still valid now that I had children. I started to focus on self-care and took an extended maternity leave with our second son Isaiah. Orlando and I had an honest conversation with the conference administrators about the difficulty of pastoring in separate churches and the strain it placed on our family.

To their credit, they responded in kind by assigning me to be chaplain at the Adventist school beside the church where Orlando was the youth pastor. Another blessed miracle from God! This new ministry dynamic allowed us to be both husband AND wife in different contexts and still serve in our separate positions. We started to figure out a rhythm that included protected family time, new traditions with our two little boys and renewed intention toward strengthening our marriage relationship.

Being close to my parents meant free babysitting and support during evening meetings and long Sabbath days. They shared their delicious Filipino cooking every week, and all the emotional support we needed during those early years of marriage. For about four years we enjoyed ministering at home, school, and work. We were purposeful about scheduling date nights, sharing household responsibilities, and making sure the boys did not feel like "pastor's kids" at church or school. Dare I say, I had finally blended my life as wife, mother, and pastor and understood my purpose in each role. There were still contentious people, daunting ministry issues, sleepless nights, family drama, and discouragement. However, God's faithfulness sustained me. I am not simply writing some cliché phrase when I say that. God was speaking the encouragement I needed daily. He did it through my Bible readings, through hugs from my kids, through conversations with my colleagues, and when I poured out my frustrations in prayer, God strengthened me.

Shortly after I started exhaling less, I became pregnant with our third son, Samuel. The conference also informed us that they would be moving us to another church five hours east where we had no family, no free baby sitting, and no support system. I was gutted. My head

and heart filled with anxious thoughts: *How is pastoring together going to affect our marriage? How are the boys going to manage long sabbath days? How do we find a trustworthy babysitter?* It is interesting how quickly we can forget God's leading in the past when we are fearful of the future. God faithfully slowed my breathing and pointed me to Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." Even in unfamiliar ministry placements, all things still work together for good.

Time to Move

We made the move out east and started to minister with our two little boys and one on the way. At the beginning of pastoring together, Orlando and I were uncertain of how it was all going to work out. Sure, there were times when we got annoyed with each other—sometimes our schedules clashed, the meals were un-balanced or our clothes were wrinkled. However, we recognized God's hand in the new assignment.

The transition had its unique growing pains. As a pastoral couple we shared responsibilities equally and never tried to "power play" at board or business meetings. The church embraced our family as we adapted to life without free babysitting and ready-made Filipino food. My office had a little mattress for the boys to nap, tons of puzzles, books, toys, and a drawer full of snacks for those long days at church. While the majority of the church was accepting of their new pregnant associate pastor, there were some who were not as compassionate and understanding. I had been in ministry for about six years at that point and had not experienced such disdain and disrespect for women in ministry. In spite of the less than encouraging exceptions, the members ones that loved and supported me always spoke louder. I could decide what voices I wanted to hear, the negative or positive ones. It took a couple of years but I learned how to always choose the latter.

When our third son Samuel was born in 2013, the tribe was complete and a new

dimension was added to our family dynamic. All that deep exhaling I did at the beginning of our marriage returned with a vengeance. At a routine check-up we were told that Samuel did not meet some of the developmental milestones for his age. After 10 months of doctor visits, applications, research, waiting lists, tantrums and testing, Samuel was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. "Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), commonly referred to as Autism, is a complex developmental brain disorder caused by a combination of genetic and environmental influences. ASD is characterized, in varying degrees, by communication difficulties, social and behavioural challenges, and repetitive behaviours and is considered to be a lifespan disorder. An estimated 1 in 68 diagnosed children is on the autism spectrum."

A Million Questions

I had a million questions whirling around in my head. *What kind of future would our son have? Would he have any friends? How would he learn? Would he be bullied?* During my many sleepless nights, God sent the Holy Spirit to calm my troubled heart, reminding me again that "in all things, I work for the good; even in the tantrums, and even in your fears." For more than 400 days our family prayed the same prayer every morning. "God, please let Samuel use his words," since communicating was his biggest challenge. Because Samuel could not express himself, he would thrash and cry if he was opposed in any way. The beginning of our journey as a special needs family was intensely challenging. I still needed to care for our other boys, effectively minister at church and in the community, spend time with my husband, and and make sure I was keeping healthy on all fronts. Our understanding church family journeyed with us through it all. They listened compassionately as we expressed our fears, hugged us when we cried, and prayed for us constantly. Even though we have moved from that church, members still connect with us regularly to check on our family. Remember all the apprehension I experienced years before about moving/ working with my husband, etc.? I can look back now and see how providential all of it was. God knew we needed an empathetic

church filled with other special needs families. He knew we needed a community that would accept a husband and wife pastoral team, and He knew our boys would make life-long friends along the way.

Now allow me to share the highlight reel of God's supremacy and wisdom. Over the past three years our Samuel, now 6, has not only learned how to "use his words," but now he reads at grade 4 level, counts past 1000, identifies colors and shapes, and can independently use the potty. He sings worship songs from memory—accompanied by the best joyful moves you've ever seen—plays the piano, and likes to DJ on my cellphone. *Nothing is impossible for God!*

God called me, an almost law school student into pastoral ministry, opened doors for me to study and work, gifted me with a wonderful husband, three adventurous boys, and tons of opportunities to love others—especially our

special needs families. For me, being a pastor and married to a pastor means that our whole family works together with Jesus. It means being gentle with myself because I will inevitably make mistakes. It means acknowledging God's authority in my life, and being faithful to His call as a wife, mom, and pastor. It means accepting His peace for our future and giving thanks for His providence. I recognize there will be days of utter exhaustion, crumpled shirts, messy rooms, miscommunication, and disappointments. There will also be days of triumph, coordinated schedules, well-balanced meals, joyful laughter, and peaceful hearts. I celebrate and praise God for the whole spectrum and everything in-between.

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Family Camp: Outreach and Reclaiming

ANNE-MAY MÜLLER

“Sorry, I can’t play with you now. Mum is busy planning family camp, so please go and play with your brother,” I heard myself say.

“Family camp?” my 7-year old responded with excitement, “Are we going to Family Camp soon? When? Tomorrow? I can help you! I can pack my own bag. Can I bring my best friend?” The excited questions seemed to rush out all at once.

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For us, Family Camp has always been something to look forward to. Let me explain why and also share why my son was so eager to bring his best friend who is from a non-Christian family.

Family Camp is of course a busy time for me, but my children know that they will get to meet many other children their own age. They can look forward to a fun weekend with lots of games, interactive worships, good fellowship, outdoor games, and time with their parents and other adults, whom they get to know much better. If the children love going to family camp, the adults usually do too.

So how can we use these camps for outreach and reclaiming? I do not pretend to have the answer to that, but I can tell you how we have experienced it in the Danish Union.

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When I plan a family camp with my team of volunteers, we always plan around these three areas: Social, Spiritual, and Educational enrichment. We want all three aspects of engagement to be present at our camps. We do not focus on only one of the areas, but are aiming for a wholistic experience every time we meet. That way there is something for families who are active in church and have a vibrant spiritual life, families who are not so familiar with the church and God, and families with limited knowledge of God and who attend because they have friends who go.

The three areas are important to all of us if we want to become better families, and therefore it is important to have a balanced program that makes room for all of them.

Social Interaction

Some adults can feel very lonely in their “parenting bubble.” The children take up all their energy, time, and mental resources. The parents can sometimes feel socially hungry. They seldom have the opportunity to have adult conversations or hang out with other adults. To help meet this need for adult connection, we include extra time around the meals and in the evenings for adults to interact. This provides time for parents to become friends as they get to know each other. It is valuable to talk

to other parents about the challenges and joys of parenting. It can also lighten the burden to find out that other families struggle with the same things. These newly formed friendships can carry them through the tough days. To exchange views and advice of what it means to be a family today in our busy world gives the families the support they often lack, and it gives them confidence and tools to tackle issues when they get home.

We always include an outdoor activity for both children and adults—no matter what the weather is like. We get fresh air, have fun together, and get a chance to talk to each other. It is usually a short walk around the campsite with different fun or challenging missions or exercises. Maybe it is a bonfire where we roast apples, an obstacle course, a quiz, charades in the woods, or whatever the creative planners can dream up. These activities are a great opportunity for adults and children to do the often-forgotten discipline—playing together.

When you have been outside trying to fill a barrel with water only using your hands, faster than the team you are competing against, the fun of working with your team breaks down barriers. It is easier to talk about life when you have just completed a challenge and had fun together.

There is always a game night planned for the families where traditional games are played—the games our grandparents and great-grandparents played before technology was a part of our lives). These games are great fun and we laugh a lot. Children love it because they see the adults joining them in their playful world. This helps the children to build relationships with the other adults as well as their parents.

A table tennis game can be just as important an item in the program as a lecture, because that is where we build the social ties and find new friends to have as companions in this life-journey and family-building business.

Another thing that helps create the relaxed atmosphere is that the food is provided for everyone. The families do not even have to help

with the dishes. To busy families with young children, that is something of a treat! When the practical things are taken care of, it makes room for the parents to relax and gives them the extra energy to pour into their own family and the relationships they are developing with the other adults present.

Spiritual Experiences

We do plan a lot of spiritual content in our Family Camps as well. Evening and morning worships are always done as “family-worships” even though we may be 100 participants in the room. The family as a whole provides the worship for the group. It is simple, interesting, interactive and fun. It contains praise, singing, a lesson and prayer, but conducted in a way that each family can emulate at home. Many families find it difficult to carve out time for family worship, and when they do, it can be challenging to know what to do and how to do it. That is why we always make sure to tell the families that this family worship is simple to do and easy to implement, so that they can try it at home when they return. We are showing the parents and the children that family worship is a cozy time, a fun time, a meaningful time, an important time. When a weekend camp is over, each family has been part of four family worships, which have given them resources and ideas to strengthen worship time at home. The non-practicing Christian or non-Christian families understand and learn the importance of such worships. All parents want to pass on good values to their children, and they see the effect it has on their family when time is set aside for family worship.

When we plan Sabbath worship service, it is always a family worship. This is not a service with a long sermon for the adults and a short children’s story. It is an inter-generational worship experience that has creative elements that children understand and find spiritually enriching. We can show children and parents that church is fun and that good worship can be interesting and meaningful. If it is interesting and meaningful to our children, it is usually interesting and meaningful to families who are not so familiar with Christianity or church life.

Educational Growth

All parents want to be the best parents they can be. That is why we aim for high-quality training at our Family Camps. Psychologists, family professionals, teachers, therapists, pedagogy professionals, dietitians, media experts etc. come and teach the adults. It is important that we take the time to be better at what we do, but many parents are lost in the vast supply of ideas about parenting. We offer solid instruction to the parents while the children enjoy activity time or spiritual meetings administered by capable, responsible adult volunteers.

The sessions are well received, and both Christian and non-Christian parents benefit from the wide variety of areas that are covered. We aim to be open to the many varying aspects of parenting, child-development, health, and mental growth, but we also tackle difficult issues such as sexuality, personal boundaries, media-usage etc. At the end of a family camp we ask participants what subjects and areas they would like to learn more about at future family camps. That way, we have an idea of what they are looking for and what areas are most relevant to them right now.

To give parents the resources and the skills to do better at home is rewarding for both parents and children. They are thankful for the new skills they learned as a result of carving out valuable time to invest in their family. These parents experience a renewed energy and trust in their own ability as parents when they go home.

Your turn

So why do we have a wide variety of families attending our camps? Maybe because we have the three-fold focus. Maybe because we try and make it user-friendly to families who do not have a tight connection to a local Adventist

Church. Most likely, however, it is because the families who attend love to come to Family Camp. They invite their friends to a church setting because it is an experience that they can relate to. Often, we have seen that families who like to attend pay for another family to come so they can get the experience as well.

Increasingly, churches in Denmark are seeing the rise of families where only one of the spouses is a professing and active Christian. It is important to make room for those families as well. Family Camp is one such event, where the whole family can be comfortable in being together in a church-setting without the non-Christian spouse feeling overwhelmed by the experience. The children in such families are also blessed because they have both their parents attending a spiritual event together. Family Camp is sometimes the first church these families attend, and it simultaneously offers parents the best possible resources to raise their children and pass on good values. This is the desire of every parent.

Back to the question my son asked me as we prepared for camp. My answer was an enthusiastic “Yes!” Not only could he bring his best friend, but his best friend managed to convince his parents that they should all go, and they came.

I do believe that Family Camp can be a way of connecting with families that do not consider themselves Christian or Adventist. I do believe Family Camp can be a way of reconnecting with families that we have lost contact with for whatever reason, and I do believe Family Camp can be a place where families with only one of the parents being Adventist can find ways to connect as a family to each other on the spiritual and value-based levels.

I urge you to consider how your planning of Family Camps can assist you in reaching families with the grace of Jesus and the love God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Molding Your Child's Development, Part 1: The Forces that Shape the Worldview of Your Child

KATELYN CAMPBELL AND JOSEPH KIDDER

“Parents should direct the instruction and training of their children while very young, to the end that they may be Christians. They are placed in our care to be trained, not as heirs to the throne of an earthly empire, but as kings unto God, to reign through unending ages.”¹ In this passage taken from Ellen White’s *Patriarchs and Prophets*, we can clearly see that the role of parent is of utmost significance. Mothers and fathers are tasked with caring for God’s treasured children. They are to teach them, train them, shape them, and empower them.

One of the most important things a parent can do for their child is to grow a Biblical worldview within that child’s heart. Doing so will set the young boy or girl on a positive trajectory in relationship with Jesus Christ. In this three-part article series we will discuss biblical worldview, the developmental stages of children, and what parents can do to influence them and build them up in the Lord. This is the heavenly task parents have been given.

From birth until a child’s preteen years, the mother, father, and primary care-givers tend to hold the greatest sway and impact in a child’s life. In a study conducted by Fuller Youth

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Institute, it was found that “parents continue to be the single greatest influence on their children’s faith.”² After childhood parental influence is usually reduced, with school, peers, media, and the like tending to have a greater impact on the child. However, it is in these childhood years when parental influence is greatest that worldview primarily develops. Therefore, if parents help their children create a solid Biblical foundation before their teenage years, they will be setting them up for lifelong Christian commitment.

This is why in these articles we will be focusing on the parenting of children from infancy until about the age of 12 or 13. In this installment, we will discuss just what Biblical worldview is, determine how to engage with worldview at a child’s various developmental stages, and look at a prime Biblical example of parental influence on a child’s worldview. With prayerful and intentional forethought, parents can use the early years of their children’s lives to have an eternal impact.

Biblical Worldview

For the sake of this article, we define worldview as a collection of basic assumptions about life and the world, creating vision through which the individual can see. Your child’s worldview is what is going to help orient him or her in life. Like a map which

turns meaningless terrain into distinguishable landmarks, worldview provides a means for interpreting the reality of the world. The worldview that your child develops will answer key questions for them: Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is real? What is right and wrong? All of these questions and more are answered by the worldview your child develops, shaping his or her outlook and basic assumptions. Everyone has a worldview, but there are many different philosophies that are used as the basis for these worldviews: evolution, creation, fatalism, and humanism are a few examples. The purpose of this article is to help you develop a *Biblical* worldview in your children that will orient them to live the Christian life to it's fullest.

Just what is a Biblical worldview? There are several foundational components to it. A Biblical worldview holds the Scriptures as authoritative divine revelation. God as creator, His character of righteousness and love, His plan for our lives, Jesus' saving sacrifice, redeeming grace, and the Ten Commandments are all bedrocks for a biblical worldview. Ultimately, a biblical worldview is founded upon a belief in God and commitment to following Him. As James Sire notes, "In the biblical worldview, in short, everything is first and foremost determined by the nature and character of God."³ Through this lens, Jesus is seen as our Creator, Savior, Redeemer, and Friend, and by utilizing a Biblical worldview, we are best able to think like Jesus, fulfilling Paul's words in Philippians 2:5: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (KJV).

Research conducted by George Barna has noted that most children begin developing their own worldview by the mere age of 2. The child's moral compass is fairly determined by the age of 9, and by the time a child turns 13, worldview is usually fully formed and set.⁴ All new experiences will be filtered through this worldview for interpretation and understanding. Just as physical and mental development is crucial in childhood, the formation of worldview from birth until 13 will set the trajectory for a child's future.

The assumptions and perceptions that comprise a child's worldview not only answers basic questions about the world, but they help establish the child's values and priorities, which in turn direct behavior and decision-making. No decision is made without a worldview. In order to make positive, healthy decisions, a child needs a positive, healthy worldview. A Biblical worldview can help children make intelligent decisions that will honor God and be a benefit to others as well as themselves. This is what God wants to see in the lives of his children: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).⁵ This is what a biblical worldview has to offer: an opportunity to live the life our Creator has meant for us to live.

Stages of Learning

Jean Piaget, a noted psychologist, laid substantial foundation for understanding the mental development of children. He proposed that a person's cognitive development occurs in four basic and primary stages⁶. From birth until about the age of 2 is the sensorimotor stage. During this time, the child learns from personal sensory engagement with the world around him or her. Learning occurs through touching, tasting, watching, smelling, and hearing. The world begins to be ordered for the child as he or she encounters and manipulates the objects within it. Parents can teach their children in a sensory-oriented way, through allowing them to see, hear, touch, and act in order to understand the world. Here are some examples: Visually show children pictures of animals or Bible characters; sing Bible-oriented songs with your children; guide them in folding their hands for prayer; give them leaves, rocks, or other objects from nature to touch and hold. The more you can connect your child with Jesus through his or her senses, the more the child will understand him.

From about age 2 through 7, the child is in the preoperational stage. During this time, memory and imagination begin to develop, and concepts of the past, present, and future solidify. Symbolic ideas begin to make sense

to the child, meaning that he or she is able to recognize that a word or object can stand for something else. Teaching children at this age means utilizing their natural propensity for imagination. Encourage them to draw out Bible stories, or join your children in acting the stories out. You can take them to a zoo, aquarium, or park and invite them to imagine Jesus creating all the plants, trees, and animals.

In her book, *Putting Their Hands in His*, Ruthie Jacobsen writes, “The Master Story Teller—Christ—often used objects in nature to help to embed a profound spiritual truth. He used the visible things of nature that His listeners were most familiar with—the waving fields of grain, the farmer planting his crops, a lost lamb. There are dramatic and mundane lessons to be drawn from nature. Some can be scary, even frightening to a child, but even from these realities of nature, there are powerful truths. And there are also stories and lessons of God’s majesty and power.”⁷⁷ Because children gain an understanding of time during this stage, you can explain the story of the Garden of Eden, God’s presence in our lives now, and His soon Second Coming so they can understand the timeline of the world. You can also begin teaching your children portions of Scripture to memorize, rewarding them for their efforts: at this age many kids will be eager to memorize. Your child’s imagination, concept of time, and capacity for memory are all key for helping him or her learn.

Ages 7 through 11 typically mark the concrete operational stage. A child in this stage will begin to develop logical thought processing. Thinking and problem solving becomes something the child can do internally within their own minds and without physically manipulating anything. During this time you can walk your child through the process of fact, truth, and application. First, tell Bible stories and explain the knowledge found in scripture—these are the facts. Once the facts are established, discuss what lessons can be learned from these stories and passages of the Bible—these are the truths. Finally, talk over with your child how the truths found in Scripture make a difference in his or her life and even

how these lessons and ideas can be shared with others—this is the application. This will lead to spiritual growth and maturity in the life of your child. At this age, children will be able to think through these deeper concepts thoughtfully and logically, so be sure to engage them in such thinking.

Ocurring from 11 years old and up, the formal operational stage features the refinement of a child’s ability to logically work through mental problems. Children are able to comprehend more abstract concepts, allowing them to move from simple and concrete facts to deeper, more life-changing ideas. Scripture reading can become more than informational: it can be transformational. During this time, parents can teach their children that every part of Scripture is for spiritual growth and maturity, providing them with development in wisdom and opportunities for sanctification. This age marks the time when a child’s spirituality truly starts becoming his or her own. It is important to encourage children to take the grand story of the Bible as their own personal story, which provides a means to eternal life (Philippians 2:16).

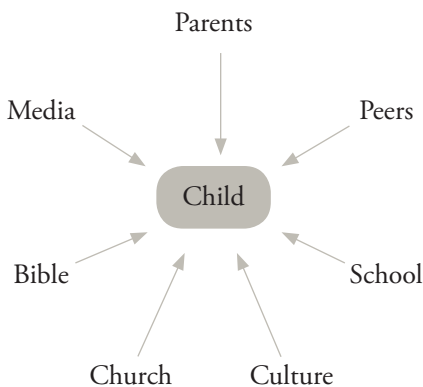
By keeping these stages of learning in mind, parents can best teach their children about God and the Bible, meeting their children where they are in their cognitive development. However, no matter exactly *how* parents teach their children, it is perhaps most important that parents simply keep in mind to teach their children about the character of God—his love, acceptance, forgiveness, goodness, and more. Ellen White describes how Jesus’ own parents did this for him: “They reminded Jesus of his identity as the Son of God. They taught him through songs and through nature. As they taught him, they themselves grew and learned more about God and his scriptures.”⁷⁸ Just as Jesus’ parents grew to know God better as they taught Him His character, parents today can also grow in their understanding of God even as they instruct their children.

The Effect of Culture

A recent survey conducted by the American Culture and Faith Institute revealed that over

half of adults in the United States (51%) believe that the nation's current pervasive culture has an overall negative effect upon children and teenagers.⁹ The survey showed that 93% of adults who claim a Biblical worldview believe that culture negatively impacts children, and even many adults (48%) who do not ascribe to a Biblical worldview still say that the country's common culture affects children in a poor way. If we as Christians wish to support the spiritual growth of our children, it may be wise to see how elements of culture impact them and what can be done to reduce negative impact and increase positive impact. No person exists in a vacuum: we are all affected by what goes on around us and to us within our environments.

The Forces that Shape the Worldview of Your Child



In the image above are some primary factors that can influence a child. When a child is young, his or her parents will have the greatest amount of influence in that child's life. In time as the child grows up, other factors will have greater influence. However, if the parents are intentional about teaching their child and setting their child down a good path at an early age, he or she will know how to navigate the other influential factors of life much better later on. During childhood it is crucial for parents to carefully consider what aspects of culture they want their children to engage with, and from which parts of culture they want to shelter them.

This question, in essence, is asking what kind of microculture you want to create. A

microculture is “a distinctive culture shared by a small group that is often based on location or within an organization.”¹⁰ While your family is set in the midst of local culture—complete with language, traditions, media, etc.—the family is itself a distinct culture. It can be influenced by surrounding cultural aspects, but it has its own established rules, customs, and ways of doing life. Within the home, parents get to set the tone and parameters for the family culture. As children grow up, they will in turn contribute to the microculture, but when the family first begins, it is the mother and father who contribute most to the development of the microculture. It is within this microculture that children will begin learning basic assumptions about the world around them as their worldviews begin to develop. According to most authorities in childhood development,¹¹ it is the mother and father (the primary caregivers) who are most influential to a child's growth. Thus, the question to parents remains: What kind of microculture do you want your family to have?

If you are seeking to raise your child with a Biblical worldview, your family's microculture needs to be intentionally crafted to promote this worldview. Ellen White writes, “Prayerfully, unitedly, the father and the mother should bear the grave responsibility of guiding their children aright.”¹² A good place to begin this thoughtful development of your microculture is to examine what Scripture suggests: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8). If you are incorporating language that is lovely, media that is pure, rules that are just, and the like, you are creating an external framework to positively influence your children.

Examine the furnishings of your microculture—the music that plays in your home, the art that hangs on the walls, the stories you read together at night. Are they

virtuous? Do they teach about God? In this age of heightened technology and media focus, we recommend limiting your family's screen time, evaluating what your children are watching, and setting positive examples for them to follow. Carefully and thoughtfully select content which will build your family up. Spend time discussing what you watch or play, pointing out lessons about morals and considering what God might have found pleasing or displeasing.¹³

But don't let your culture be one that simply sits on the couch all day long! Fill your family's time with fun and affirming activities. It may be easy to think of all the things you *don't* want in your family's microculture. But consider this parable from Jesus:

“When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. Then he says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order. Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation” (Matthew 12:43-45).

Don't just empty your house of evil. Fill it with goodness and the presence of God. Have fun with your children. Play games, read books, cook food, have adventures, and all along the way teach your children about their Heavenly Father. The Psalmist wrote of this joy of a life spent with God, saying:

“YOU WILL SHOW ME THE PATH OF LIFE;
IN YOUR PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY;
AT YOUR RIGHT HAND ARE PLEASURES
FOREVERMORE”
(PSALM 16:11)

With healthy and direct influence, parents can create such a culture for their children, and through this culture they will experience the fullness of joy of God and develop a Biblical worldview.

The Influence of Parents: Lessons from the Life of Timothy

In the New Testament, Timothy is a primary example of what it looks like for a young person to be raised with a Biblical worldview. Timothy was a pastor and evangelist right alongside Paul, but it took years of discipling for him to become such a prominent preacher of the gospel. Scripture tells us that his family was very instrumental in Timothy's spiritual development. In 1 Timothy, Paul writes to the young man, saying, “...I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also” (1 Timothy 1:5).

Both Timothy's mother and grandmother raised him in the faith of the Lord. Their influence was so instrumental that believers in the surrounding area where he lived had plenty of positive things to say about him. “Then [Paul] came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:1,2). Before ever making contact with the great evangelist Paul, Timothy's faith in the Lord was evident, grown through his experience at home. Ellen White writes, “the piety and influence of his home life was not of a cheap order, but pure, sensible, and uncorrupted by false sentiments. The moral influence of his home was substantial, not fitful, not impulsive, not changeable. The Word of God was the rule which guided Timothy. He received his instruction line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little. Impressions of the highest possible order were kept before his mind. His home instructors cooperated with God in educating this young man to bear the burdens that were to come upon him at an early age.”¹⁴ The frontline of the cultivation of Biblical worldview starts with the child's parents and primary caregivers.

The Responsibility of the Community of Faith

Although we have been talking about the influence of parents, all believers should be involved in the spiritual development of children, youth, and young adults. Of course in the life of Timothy, after Paul decided to take the young man under his wing, a mentorship process began. In *Philippians 2:22*, Paul says of Timothy to the church of Philippi, “you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.” A strong relational bond was formed between these two. Paul was intentional about his close relationship with Timothy, teaching him and empowering him with opportunities to serve and expand the kingdom of God.

In fact, Paul had tremendous faith and trust in this young man. “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church” (*1 Corinthians 4:17*). Paul built up his prodigy and then sent him out to do great things for God. We can clearly see here the need for young people to have additional teachers and mentors outside of their immediate family. After all, as the old African proverb goes, it takes a village to raise a child. Paul desired to build a culture of mentorship within the church, something which he himself modeled and instructed others to do as well.

In the book of *Titus*, Paul wrote to another of his mentees, penning these words: “...older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having

nothing evil to say of you” (*Titus 2:2-8*). Paul was instructing the older men and women of the church to not only be responsible for their own behaviors but to be sure to train up the next generation of believers in a like manner. The church is meant to be a training ground for children and young adults to grow in Christ. As the Psalmist writes, “One generation shall praise your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts” (*Psalms 145:4*).

Peter wrote in *1 Peter 5:1-2*, “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you...” As members of a community of faith, the entire church is called upon to mentor and compassionately instruct boys and girls, young men and women, as they grow as Christians. We all have a part to play in the cultivation of the next generation’s worldview.

We can see such mentorship all throughout the Bible: Eli ministered to the young boy Samuel within the temple, teaching him about the voice of God (*1 Samuel 2:11; 1 Samuel 3*); Naomi mentored her bereaved daughter-in-law, Ruth, and taught her all about the true God of heaven and earth (*Ruth 1:15-19*); Mordechai comforted and empowered his cousin Esther, encouraging her to fulfill the plan God had put before her (*Esther 4*); and the married couple Priscilla and Aquila took in the young preacher Apollos and taught him new truths about Christ (*Acts 18:24-26*). When you begin looking for them, you will be surprised what young people God may put into your path.

Conclusion

The development of a Biblical worldview does not happen overnight or without thought or intentionality: it takes parents committed to teaching and growing their children after God’s own heart. As *Proverbs 22:6* says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” If you truly wish to see your son or daughter grow into a mature, strong person of faith, begin that process today.

Parents always have been and will continue to be the greatest impactors upon a child's faith. The previously mentioned study conducted by the Fuller Youth Institute has debunked the common misconception in today's cultural climate that parents have less and less influence upon their children.¹⁵ This idea simply is not true. In spite of the allures of culture, parents still hold the strongest sway over the worldview of their children.

The influence of a parent can never be underestimated. Your children are always watching and listening, ready to be influenced and molded by you, the parents. By recognizing where your child is in his or her developmental growth, you can engage with him or her in ways that best teach about Christ. Here we have begun to outline ways that you can do this—reading, applying, and memorizing Scripture; singing praise songs and psalms together; and appreciating and finding God's creative power in nature, among others. In the next two articles we will discuss more practical ways and methods you can implement in your home to grow your child in God.

Notes

- ¹ Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Napa, ID: Pacific Press, 2002), 244.
- ² Dustin McClure, "Helping Kids Keep the Faith," Fuller Youth Institute, accessed March 28, 2019, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/helping-kids-keep-the-faith>.
- ³ James Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 55.
- ⁴ Barna Group, Ltd., "Changes in Worldview Among Christians over the Past 13 Years," March 9, 2009 <https://www.barna.com/research/barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years/>.
- ⁵ Unless otherwise noted all Bible quotes are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV).
- ⁶ Saul McLeod, "Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development," Simply Psychology, accessed March 28, 2019. <https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html#stages>.
- ⁷ Ruthie Jacobsen, *Putting Their Hands in His* (Pittsburgh, PA: Autumn House, 2001), 63.
- ⁸ Ellen White, *Youth's Instructor* (Sept. 8, 1898).
- ⁹ George Barna, "Americans Worried About Children," June 28, 2017. <http://www.georgebarna.com/research-flow/2017/6/28/americans-worried-about-children>.
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- ¹² Ellen White, *Review and Herald* (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press, 2002).
- ¹³ Joseph Kidder and David Penno, "A Christian Perspective on Watching Secular TV Programming," Healthy Families for Eternity (Silver Spring, MD: North American Division Corporation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church), 61-62.
- ¹⁴ Ellen White, *SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7* (Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1957), 918.
- ¹⁵ Dustin McClure, "Helping Kids Keep the Faith."

“LOVE GOD, YOUR GOD, WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART: LOVE HIM WITH ALL THAT’S IN YOU, LOVE HIM WITH ALL YOU’VE GOT! WRITE THESE COMMANDMENTS THAT I’VE GIVEN YOU TODAY ON YOUR HEARTS. GET THEM INSIDE OF YOU AND THEN GET THEM INSIDE YOUR CHILDREN. TALK ABOUT THEM WHEREVER YOU ARE, SITTING AT HOME OR WALKING IN THE STREET; TALK ABOUT THEM FROM THE TIME YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING TO WHEN YOU FALL INTO BED AT NIGHT.”
DEUTERONOMY 6:5-8 (MSG)

In today’s world, family time is a rare commodity. Yet, the words of Deuteronomy still apply! Leadership is given to the parents. “Get them inside of YOU” first, God seems to say, **then** get them inside your children! The Lord is very clear about His expectation of home leadership; parents must obey His commandments first and then “get them inside their children.” Proverbs 22:6 gives instruction from the oldest parenting manual, the Bible: “Train up a child in the way he should go [teaching him to seek God’s wisdom and will for his abilities and talents], even when he is old he will not depart from it” (AMP). Yet, often today the teaching of principles to children is left to the school and the church. Note the

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Social Media: Blessing or Curse!

WILMA KIRK-LEE

definition of leadership: a person who guides or directs a group.

In the not too distant past, families gathered around the dinner table and shared about their day with each other. Today, few families share a daily meal and when they are all in the same place, they are connected to the world beyond their table through their smartphones and other media.

Let’s look at some statistics from Common Sense Media, a leading source of entertainment and technology recommendations for families:

- Mobile media have become a nearly universal part of the children’s media landscape, across all levels of society.
- Nearly all (98 percent) children age 8 and under live in a home with some type of mobile device, the same percentage that have a TV in the home. Mobile media ownership is up from 75 percent in 2013 and 52 percent in 2011
- Ninety-five percent of families with children age 8 and under now have a smartphone, up from 63 percent in 2013 and 41 percent in 2011, and 78 percent have a tablet (up from 40 percent in 2013 and 8 percent just six years ago in 2011).

- 42 percent of children now have their own tablet device—up from 7 percent four years ago and less than 1 percent in 2011.

According to a Pew survey conducted during 2014 and 2015, 94 percent of teens who go online using a mobile device do so daily. Teens use multiple social platforms. Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat are the most popular, and 71 percent of teens say they use more than one social media site.

“THE END AND CULMINATION OF ALL THINGS IS NEAR. THEREFORE, BE SOUND-MINDED AND SELF-CONTROLLED FOR THE PURPOSE OF PRAYER [STAYING BALANCED AND FOCUSED ON THE THINGS OF GOD SO THAT YOUR COMMUNICATION WILL BE CLEAR, REASONABLE, SPECIFIC AND PLEASING TO HIM.]”
1 PETER 4:7 (AMP)

The Challenge of Technology

Modern technology has brought never before dreamt of challenges to home and family life. Previous generations communicated to those outside the home using a phone that was attached to a wall in the family home. If you were away from home, you looked for a phonebooth and hoped you had a quarter to make the call. People would use the phone in the booth to speak with others and to leave information behind—names and numbers posted somewhere on the wall of the phone booth. Only people who entered that particular phone booth would know the name or number.

In the era of the phone booth, I was taught the following: “Fools names and fools faces are always found in public places!” In the age of “anonymous” social media seems, does this adage still apply? Yes it does—even though we are led to think that things posted online can’t be seen. **They are always there!** When today’s young people apply to college or for employment, someone reviews their social media account. What they have posted can make the difference between acceptance or rejection.

Is there Any Hope?

So what’s a parent to do? How do today’s parents manage the ever-present media landscape? Do they have to move “off the grid” to prevent their children from using social media? What is the balance? These are great questions

The first thing to consider is this: Principles of value are usually **caught** not **taught**. Parents must examine at their own social media habits and usage. Everyone today owns a smartphone. Some children live in a home that does not have a landline just a smartphone. Adults pay for and distribute smartphones to their children in the home. They also make the smartphone the constant companion in their life. Healthy technology use must be demonstrated first by example. Parents must model this behavior or their children will never learn the lessons they hope to teach. Do we even know what is healthy use of technology and what is not?

No matter where you are or who you are, there is one thing in life that is the same for everyone: **Time!** Each of us is governed by 365 days a year, 52 weeks a year, 7 days per week, 24, 1140 minutes, and 86,000 seconds in a day. Our time belongs to God. Ellen White wrote that “Every moment is His and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory. Of no talent He has given will He require a more strict account than of our time (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 342).

Self-Control/Temperance in All Things

In order to train our children to learn self-control (temperance) when consuming or using media, self-control must be an intentional part of our family lifestyle. There’s a place for media, but there is nothing like “the ministry of **presence**.” Parents must provide an opportunity for children to share their feelings, concerns, doubts, and challenges without distraction or being rushed. This requires that parents prioritize how this time will be spent.

Again, the Lord asks us to prioritize our time with Him. Listen to Him speak in Psalm 46:10: “Step out of the traffic! Take a long, loving look at Me, your High God, above politics, above everything” (MSG). Long before there was modern technology, God knew we could easily be distracted by our time priorities. When we place God first in our time priorities, He reminds us of the precious gifts He has entrusted to us in our children. He also reminds us to be the example for our children who in turn reflect His love to us.

Too often, temperance or self-control is only mentioned in relation issues of substance abuse. If we consider self-control (temperance) as a lifestyle, then we will be far more conscious of how we use things in this life that impact our time, including our devices. Paul states it this way, “Now every athlete who [goes into training and] competes in the games is disciplined and exercises self-control in all things,” (1 Corinthians 9:25, AMP).

We should encourage temperate use of media that is age-appropriate. Research shows that children under the age of six should not be allowed to use media. Additionally, parents should limit media usage for children older than six and restrict their access to media.

Phones and other media should be placed in a central, monitored location during meal times and at bedtime. When parents adhere to these guidelines and model them for their children, they are training up their children in the way that they should go. Remember principles are **caught** not **taught!**

Being a model leader is always difficult. Yet, our God entrusts us with training our children in the way they should go, and He’s also working on us at the same time! What a wonderful manifestation of love and grace. We provide our children with a healthy legacy by the time, memories, and feelings of connectedness with which they leave our homes. To accomplish this noble aspiration requires two things: **Time** and **Presence!** Both of these are priceless! The choice to use them wisely is up to us!

Conclusion

It is time to look at how we spend our time. Is Sabbath the only time we give to the Lord and His work? Are we so busy making a living that we have forgotten how to live? Maybe small steps would help.

Begin by encouraging daily Sabbath School study and personal worship time. The discussions we have at the family table during our meals could be focused on what we learned from our time with God in study.

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(Use the following assessment to see how much time you spend with your own media.)

HANDOUT

NOMOPHOBIA

*(irrational fear of being without your mobile phone
or being unable to use your phone for some reason)*

Are you a smartphone junkie? Rate each item on a scale of 1 (“completely disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”) and tally up your total score to find out. Be honest!

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. I would feel uncomfortable without constant access to information through my smartphone.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>7. If I did not have a data signal or could not connect to Wi-Fi, then I would constantly check to see if I had a signal or could find a Wi-Fi network.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |
| <p>2. I would be annoyed if I could not look information up on my smartphone when I wanted to do so.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>8. If I could not use my smartphone, I would be afraid of getting stranded somewhere.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |
| <p>3. Being unable to get the news (e.g., happenings, weather, etc.) on my smartphone would make me nervous.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>9. If I could not check my smartphone for a while, I would feel a desire to check it.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |
| <p>4. I would be annoyed if I could not use my smartphone and/or its capabilities when I wanted to do so.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>10. If I did not have my smartphone with me ... I would feel anxious because I could not instantly communicate with my family and/or friends.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |
| <p>5. Running out of battery in my smartphone would scare me.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>11. I would be worried because my family and/or friends could not reach me.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |
| <p>6. If I were to run out of credits or hit my monthly data limit, I would panic.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> | <p>12. I would feel nervous because I would not be able to receive text messages and calls.</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</p> |

..... HANDOUT

13. I would be anxious because I could not keep in touch with my family and/or friends.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I would be nervous because I could not know if someone had tried to get a hold of me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I would feel anxious because my constant connection to my family and friends would be broken.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I would be nervous because I would be disconnected from my online identity.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I would be uncomfortable because I could not stay up-to-date with social media and online networks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I would feel awkward because I could not check my notifications for updates from my connections and online networks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. I would feel anxious because I could not check my email messages.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. I would feel weird because I would not know what to do.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

How You Score

20: Not at all *nomophobic*. You have a very healthy relationship with your device and have no problem being separated from it.

21-60: *Mild nomophobia*. You get a little antsy when you forget your phone at home for a day or get stuck somewhere without WiFi, but the anxiety isn't too overwhelming.

61-100: *Moderate nomophobia*. You're pretty attached to your device. You often check for updates while you're walking down the street or talking to a friend, and you often feel anxious when you're disconnected. *Time for a digital detox?*

101-120: *Severe nomophobia*. You can barely go for 60 seconds without checking your phone. It's the first thing you check in the morning and the last at night, and dominates most of your activities in-between. It might be time for a serious intervention.

What Do You Want Me to Do for You? Jesus' Blueprint of Generosity

DIANE THURBER

The World Health Organization shares the following key facts about blindness and visual impairment:

- Globally, it is estimated that approximately 1.3 billion people live with some form of vision impairment.
- With regards to distance vision, 188.5 million people have mild vision impairment, 217 million have moderate to severe vision impairment, and 36 million people are blind.
- Approximately 80% of all vision impairment globally is considered avoidable.
- Most people with vision impairment are over the age of 50 years.

It can be overwhelming when one reflects on these statistics. But we don't have to go too far to realize that we know someone who navigates life with vision challenges. Every community in every country on every continent has someone who is blind or visually impaired, and more times than not these individuals are marginalized by society. The reasons may be bewilderment, superstition, lack of knowledge, skill, resources, or for some, apathy.

Diane Thurber is President of Christian Record Services, Inc., an official ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.

I received a phone call from a woman who just wanted to talk with someone. Why? Because since she had become blind no one treated her the same. She used to be actively involved in her church and community, but her blindness had created a new reality: She was the same person inside, but her family and friends turned away from her, rejected her, were embarrassed by her, and she felt alone and fearful for the first time in her life. She was an outcast.

Jesus and the Marginalized

It is interesting to note that Jesus was in tune with those marginalized by society as He walked His earthly journey, and He is still in tune with those among us who are differently abled and yet not fully embraced by their family, community, society, or even their church. He is a Friend to all.

Just like ignoring poverty and other social ills, ministering to those with blindness or visual impairment can easily be placed “on the shelf” by some who think that the issue or persons in need are someone else’s problem to solve or deal with, for another generation perhaps. However, if we are disciples of Christ, we must embrace the realization that the Gospel Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 is not just for a select few; It is for the whole world and for every child of God in the world—those who are sighted and those who are not.

As Christians we certainly understand the call to teach all nations and baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, but when delivering the Great Commission, Jesus also instructs His disciples to teach “them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20 KJV).

Jesus was the Master Teacher. He always had followers and sometimes those followers numbered into the thousands who hung onto His every word and observed every action. He taught in a variety of ways: He told stories and parables; He asked questions; and He used visual illustrations, to name a few. And another way Jesus taught was to demonstrate valuable lessons. For example, Jesus didn’t just verbally teach to love sinners; He sought out Matthew, the tax collector and dined at his home. The Pharisees asked His disciples why their teacher eats with tax collectors and sinners. Upon hearing this, Jesus said, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (See Matthew 9:10-12 KJB).

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Sometimes Jesus’ teaching actions were arranged, and, at other times, we see He was spontaneous when Jesus saw a teaching opportunity for His followers to observe.

We may think of Jesus’ actions towards those who are blind as spontaneous as He encountered a need. However, Jesus never wasted a teachable moment or an opportunity to bring restoration. The healing that took place during those encounters was not just physical and spiritual healing, but also an emotional healing as He elevated these individuals and restored them to their rightful place in their community. Jesus reinstated dignity and value as He demonstrated to those observing (and future generations) how to treat others. He helped His Church and the body of Christ see that responsibility extends beyond normal social circles but to everyone He places in our path.

Jesus engaged those whom others thought were not worthy of the Savior’s attention. He spoke respectfully. Notice what He did when encountering Bartimaeus who was blind, He

asked, “What do you want me to do for you?” (Luke 18:41 NKJV)

Though it was obvious to some observing what the man needed or wanted, not only did Jesus give an opportunity for this man to exercise his faith, Jesus also showed respect by offering Bartimaeus an audience and allowing use of his voice. His voice may have been shushed for years. His voice may have been discounted. His voice may have been mocked. However, Bartimaeus’ faith compelled him to plead with confidence, “Lord, that I may receive my sight” (Luke 18:41 NKJV).

Heaven Sees Worth

As Jesus met the needs of those He encountered, He also powerfully demonstrated that while many underestimated their worth, Heaven did not. Did this cause a change in thoughts and actions of those who observed the Great Teacher? Does it cause us to pause and consider our attitudes and actions?

If pausing to make a difference in the life of someone who is blind was important to Jesus—and it clearly was as we read Scripture—then it should be high on our priority list as well. If unsure, then ask these questions: If not us, who? If not now, when? Ultimately, someone is responsible for taking the Gospel to the whole world and there has never been a more critical time than in these last hours of Earth’s history.

When Jesus said to his disciples, “The poor you will always have with you” (John 12:8), He was quoting another well-known passage from the Jewish Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible). In fact, scholars believe those who heard Him say those words would have immediately caught His implied reference. Here’s the full original quote:

IF AMONG YOU, ONE OF YOUR BROTHERS
SHOULD BECOME POOR, IN ANY OF
YOUR TOWNS WITHIN YOUR LAND
THE LORD YOUR GOD IS GIVING YOU,
YOU SHALL NOT HARDEN YOUR HEART
OR SHUT YOUR HAND AGAINST YOUR

POOR BROTHER, BUT YOU SHALL OPEN YOUR HAND TO HIM AND LEND HIM SUFFICIENT FOR HIS NEED, WHATEVER IT MAY BE . . . FOR THERE WILL NEVER CEASE TO BE POOR IN THE LAND. THEREFORE, I COMMAND YOU, 'YOU SHALL OPEN WIDE YOUR HAND TO YOUR BROTHER, TO THE NEEDY AND TO THE POOR, IN YOUR HAND'
DEUTERONOMY 15:7-11 ESV.

We can insert the word “blind” in this passage for the word “poor,” and I believe we have a blueprint of generosity in ministry for and with people who are blind and their families. This is a direct instruction by God to be generous.

The challenge in ministering for and with people who are blind is that no two who are blind or visually impaired are the same or have the same needs. No family with members who are blind or visually impaired are the same or have the same needs. No one's needs are the same at each stage of life. So, what do we do as individuals and as a church to follow this blueprint of generosity communicated and demonstrated so beautifully by Christ?

Generosity Instead of Apathy

We first choose generosity instead apathy. We open our hands and our hearts to the needs of our brothers and sisters. We choose to be like the early believers who took this challenge seriously, so much so that Acts 4:33,34 describes their generosity: “And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them” (NIV).

Imagine that! This is what happens when we follow Jesus' teachings and offer support and nurture through friendship. He invites us to show His children who are blind (and their families) what it means to become part of the body of Christ, a body that not only meets their needs but fills them to overflowing.

Larry Evans, Special Needs Ministries leader for the Seventh-day Adventist world

church, continues to engage Church leaders and members at every level around the globe, reminding that “All are gifted, needed, and treasured.” He challenges the church to address those who are differently abled by considering three areas of emphasis: Awareness, Acceptance, and Action.

Awareness

I talked about awareness earlier when highlighting the statistics of those among us who are blind or otherwise visually impaired. There is much more that could be learned by going to a local library or center of education. We must not only be aware of the statistics but of the barriers and prejudices faced as those who are differently abled endeavor to live the life God has planned for them (See Jeremiah 29:11). God has plans for each of us. We must raise our awareness individually and corporately as a Church by educating about the causes of blindness, and in conjunction with health ministries leaders, educate about avoidable vision impairment. We must also educate about God's desire for an inclusive body of Christ. Full inclusion means more than giving a friendly welcome. It means including the visually impaired and others with special needs into all aspects of worship and mission. It also means removing barriers to ensure that these changes happen.

Acceptance

Jesus accepted those who were and are outcast by society. We must grow in love, grace, and mercy as we accept all people as Jesus did. After all, Christ accepts each of us who are not fully whole. We must change our thoughts about how God has those who are blind. We should welcome all into the Body of Christ to use their talents and spiritual gifts to bring hope and help to a dying world, and to disciple those within circles. They have a testimony that will be more powerful to someone in similar circumstances than I could give. Accepting may also mean advocating within families, churches, and the community on behalf of someone who is blind.

Action

Finally, we must be intentional about meeting needs—physical, spiritual, and emotional.

So, what are some of these needs? I can tell you some of the needs I have observed as I have been invited into relationship and fellowship with people who are blind. When not sure of what I am seeing and learning, I asked for clarification to gain greater understanding. Anyone who is willing to serve will need to do the same to help fill a friend's needs to overflowing and embrace them in the Body of Christ and life of the Church.

We need to give of ourselves to build relationships with someone who is blind. We will need to adjust our time, energy, priorities, and finances to make a difference, just as we do with any relationship that is meaningful to us. We need to ask as Jesus did, "What would you want me to do?" And we need to ask this not only of the individual but of their family as well.

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Some needs may include:

- Friendship
- Food
- Transportation
- Childcare
- Medical expenses
- Lodging
- Belonging
- Employment
- Opportunities to serve
- Education
- Housekeeping
- Laundry
- Equipment
- Accessible resources
- Assistance reading mail
- Grooming a guide dog
- Referral services

The list of needs will vary depending on the person, their degree of blindness, where they are in life and on their path, their resources and the family's needs.

I spoke with one person who is blind about a year after we met. We spoke frequently, but

this time I ended the conversation with the simple phrase, "It was nice chatting with you, Friend."

There was a long, quiet moment and then he tearfully responded, "I like hearing you say, 'friend.' I don't have many who are willing to be my friend."

I hadn't thought about what a simple comment like that could mean to someone. True kindness and friendship ease a multitude of pains and sorrows that someone who is blind experiences. This is essential ministry that we all need until Jesus returns. Making friends can start with a simple "Hello," and thereafter progress into a beautiful relationship if we are genuine and vulnerable when extending the hand of friendship and the healing ministry of Christ to them.

Once we offer friendship and establish a trusting relationship, we can begin to dream with our new friend. We can ask questions like this: If you did not have barriers, what would you like to do? Who would you like to be? Do you believe God cares about you? Would you like to learn more about a God who loves everyone? Who do you think God created you to be? How do you believe you are called to serve Him?

Too often we place people in a "box" by setting limited expectations of what they can be and what they can contribute to the world and the church. This is not our prerogative. Our place is to walk alongside and help open doors of opportunity when invited and needed, taking our cues from them as they are led by the Holy Spirit.

Practice

As we develop any skill, whether it be playing the piano or running a marathon, we must practice. If we want a greater capacity to love people who are blind, we begin by serving them and asking God to be with us. As we release the love of God through our words and actions, God will expand our capacity to love and serve. We need to ask God to help us

love like He did. To truly love as He did means emptying ourselves for the benefit of another: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13 KJV).

There is a beautiful verse in the book of Revelation that has special meaning to those who are blind: Revelation 1:7 says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. . .” (ESV). Imagine the significance of those words to someone who is blind who has accepted Jesus as their Savior.

When we look at those who are blind in our world, we can let these numbers overwhelm us, or we can pause just as Jesus did when He encountered someone who was blind during His earthly ministry. We simply need to ask Him and the person He places in our path: “What do you want me to do?” and He will show us.

Helen Keller, a famous American author, political activist, and lecturer who was Deaf-blind, is reported to have said: “Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” Let’s work individually and collaboratively until Jesus comes. Let us accomplish much for our Savior on behalf of His children who are blind. Heaven will be such a beautiful place for all to see, and especially as our eyes fall on the face of our dear Jesus who came so all could enjoy eternal life with Him.

Adventist Special Needs Ministries has a variety of resources to assist in serving people who are blind. Begin by visiting <https://specialneeds.adventist.org/blind>, and then connect with Division, Union, and Conference Special Needs/Disability Ministries leaders to learn how to partner to make an impact in every region of the world.

MISSION CITIES

to the

PRAYER MAP

There are 580+ cities of a million or more worldwide. Pray for one each day, and pray your way around the world!

LEGEND

- Cities with 1,000,000+
- Cities with 10,000,000+
- Cities with 20,000,000+
- Cities with 30,000,000+
- Cities with 40,000,000+
- Inside 10/40 Window
- Outside 10/40 Window
- Prayer-focus Cities

DIVISIONS/REGIONS OF THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

- ECD East Central Africa
- ESD Euro-Asia
- EUD Inter-European
- IAD Inter-American
- IF Israel Field
- MENA Middle East & N. Africa
- NAD North American
- NSD Northern Asia-Pacific
- SAD South American
- SID Southern Africa-Indian Ocean
- SPD South Pacific
- SSD Southern Asia-Pacific
- SUD Southern Asia
- TED Trans-European
- WAD West-Central Africa

This map is based on data compiled by Thomas Brinkhoff (citypopulation.de) and other sources. The Brinkhoff list focuses on agglomerations, so smaller cities on the periphery of larger cities are absorbed into the total population for the larger cities, even in cases where the smaller city has a population of over one million. (Thomas Brinkhoff: Major Agglomerations of the World, <https://www.citypopulation.de/world/Agglomerations.html> Accessed June 27, 2019)

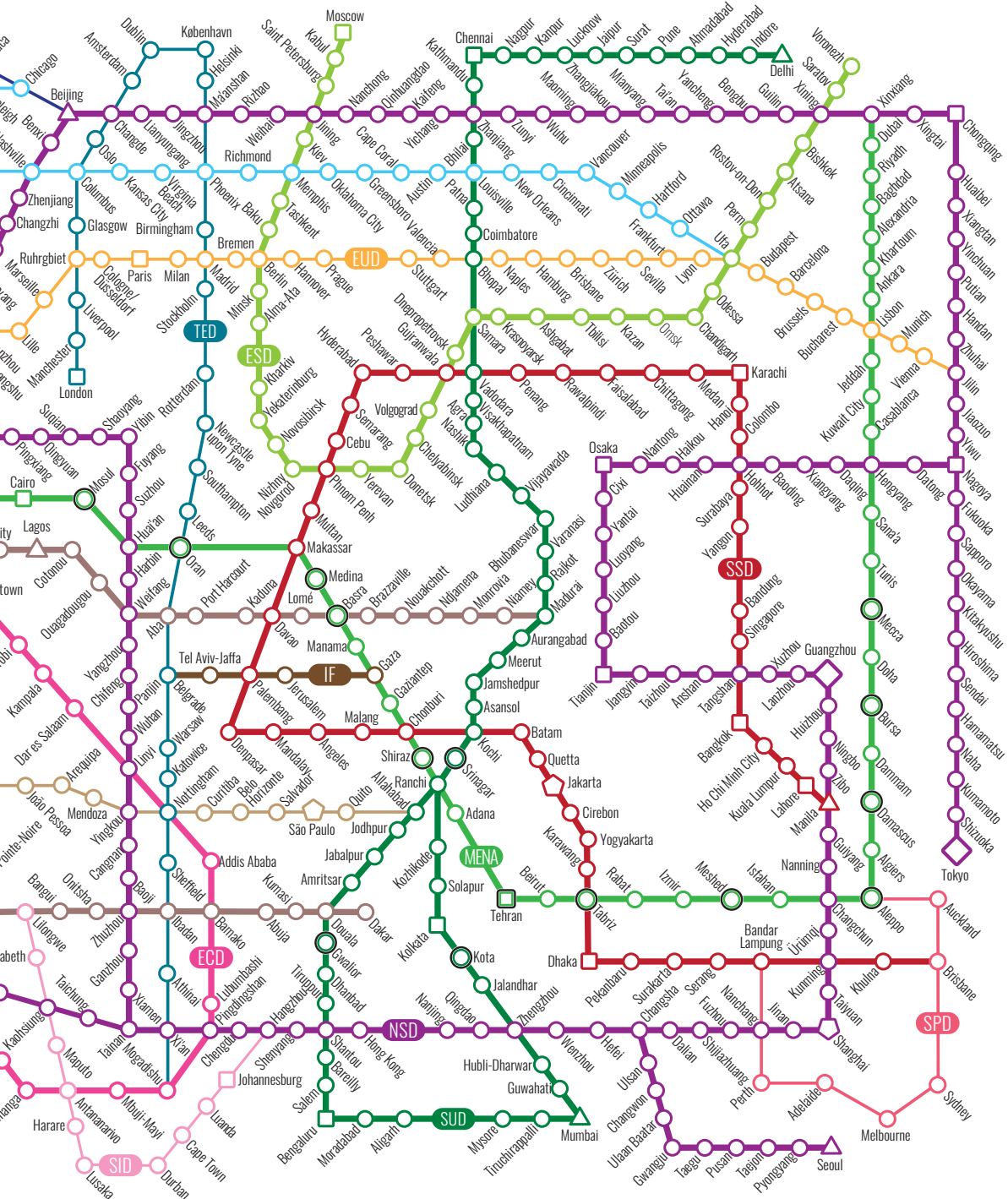
- The thick lines represent the divisions within the 10/40 Window.
- You can tell the size of each city by referring to the shapes and the legend.
- Choose anywhere on the map, and pray for one city each day, checking them off as you go. In about a year and a half, you'll pray your way around the world.





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REPRINTED ARTICLES

Care for Kids Left Behind in Breakup

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: I got divorced last year after a 6-year marriage that was wrong to begin with! My 13-year-old daughter keeps telling me that me and my ex are toxic because we show so much hatred towards each other. She says that she feels lonely, abandoned, and unloved and says maybe I would be better off without her. How can I help her to feel better?

A: A divorce or separation of any kind can be traumatic for everyone involved, but especially for children. While there is a common belief that children are ultimately better off being in an environment where their parents are not arguing, children are usually devastated to see their family fall apart—if they are not in homes where there is physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. An aspect of divorce that most parents do not consider for themselves or their children is the grief process that goes along with the loss of a marriage and disintegration of the family. For a child—as well as the parents—divorce leaves deep psychological wounds and scars that if left unattended will affect all future relationships.

Your child is expressing her deep pain and hurt, which you should take very seriously. And since it appears she has already experienced the

pain of separation twice in her short life, it is possible she feels a deep sense of hopelessness. She may even be imagining herself as the cause of the distress in the lives of the significant adults in her life. This type of trauma in a child's life can lead to risky behaviors such as problems at school, choosing the wrong friends, and even leading to future problems with the law.

At this juncture, we strongly encourage you to seek professional counseling immediately from someone who has expertise in working with families and adolescents. Concurrently, here are a few things you can do to help alleviate some of your daughter's fears:

- 1) Make her well-being your highest priority. Of course, ensure you remain healthy psychologically, emotionally, spiritually and physically, so you have the reserves to take care of your daughter. Many divorced people use a lot energy getting back at their ex (or exes), or they jump into a new romantic relationship to help them recover from the previous relationship breakup. These quick solutions are unhealthy for all parties involved and do nothing but put a small bandage on a very large wound, causing further damage to the children involved. Also, you may have a few wounds that need to be healed, so now is a good time for that healing to begin and to develop additional self-awareness.

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- 2) Assure her of your love and stability in her life. Give her lots of hugs and verbally tell her that you love her. Even if you have to work more to provide for both of you, establish routines such as regular times for family worship, breakfast and/or dinner together, or just to have fun together.
- 3) Commit to having a positive relationship with your recent ex-husband and her father if he is still in the picture. Resist the urge to bad mouth your ex in front of your daughter. Children of divorced parents tend to feel they did something wrong or feel guilty for the divorce. Regardless of

the reason for the divorce, no matter how dreadful the situation may have been, keep your explanations honest but without graphic details. If she has a close relationship with her step-dad and/or her biological dad, work on an amicable way to have them remain in her life, if appropriate.

2 Corinthians 12:9 declares: “And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness...” We pray that during this difficult period in your life you and your daughter will experience hope and healing through God’s grace, love, and power.

My Wife Has Bi-Polar Disorder

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: My wife was recently diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Her frequent mood swings and unstable emotions have us on a constant rollercoaster, and it has taken a huge toll on me and on our kids. Sometimes I think it will be best for us to just leave her; does God really expect us to live with such unhappiness?

A: It has been said that when one member of the family is diagnosed with an illness, the entire family bears the brunt of the disease; this is especially true when dealing with mental illness. We say, especially mental illness because all too often, unlike other diseases, it goes undiagnosed and untreated. Hence, we empathize with you and your children who have been living with a loved one who has bipolar disorder. This disease, although frequently and erroneously joked about in the general public, has serious ramifications and can create major upheaval in the life of the family and other relationships.

Needless to say, this is not the time to think about leaving your wife. This is where those vows you made “in sickness and in health” come into play. Marriage is not for cowards and it’s not a fairytale. After the wedding, real life kicks in! We hear and feel your pain and

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distress and are fully aware of the pain and trauma your wife’s illness has caused. However, you and your children can survive this and have a healthy and happy home environment if you get the help that is required in such a situation. But it will require hard work, dedication and much prayer. We know that “in this world, you will have tribulation” (John 16:33), but God promises to give you peace and to supply all your needs. This is a promise that you can count on.

The Coping Strategy

So first, if you haven’t already done so, you must get counseling for yourself and for your children. We recommend that you find a good Christian counselor who has experience working with bipolar disorder and with families. It is absolutely essential that you receive the support, guidance and coping strategies for dealing with a family member who has bipolar disorder. As you have mentioned it is like being on a rollercoaster ride and this takes a significant toll. This holds true for how you relate to your wife and to each other as family members. It is also significantly impacts your relationships outside of the home.

We should also hasten to say that your wife must be encouraged and supported in cooperating with the treatment plan prescribed by her doctor, which may include prescription

drugs and counseling. Sometimes people feel they can stop taking medications because they are feeling better or the meds may initially make them feel worse. Finding the right medications always takes time and this is an area where you can be of assistance to your wife. She will need your support in taking her medication, following up with her counseling appointments and implementing the strategies suggested by her counselor.

Ongoing Flexibility

While it can be expected that your family will have to make or continue making adjustments due to your wife's mental illness,

it is possible for your wife, your children and you to lead a healthy and happy life. But it will require changes in your behavior and your attitude towards your wife, these changes can play a major role in her recovery. You and your children can learn how to maintain a supportive and accepting attitude towards her, showing patience when she is having a challenging day. Honestly, the same principles of love, tenderness, patience, flexibility, and joy that are needed for success in any relationship will be effective in this situation.

We pray and hope that you will reframe how you view your wife's mental illness. Ask God to give you an extra portion of his grace and peace.

She's So Slow. Tell Her to Hurry Up!

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: My wife moves very slowly. It is the reason we are late most of the times to everything. We've been married for over 25 years and I am really tired of always waiting for her. I wish she could move a little faster. However, every time I ask her to move faster, she seems to move slower. Sometimes I feel like I am going to lose my mind. Please help me with a strategy to help my wife move faster so our marriage can be what it has the potential to be.

A: Marriage can be truly difficult. Isn't that right? Nevertheless, once you accept the fact that marriage can be difficult, the fact that it is difficult no longer really matters, as long as you trust God to give you the patience needed to respond to any situation with love. And, by the way, Jesus makes the promise in Mark 10:47 that, "...with men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

As we think about the situation you have shared about your wife, we cannot help but reflect on the fact that we are at the beginning of another year when many choose to make resolutions for the new year. We are wondering out loud what new or not so new resolutions you might want to make in your relationship with

your wife of 25+ years, given the annoyance you have reported having with her slowness.

Right about now we are wondering if your wife has always been slow, or if this is a tendency she has developed of late. If it is the former, then it follows that during your courtship and early marriage you simply chose to overlook her slowness, given her outstanding characteristics on other matters. Of course, if your wife's slowness is something she has recently developed, you may want to check on her health, and/or come to grips with the fact that as one grows older, one tends to develop aches and pains in one's extremities, which tend to literally slow one down. And the latter may be an explanation for your wife's current slowness.

So, this is as good a time as any to make decisions about how you will respond to your wife, going forward, in order to maximize the viability of your marital relationship in this new year. Because, the truth is, the only counsel we have to share with you about improving your current marriage dilemma is not so much about what you can tell your wife to correct her perceived flaws, as much as how you can respond to your wife to enhance your marriage relationship.

What we know about healthy marriages is that they are characterized by partners who tend to respond to each other with love,

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despite the circumstances that may arise from time to time in the course of negotiating life together. We have the natural predisposition to respond with anger, resentment, selfishness, contempt, criticism or disrespect to things we don't like about people we are in close relationships with; responding in love is the only assurance of being in a successful and satisfying partnership.

Thus, rather than being too concerned about your wife's slowness, we would encourage you to make a New Year's resolution—with the

help of God, of course—to be loving and kind to your wife regardless of the circumstances. Also, that you will practice being accepting of her, just the way she is. The more you exercise responding to your wife in love, the more likely you will be to bring out the best in her, and experience the joy of a satisfying and happy marriage relationship.

Please know you and your wife are in our prayers as you trust God each day to help you be the patient and loving husband He wants you to be.

All Bible verses are from the NKJV

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Reprinted from an article that first appeared in the January/February 2019 issue of *Message*, p. 11. Used with Permission.

It's Our Turn Now!

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: You have just married off your only daughter recently. What did you teach her? What stuck? What are your fears just the same? How does this groom enter such a tight knit family? How can he hope to get in your good graces? And, what can all newlyweds, and soon-to-be marrieds, extrapolate from this?

A: We were very grateful and blessed to witness and participate in the nuptials of our first-born and only daughter. We believe God chose a wonderful mate for our daughter and we are thrilled to welcome him into our family. Not only did we participate as parents of the bride, but we also officiated in presenting the wedding homily. During the few minutes we spoke, we summarized many of the lessons about marriage we taught our daughter throughout her life.

Something Learned

When it comes to learning for children, information and values are often caught than taught. Thus, it isn't as much of what we have said to our daughter—we also have a son—as much as how we have behaved towards each

other that has helped her develop a healthy concept of marriage.

We would like to believe, based on our casual conversations with our daughter about relationships and marriage, that she has embraced a wholesome notion of marriage that will help hers go the distance.

One thing she is very aware of is that while marriage is a beautiful and wonderful adventure, it doesn't come without its challenges. She has witnessed a less-than-perfect couple in her parents. Hopefully, however, our children sensed that by God's grace and our willingness to humble ourselves, it is possible to have a strong, stable, and happy marriage.

We hope she learned that couples will disagree, but that we can learn to manage differences without destroying the marriage. We also hope that our strong sense of commitment to each other, to them, and to God stuck in her mind. We hope that knowledge will help her to push through the tough times, realizing that if she fights for her marriage, tomorrow will be a brighter day.

Something Practiced

Here is what we offer about our potential fears—as you asked. She still has to choose

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to put those lessons into practice. We don't always make decisions based on what we know, but based on impulse or on the emotion that is most prominent when we are upset. This is not only potentially true about our daughter's marriage, but also about ours, despite our reservoir of knowledge on the dynamics and mechanics of a working marriage.

Someone Embraced

Finally, our daughter's husband is already a part of our family. During their courtship we hosted him in our home many times, and talked with him numerous times during the many meals we've shared together. By the time he visited with us to ask for our blessing to marry our daughter, we knew him quite well. We had a pretty good handle on his family of origin background, his personality, and his very gentle and patient pattern of interacting with our daughter.

We believe it is very important for parents to have the opportunity to interact with their daughter's—or son's—intended. This provides an opportunity to develop a healthy level of comfort with the person before they become a part of their family. To be sure, this has much to do with the relationship between a daughter and her parents, as has been the case with our daughter. The greater the relationship of trust between a daughter and her parents is, the easier it will be to become at ease with the notion of welcoming such a person into one's family.

Someone Trusted

The most important thing now is for our daughter and her husband to leave and cleave. As parents, we now have to trust God to help them as they live in their new reality of being one, to form their own couple identity. Please join us in prayer on their behalf that they will trust God each day for patience and kindness to make of their marriage a little heaven on earth.

RESOURCES

Taking Faith Home Series

Family Ministries Departments
of the Nordic Seventh-day Adventist Unions, 2017
Six Pamphlets Series

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As parents who believe we are loved by God, we want to do all we can to help our children receive that same love through a relationship with God that leads to a spirit filled life.

The question is, how do we do this? Research shows that we cannot delegate the important task of mentoring our children towards discipleship. Parental influence is by far the most important

factor in our children's faith development. In other words, we need to take faith home.

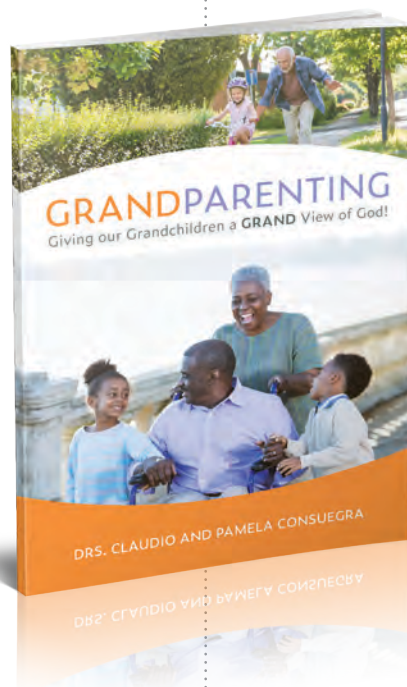
These pamphlets give a brief guide and ideas on how you can share your faith with your child from toddler through the teen years. We hope that these ideas can be a starting point for you and your family as you begin your faith journey together at home.

To download all pamphlets visit: family.adventist.org/TakingFaithHome

GrandParenting: Giving Our Grandchildren a Grand View of God

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA
AdventSource, 2018
149 pages

God's ideal for grandparents has been marred by a world filled with sin. His original plan has been pushed out of the picture and society has blurred the clarity of the role that we, as grandparents, have been called to fill. The culture's distracting noise screams loudly to grandparents, calling them to a life of indulgence with their grandchild while God has given them a much higher calling – that of being disciple-makers. It's time we understand that we are a vital part of fulfilling the gospel commission as we have been God-ordained to give our grandchildren a GRAND view of God! This resource is filled with research, practical ideas, and discussion questions that may be used by individuals or small groups to explore their God-given role of grandparenting.



New Freedom To Love

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN NORTH AMERICA
Website with Video Seminars
www.newfreedomtolove.org



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New Freedom to Love is created by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America with the specific goal of raising awareness of the pornography epidemic and giving churches a tool to help members and their families.

New Freedom to Love is a live, 5-part, church-sponsored seminar that opens the subject of pornography up for frank discussion. It provides an educational, holistic look at how pornography affects us bio-chemically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Who should see this?

Everyone. This is not just for those who are struggling with porn, though it will be useful to them. This is an educational and informational series designed for a general audience. Viewers will learn about how porn seriously damages relationships and how to have better ones. Men will gain great insight by watching the presentation specifically about women, and women will learn more about men by watching the presentation about men. Every session has something for everyone.

How old should youth be to see this?

Youth who are just beginning to think about starting a romantic relationship for the first time should see this, perhaps by starting with the youth-specific presentation. They are hearing misinformation from the internet and all kinds of other sources in their life, and it is better that they learn the truth here.

How graphic are the language and images?

Not at all. There are no graphic images of a sexual nature of any kind. While the videos do use the appropriate terms for human body parts, the use of that language is not the focus of any of the presentations.

What should we do when we're finished with the workshop?

There are optional discussion questions on page 3 that you can use at the end of each session.

If you would like even more material and links to other resources, visit newfreedomtolove.org. There you can find a link to a more therapy-based, addiction-specific online course for use in battling a pornography addiction.

Couple's Bible

Safeliz, 2019
1,500 pages

The Couple's Bible is designed to help build and nurture relationships. There are more than 170 topics that are divided into five sections focusing on how to strengthen marriage, and parenting relationships, as well as how to overcome challenges that couples face. Special features include:

- Marriage in the Bible, Biblical Theology of the Family, Pillars Undergirding Family Ministries, Special Texts for Couples and more
- A special Bible course on home and family
- 101 Ideas for Family Evangelism
- Marriage vocabulary dictionary and maps
- And much more...

The Bible is available in several languages including English, Spanish and French and can be ordered at Adventist Book Centers throughout the world or by visiting: www.safelizbibles.com



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APPENDIX A

FAMILY MINISTRIES

IMPLEMENTATION

Please use these documents as part of your work in Family Ministries. The contents are the result of working with families in our church around the world. You can find each print version of these files in the disc that comes with this book.

Note:

Some of the recommendations listed in these forms will need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws of the territories in which this resource is to be used.

Downloadable Material

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2020>

A Family Ministries Policy and Purpose Statement

The congregation and staff of the

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Church are committed to providing a safe environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of this congregation to prevent any form of child abuse physical, emotional or sexual and to protect children and those who work with them.

Churches with programs for children are not insulated from those who abuse: therefore, this congregation believes that it is vitally important to take decisive steps to ensure that the church and its programs are safe, providing a joyful experience for children and youth. The following policies have been established and reflect our commitment to provide protective care of all children when they are attending any church sponsored activity.

- Volunteers who work with children and youth are required to be active members of this congregation for a minimum of six months, and must be approved by appropriate church personnel before they may begin working directly with children, unless there has been previous documented clearance.

- All NAD employees and NAD volunteers who regularly work with children must complete an application form (see NAD's Children's Ministries website: <https://www.childmin.org/childrens-safety>). References must be obtained from potential volunteers. Appropriate personnel or staff must check those references. Other divisions are encouraged to follow this procedure.
- All workers with children should observe the "two person" rule, which means that workers must avoid one-on-one situations with children whenever possible.
- Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. Individuals with such a history must discuss their desire to work with children and youth with one of the staff in a confidential interview prior to receiving approval to work in these areas.
- Individuals who have committed physical or sexual abuse, whether or not convicted, may not work in church –sponsored activities or programs for children or youth.
- Opportunities for training in prevention and recognition of child abuse will be provided by the church. Workers will be expected to participate in such training.

- Workers should immediately report to the pastor or administration any behaviors or other incidents that seem abusive or inappropriate. Upon notification, appropriate actions will be taken and reports made in compliance with the operating procedure of these policies.
- Guidelines for volunteers who work with your and children will be provided to each volunteer.
- Children shall not be allowed to roam around the church without adult supervision. Parents are responsible for supervising their children before and after Sabbath School.
- No child should be released to use the restroom unless accompanied by a parent or older sibling.
- A responsible adult shall be designated to circulate in and around the church, including parking areas to provide security. This is critical when only one adult is present at some activities for minors, such as a Sabbath School division.
- Any discipline shall occur within the visual contact of another adult. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.
- All meetings for children or youth must have the approval of the pastor and/or church board, especially overnight activities. Minors must have signed parental permission for each trip, including emergency medical treatment release.
- If there is a known sex offender attending a church, a deacon or other responsible adult shall be assigned to monitor the person while on the premises or at off-site church activity. The offender shall be informed of the procedure. If a sex offender transfers to or attends another church, the leadership of that church shall be notified.

The Family Ministries Leader

The family ministries leader designs a ministry to families that will meet the specific needs of the congregation and community. This section provides planning support for family ministries leaders. Planning is critical for ministering to the individuals and families in the congregation. Family ministries is also an excellent way to reach out to families in the community. The family ministries leader is a member of the local church board and integrates family ministries activities to the whole church program. Listed below are responsibilities and activities.

1. Develop and chair a small family ministries committee that reflects the distinctiveness of the congregation. It may include a single parent, young married persons, mid-life families, retired, widowed or divorced persons. People who serve on this committee should be carefully chosen as visionary people reflecting the grace of God.
2. Be a family advocate. Family ministries is not merely program-oriented, but must look at the whole church program with sensitivity to its impact on families. In some situations the family ministries leader may need to advocate for family time. In other words, there may be so many programs going on in a congregation that people have little time to live their own lives as families.
3. Survey family needs and interests in the congregation. The needs assessment survey and family profile sheet may be used to help determine the needs of the congregation.
4. Plan programs and activities for the year that may include video presentations, retreats or special speakers who present workshops and seminars. Plans should also include simple activities that may be suggested to families through the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Work with the pastor and church board to be sure plans are included in the local church budget.
6. Make use of the resources available from the conference family ministries department. These can save time, energy and serve to keep costs down for the local congregation. When planning for special presentations, the conference family ministries director is able to assist in finding interesting and qualified presenters.
7. Communicate with the congregation. Family ministries should not be perceived simply as an annual event. Keep the importance of good family skills alive by use of posters, the church newsletter and/or bulletin throughout the year.
8. Share your plans with the conference family ministries director.

What is a Family?

One of the tasks of a family ministries leader is to define the families to whom they minister within their congregations. A ministry only to married couples with children, for example, will benefit only a small percentage of the people in the church. Families of all sorts may need guidance as they move toward healthy relationships. The work of coping with the daily tasks of sharing a household and managing conflict is never easy when people share space and resources or come from homes with differing values. Here are some of the ways families today are configured.

- Families are nuclear – with Mom, Dad and children who were born to this Mom and Dad.
- Families are stepfamilies – sometimes called blended. Stepfamilies are formed when parents divorce or are widowed and remarry. Some become stepfamilies when an unmarried parent marries someone not the father/mother of his/her child.
- Families are single – sometimes just me and the cat – living alone. They may be divorced, widowed or never married, but the household is a separate entity. Some singles may live with other singles in one household.
- Families are single parent – This may occur when a parent is divorced or widowed and has not remarried, or is a parent who has never married.

- Families are empty nest families – Mom and Dad when the kids leave home.
- Families are re-attached – When adult children come back to live with Mom and Dad – usually a temporary arrangement. A family is re-attached when an older parent lives with the family of a son or daughter or grandchild.
- Families are a part of the family of God. Many consider members in their congregation as family and may feel closer ties to them than those related by birth or marriage.

Beyond the usual family demographics one can also stimulate people to think about their important relationships, including those in the church family, by posing questions like these:

- If an earthquake destroyed your town, who would you be most desperate to locate to be sure they were okay?
- If you were moving a thousand miles away, who would move with you?
Who would be the ones you'd stay in touch with, however difficult it might be?
- If you developed a long-term illness, who could you count on to take care of you?
- Who will be your family from now until you or they die?
- From whom could you borrow money and not feel like you had to pay it back right away?

Committee and Planning Guidelines

Family ministries leaders who are either new to the position or have never served as a leader wonder where to begin! This section is to help a leader get started. It is often helpful to select a small committee with whom one can work well—people well oriented in the grace of Christ and who don't have the proverbial ax to grind. A family ministries committee, more than any other, should seek to model family. What follows are some ways to accomplish that. While these ideas are not the only way to work, they can help a group work together more smoothly. (They may be helpful to other committees as well).

- Select a small number of persons with similar concerns for families. They should represent the variety of families found in the congregation. This committee might have a single parent, married couple, divorced, retired or widowed persons, and reflect the gender and ethnic profile of the church.
- The committee should not be too large—five to seven persons are ideal. Individuals may represent more than one family category.
- Especially for the first meeting, gather in an informal setting—perhaps at someone's home or a comfortable room at the church. Begin with prayer for God's blessing.
- Provide light refreshments that include water or hot or cold drinks, something light too much on like fresh fruit, cookies, or nuts. Make it attractive, but not fussy or involving great effort.
- For the first meeting, spend time telling each other your story. This is not a therapy session so let people know that they should tell only what is comfortable. A few guidelines will help: confidentiality is to be respected and seen as a gift to one another. It might be good for the leader to begin—starting with sentences like, “I was born in..., raised in a (Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic or whatever) home.” Include other things like where you went to school, children's names or other pertinent information. Include how you became a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist or a pleasant or funny story from childhood. This may seem like a waste of time. But you may be surprised to hear the story of someone you thought you knew for a long time. The telling of our stories is how we connect and bond with each other. It will make your work together go more smoothly. It will also make it easier for committee members to be sensitive to the needs of one another.
- For all subsequent meetings, spend a portion of time—perhaps 10 or 20 minutes in re-connecting with your committee members. One might be rejoicing over an important event. Another may need support with a special need. Here are some questions you could ask to start your meetings:
 - Who are the people you consider to be your close family?
 - How do you live your faith together as a family?
 - What do you think the church could do to help your family?

- What do you like best about your family?

Then move to the agenda. Remember that you are modeling family.

- Review results of the Interest Survey.
- Talk about goals. What do you wish to accomplish? Will it meet a need? Who are you trying to reach? How can you accomplish your goals?

- Pray for God's blessing, plan wisely so that people do not burn out and ministry is soon underway.

An important resource for Family Ministries leader is the Family Ministries Planbook. A new edition of this resource book is published every year and includes programs, sermon outlines, seminars and much more that can be used as part of your yearly program.

A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things

1. **Inform** – People should learn something they did not know prior to attending your presentation.
2. **Entertain** – People deserve not to be bored!!!
3. **Touch the Emotions** – Information that only informs the head never makes a change in attitude or behavior.
4. **Move to Action** – If participants leave your presentation without a desire to DO something different –you have wasted your time and theirs!

Handouts

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience

shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.

- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

Introduction

- Find out who will introduce you.
- Write your own introduction.
- Contact the person at least two days before and give them the introduction.
- Pronounce any unusual words– check accuracy of all information.
- Don't make assertions that are not true.

The Ten Commandments of Presentations

1. **Know Thyself** – Body language and tone of voice make up 93% of your credibility. Would you be interested in you?
2. **Be prepared** – Know your presentation, your equipment and be ready for mishaps. Projectors always blow bulbs in the midst of important presentations so keep a spare, and know how to change it.
3. **Examine Your Speech** – Use direct expressions, and don't seek to impress—you're there to communicate.
4. **Arrive Early** – Your guests might be waiting. Be there at least a half hour before the presentation to make certain that everything is set up the way you want it to be.
5. **Tell Them What to Expect** – Tell the meeting attendees specifically what they will learn in the course of the meeting and how they will be able to apply their new knowledge. Clear goals keep attendees focused on their own responsibilities as active participants.
6. **Less Is More** – Your audience can only take so much, so limit your main points. Seven main points is roughly the maximum your audience can take in and fully contain.
7. **Keep Eye Contact** – Use note cards instead of a completely scripted speech, so you can look up and keep eye contact with your audience. Avoid the urge to READ a presentation. Your audience response will be thanks enough for sticking your neck out.
8. **Be Dramatic** – Use bold words and unusual statistics. Your presentation should be filled with simple, hard-hitting statements to keep your audience intrigued. Laughter never hurts either!
9. **Motivate** – End your presentation with a call to action. Tell your audience exactly what they can do in response to your presentation.
10. **Take A Deep Breath, and Relax!** – Don't huddle over the lectern. If you are standing behind one, stand up tall. Move around. Use gestures for emphasis. Remember how you say something is as important as what you have to say.

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Family Life Profile Survey

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?

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Marital status:

Single, never married

Single, divorced

Single, widowed

Married—Spouse's name Date of Birth

Spouse is SDA—Local church membership

Spouse is not SDA—Present religious affiliation

Children whose primary residence is with you:

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Children whose primary residence is elsewhere:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Other family members living with you:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Family Relationship

Name Birthdate

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?

.....
.....
.....

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 Life Profile

Church Date

Family Category

Active Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Never Married

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Inactive Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Non-member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Divorced

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Family Ministries Interest Survey

Your age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+
 Gender: M F

From the topics below, please select the five that are of most interest to you.
 Place a check in front of each one you select:

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- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship and devotional life |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family finance | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline in the home | <input type="checkbox"/> Single adult living |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting teenagers | <input type="checkbox"/> Improving self-worth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for childbirth | <input type="checkbox"/> Resolving anger and conflict |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce recovery | <input type="checkbox"/> Television and media |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single parenting | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexuality | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical dependency issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enriching your marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Blended families |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief recovery | <input type="checkbox"/> Death and dying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding temperaments | <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with widowhood |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please list): | |

Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name

Address Telephone

Area(s) of specialty

What time of the day and what day of the week is best for you to attend a 1-1/2 - 2 hour program on one of the above topics? (Check the appropriate periods.)

	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"/>

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 | <input type="checkbox"/> Overcoming Loneliness Weekend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding Children | <input type="checkbox"/> Family Finances |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Esteem | <input type="checkbox"/> Grief Recovery |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting Skills | <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management and Life Priorities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with Teenagers | <input type="checkbox"/> Planning Retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childbirth Preparation Class | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify) | |

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3. What time of the day and what day of the week is best for you to attend a 1-1/2 - 2 hour program on one of the above topics? (Check the appropriate periods.)

	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 we 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 61-70 71+

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

Are you:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never married | <input type="checkbox"/> Married |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separated | <input type="checkbox"/> Divorced |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Widowed | <input type="checkbox"/> Remarried after divorce |

Sample Evaluation

1. What inspired you most about this workshop?

.....

2. What did you learn that you didn't know before?

.....

3. Were the concepts in this workshop presented in a clear manner?

.....

4. Which activity/section was of least value to you?

.....

5. How could this workshop be improved?

.....

6. On a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being generally dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, how would you rate this workshop? Circle one.

- 1
Generally Dissatisfied
- 2
Somewhat Dissatisfied
- 3
Somewhat Satisfied
- 4
Generally Satisfied
- 5
Very Satisfied

7. Who made this evaluation?

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

Gender: M F

Marital Status:

- Never married
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed

How long have you been married, divorced, separated or widowed?

.....yearsmonths

Thank you for your honest comments, they will help us in planning future workshops!

APPENDIX B

VOTED STATEMENTS

An Affirmation of Marriage

Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.”

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Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God’s self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. In the divine purpose, procreation springs from and is entwined with the same process whereby husband and wife may find joy, pleasure and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in a deep sexual bond that a child may be entrusted. Their child is a living embodiment of their oneness. The growing

child thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity in which he or she was conceived and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression. However, the estate of marriage is not God’s only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage.

To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. Because marriage has been corrupted by sin, the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant.

Statement on Home and Family

The health and prosperity of society is directly related to the well-being of its constituent parts—the family unit. Today, as probably never before, the family is in trouble. Social commentators decry the disintegration of modern family life. The traditional Christian concept of marriage between one man and one woman is under assault. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, in this time of family crisis, encourages every family member to strengthen his or her spiritual dimension and family relationship through mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility.

The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 22 states the marital relationship "is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. ... Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity.

Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God."

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the church, stated: "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' (Prov.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.

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Statement on Child Sexual Abuse

Child sexual abuse occurs when a person older or stronger than the child uses his or her power, authority, or position of trust to involve a child in sexual behavior or activity. Incest, a specific form of child sexual abuse, is defined as any sexual activity between a child and a parent, a sibling, an extended family member, or a step/surrogate parent.

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Sexual abusers may be men or women and may be of any age, nationality, or socio-economic background. They are often men who are married with children, have respectable jobs, and may be regular churchgoers. It is common for offenders to strongly deny their abusive behavior, to refuse to see their actions as a problem, and to rationalize their behavior or place blame on something or someone else. While it is true that many abusers exhibit deeply rooted insecurities and low self-esteem, these problems should never be accepted as an excuse for sexually abusing a child. Most authorities agree that the real issue in child sexual abuse is more related to a desire for power and control than for sex.

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children

entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victims' deepest feelings about themselves, others, and God, and shatter their capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

The Adventist Christian community is not immune from child sexual abuse. We believe that the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist faith require us to be actively involved in its prevention. We are also committed to spiritually assisting abused and abusive individuals and their families in their healing and recovery process, and to holding church professionals and church lay leaders accountable for maintaining their personal behavior as is appropriate for persons in positions of spiritual leadership and trust.

As a Church we believe our faith calls us to:

1. Uphold the principles of Christ for family relationships in which the self-respect,

- dignity, and purity of children are recognized as divinely mandated rights.
2. Provide an atmosphere where children who have been abused can feel safe when reporting sexual abuse and can feel that someone will listen to them.
 3. Become thoroughly informed about sexual abuse and its impact upon our own church community.
 4. Help ministers and lay leaders to recognize the warning signs of child sexual abuse and know how to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected or a child reports being sexually abused.
 5. Establish referral relationships with professional counselors and local sexual assault agencies who can, with their professional skills, assist abuse victims and their families.
 6. Create guidelines/policies at the appropriate levels to assist church leaders in:
 - a. Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children,
 - b. Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.
 7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:
 - . Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
 - a. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
 - b. Fostering Christlike relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.
 8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.
 9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators.
- (The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Lev 18:20; 2 Sam 13:1-22; Matt 18:6-9; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 5:5-8.)

Statement on Family Violence

Family violence involves an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one person or persons against another within a family, whether they are married, related, living together or apart, or divorced. Current international research indicates that family violence is a global problem. It occurs between individuals of all ages and nationalities, at all socioeconomic levels, and in families from all types of religious and non-religious backgrounds. The overall rate of incidence has been found to be similar for city, suburban, and rural communities.

Family violence manifests itself in a number of ways. For example, it may be a physical attack on one's spouse. Emotional assaults such as verbal threats, episodes of rage, depreciation of character, and unrealistic demands for perfection are also abuse. It may take the form of physical coercion and violence within the marital sexual relationship, or the threat of violence through the use of intimidating verbal or nonverbal behavior. It includes behavior such as incest and the mistreatment or neglect of underage children by a parent or another guardian that results in injury or harm. Violence against the elderly may be seen in physical, psychological, sexual, verbal, material, and medical abuse or neglect.

The Bible clearly indicates that the distinguishing mark of Christian believers is the quality of their human relationships

in the church and in the family. It is in the spirit of Christ to love and accept, to seek to affirm and build others up, rather than to abuse or tear one another down. There is no room among Christ's followers for tyrannical control and the abuse of power or authority. Motivated by their love for Christ, His disciples are called to show respect and concern for the welfare of others, to accept males and females as equals, and to acknowledge that every person has a right to respect and dignity. Failure to relate to others in this way violates their personhood and devalues human beings created and redeemed by God.

The apostle Paul refers to the church as "the household of faith" which functions as an extended family, offering acceptance, understanding, and comfort to all, especially to those who are hurting or disadvantaged. Scripture portrays the church as a family in which personal and spiritual growth can occur as feelings of betrayal, rejection, and grief give way to feelings of forgiveness, trust, and wholeness. The Bible also speaks of the Christian's personal responsibility to protect his or her body temple from desecration because it is the dwelling place of God.

Regrettably, family violence occurs in many Christian homes. It can never be condoned. It severely affects the lives of all involved and often results in long term distorted perceptions of God, self, and others.

It is our belief that the Church has a responsibility-

1. To care for those involved in family violence and to respond to their needs by:
 - a. Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.
 - b. Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.
 - c. Providing a caring, supportive ministry to families affected by violence and abuse, seeking to enable both victims and perpetrators to access counseling with Seventh-day Adventist professionals where available or other professional resources in the community.
 - d. Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.
 - e. Offering a ministry of reconciliation when the perpetrator's repentance makes possible the contemplation of forgiveness and restoration in relationships. Repentance always includes acceptance of full responsibility for the wrongs committed, willingness to make restitution in every way possible, and changes in behavior to eliminate the abuse.
 - f. Focusing the light of the gospel on the nature of husband-wife, parent-child, and other close relationships, and empowering individuals and families to grow toward God's ideals in their lives together.
 - g. Guarding against the ostracism of either victims or perpetrators within the family or church community, while firmly holding perpetrators responsible for their actions.
2. To strengthen family life by:
 - a. Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.
 - b. Increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to family violence.
 - c. Developing ways to prevent abuse and violence and the recurring cycle often observed within families and across generations.
 - d. Rectifying commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up family violence. For example, while parents are instructed by God to redemptively correct their children, this responsibility does not give license for the use of harsh, punitive disciplinary measures.
3. To accept our moral responsibility to be alert and responsive to abuse within the families of our congregations and our communities, and to declare that such abusive behavior is a violation of Seventh-day Adventist Christian standards. Any indications or reports of abuse must not be minimized but seriously considered. For church members to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and possibly extend family violence.

If we are to live as children of the light, we must illuminate the darkness where family violence occurs in our midst. We must care for one another, even when it would be easier to remain uninvolved.

(The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Ex 20:12; Matt 7:12; 20:25-28; Mark 9:33-45; John 13:34; Rom 12:10, 13; 1 Cor 6:19; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:2, 3, 21-27; 6:1-4; Col 3:12-14; 1 Thess 5:11; 1 Tim 5:5-8.)



This resource also includes free presentations of the seminars and handouts. To download them please visit:
<http://family.adventist.org/planbook2020>

Making Disciples is for pastors and ministry leaders in their work with families in and out of the church. We hope the resources found in this volume will help develop healthier families, which invariably result in healthier churches that can reach the world with power and joy to help hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.

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- Hope for Today's Families
- Sometimes it Hurts When You Are a Mother
- Self-Acceptance in Christ
- Rivers in the Desert

Children's Stories

- In My Father's House
- Compassion in Cuba
- The Talking Saw

Seminars

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- Disciple-Making Parenting: Helping Our Children Develop a Moral Compass
- Parenting Adolescents in Today's World
- Keeping Homes Abuse-Free

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- Balancing Marriage, Motherhood and Ministry
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