JANUARY-MARCH



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide for Young Adults

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JANUARY-MARCH 2006

"All in the Family"

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Peta Taylor was born in Melbourne, Australia, and grew up in nearby Warburton. After completing her first year of training in nursing at Avondale College, she moved to England, completed a diploma in illustrating and cartooning, and worked as a freelance illustrator. She married in England and, upon return to Australia, undertook further studies in art and design. For several years she worked as a graphic designer at Signs Publishing Company in Warburton, and is currently a freelance illustrator in Newcastle. She enjoys horse-riding, mountain-biking, reading, photography, and drawing.

Getting the most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of CQ is about 70,000.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.

3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.

4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:

"Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.

"Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

"Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference–approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

Lesson 1 December 31–January 7

A Family of Families



"You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19, 20, NKJV).

Sabbath December 31

Does Fear Equal Knowledge?

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 1:7

Have you ever wondered, What is the one thing I must do to benefit our marriage or family? As Christians this question comes to our minds frequently. We wander around in search of formulas and advice to make our lives easier and our relationships with others more fulfilling.

The Bible tells us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7, NKJV). Other versions replace the word "knowledge" in this verse with "wisdom." So then, how can fearing the Lord or studying His Word influence our wisdom, or even our marriages and families? This verse says clearly that your wisdom will increase, and that you will become a more knowledgeable person, the more you fear God and study His Word. But how do we do this?

It was the end of my tenth grade and I was ready to go to academy. Something in my head was telling me that I was going to be able to do just fine. But I thought that if I wanted to do better than "just fine," I was going to have to do something extra that would bump me up above everybody else's level.

So I joined a group of students who were doing a Bible reading program, which

consisted of reading a certain quantity of verses of the Bible, especially the book of Proverbs, for seven months.

At the beginning it was a bit challenging to find time to just sit down and read the Bible. But it worked. Sometimes it was easy;



at other times it was tough. But not too long after, I began to notice changes in myself and that my relationship with my family was improving.

So what was it that was expanding my wisdom and my attitude toward others, including my family? If you haven't noticed, as you read the Bible you come across great stories and every possible topic. All these materials expand your mind and your thinking, and you come to have a greater idea of God's plan for your life. God knows what's best for us, so He provided answers in the Bible before we had the questions.

Most of the time we go around without taking advantage of the great treasures that are hidden within the pages of the Bible. As I was growing up, my parents were most influenced by their reading of the Bible and communion with God. And these practices were passed on to me.

Now is our turn to expand our minds and knowledge and improve our relationships with our families or spouses. We can begin to follow God's advice, to "fear" Him, and we'll begin to see the "beginning of [our] knowledge" (verse 7, NKJV). The Bible never runs out of wisdom.

Sunday January 1

Keeping It in the Family

LOGOS

Gen. 2:18–25; 27:1–28:5; Matt. 10:35–37; John 17:11, 21, 22; Acts 9:17; 21:8, 9; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:14, 15; Gal. 4:5; 1 John 4:8, 16

The First Family (Gen. 2:18-25)

God's original intention comprised the creation of a family characterized by unity, mutual respect, and an ever-deepening love between husband and wife. This family was to reflect, in some small way, the unity and love within the perfect relationships among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As such, Genesis 2:18–25 presents a wonderful vignette of the creation of the

Genesis presents a wonderful vignette of the creation of the first family. first family. Here we find God gently leading Adam to realize his need for a companion who was "flesh of [his] flesh" (verse 23, NKJV) and so appreciate all the more what God was about to do. The Lord brings before Adam all

the animals He has created, ostensibly so that he can name them. However, there appears to be the added function of helping Adam see both his uniqueness among God's creations, and therefore also his loneliness and lack of a human companion. It is only then that God places Adam in a deep sleep and removes a rib from his side, from which the Lord creates Eve. Upon waking, Adam stares in wonder at this new creation who is "flesh of [his] flesh" (verse 23, NKJV).

The last two verses of this chapter depict the unity, trust, and openness that existed between the first couple. This unity was to be a pattern for each subsequent new family.

Floundering Families (Gen. 27:1–28:5)

Unfortunately, God's original intention for the family was marred by sin. Soon after choosing the path of sin and death, Adam and Eve experienced estrangement from one another (3:7–12).

Instead of reflecting the perfect unity and love within the Trinity, families became mired in jealousies, betrayals, and deceit. This often resulted in bitterness and sometimes even murder.

The lengths to which some would go for selfish advancement at the expense of their family members are well illustrated in the story of Jacob and Esau (27:1–28:5). In this passage we see how Jacob fraudulently steals away his twin brother's blessing and the subsequent consequences that befall the whole family. It becomes clear as we delve into the narrative that this event has its roots much earlier. We see that Isaac and Rebekah each had a favorite son (verses 1, 13), and perhaps this fostered a sense of rivalry between the brothers. In fact, it is Rebekah who suggests deceiving her husband (verses 5–10). However, Jacob's character is also called into question when his objections are based on a fear of the consequences of being caught, rather than any sense of love for his father and older brother (verses 11, 12).

The consequences are heartbreaking: Isaac is horrified and filled with selfreproach at his mistake (verse 33); Esau is devastated and feels betrayed by his brother with whom he is naturally furious and whom he plans to kill; Jacob is forced to flee, never again to see his father or mother; Rebekah loses her favorite son and has to live with the knowledge that she has driven a wedge between Isaac and his favorite son (28:8, 9).

Fixing the Shattered Mirror (John 7:11; Acts 9:17; Rom. 8:15; 1 John 4:12–17)

Into a world filled with the shattered mirrors that were intended to reflect the unity and love within the Godhead, comes God Himself. It is worth noting that Christ comes as a baby born within a human family. During His ministry Jesus consistently seeks to rectify the image of God held before the people. His work is one of reconciliation.

As the Son of God and the Second Person in the Trinity, Christ brings reconciliation between human beings and the triune God. Through Christ we once again "receive the full rights of sons" (Gal. 4:5, NIV). As the Second Adam (1 Cor. 15:22) and our elder Brother, Christ makes reconciliation possible among members of the human family. For this reason Jesus earnestly prays that all who believe in Him may experience a restored unity and oneness (John 17:11, 21, 22), reminiscent of the oneness that existed between Adam and Eve prior to their fall.

Thus Christ calls His church to a new sense of family. We are all sons and daughters of God (Rom. 8:15), which makes us brothers and sisters (James 2:15). Since we are brothers and sisters in the new family of God, reconciliation is now possible between us, even if we have been wronged, betrayed, or hurt by other members of this new family (Acts 9:17). Naturally, some might choose not to become or remain part of this new family. This is particularly heartbreaking when members of one's natural family make this choice. Inevitably, those who have chosen to follow Christ might at times be at odds with their natural families. While this is to be avoided whenever possible, one's primary commitment is to God (Matt. 10:34–37).

Monday January 2

Heaven on Earth

TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:27, 31

"Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth.... The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides." The home encapsulates the family, and so if it is modeled after Eden the family will have a place of rest and a foundation from which to live out the great command of love.

"The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. . . . Our homes must be made a Bethel, our hearts a shrine."² Our family relationships are to be a daily, living sacrifice to our God and an example to our fellowman.

"Every Christian family should illustrate to the world the power and excellence of Christian influence.... Holiness to God is to pervade the home."³

"Every Christian family should illustrate to the world the power and excellence of Christian influence." "Fathers and mothers who make God first in their households, who teach their children that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, glorify God before angels and before men by presenting to the world a

well-ordered, well-disciplined family—a family that love and obey God instead of rebelling against Him. Christ is not a stranger in their homes; His name is a household name, revered and glorified. Angels delight in a home where God reigns supreme and the children are taught to reverence religion, the Bible, and their Creator. Such families can claim the promise, 'Them that honour Me I will honour.' "⁴ Is it not such a privilege to be honored by God when pleasing Him?

"The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven."⁵

We all yearn for our own little piece of heaven here on earth amidst the drudgery and mire of our sin-ravaged society. Our Creator in His infinite love has provided a way for this to become a reality: the family.

^{1.} The Adventist Home, p.15.

^{2.} lbid., pp. 18, 19.

^{3.} Ibid., p. 19.

^{4.} Ibid., pp. 27, 28.

^{5.} Ibid., p. 28.

Tuesday January 3

The Family of God

EVIDENCE Eph. 2:19, 20

The word "family" conjures up many images. Some people think of their immediate family. Others would add grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. The *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* also defines a family as "a group of people united by certain convictions or a common affiliation" or "a group of things related by common characteristics." These days, the term *family* can even be extended to crime organizations, such as the Mafia.

When most people are asked to define a family, most come up with a pictureperfect one, the nuclear family. It consists of a mother, father, and two or three children. This is the type of family that is considered typical and most stable. But unfortunately this archetype has never been the norm.

In Bible times some men had many wives who all lived in the same camp, such as Jacob with his four wives and 12 children. We all know how well that family functioned. Look at what happened to Joseph. There was also Levirate marriage, *levir*, meaning "brother-in-law."¹ This occurred when a woman was widowed without pro-

ducing a son and was required, by law, to marry her brother-in-law, resulting in blended families. These days more than half of Americans "have been, are

We all know how well that family functioned.

or will be in one or more stepfamily situations."² Approximately 2.4 million grandparents in the U.S. are the chief caregivers of their grandchildren. Twenty-seven percent of households have only one parent.³ And beyond these families, many more are broken by alcoholism, abuse, and a lack of love, resulting in dysfunctional homes that often continue the cycle generation after generation.

These families are not the kinds that God had in mind when He first created man and woman. He intended for families to be communities of support, in which love abounds and children can grow in their relationship with Him. Sadly, this is not the case in most families today. But there is one family that offers us everything we need, even when our own families fail us. This is a family that will always accept you, no matter who you are or where you have been. That is God's family.

"I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God, I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His Blood! Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, For I'm part of the family The Family of God."

3. Ibid.

^{1. &}lt;http://www.religioustolerance.org/mar_bibl.htm>

^{2. &}lt;http://www.womedia.org/taf_statistics.htm>

^{4. &}lt;http://my.homewithgod.com/heavenlymidis/songbook/family.html>

Wednesday January 4

How to Be a Family of Families

HOW-TO John 13:34; 1 Cor. 13:4

All humankind belongs to one family, the human family. Originally that family had a close and intimate relationship with the Creator of families, but through disobedience that special family bond was lost. Throughout the earth's history the Creator of families has been endeavoring to reinstate that original family tie. He wants us back home again. While we wait for our Savior to come and fetch us, we—as a church—are to be a family of families here on earth.

When I, along with a few friends, was on a working holiday in England, I had the wonderful experience of meeting Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians who opened their homes, their hearts, and even offered to open their wallets for us. We were repeatedly reminded that their offers still stood and that they would always be there for us if we needed them for anything. It felt wonderful to know that we truly were part of a family because right then and there we felt love, trust, kindness, and caring.

"The cause of division and discord in families and the church is separation from Christ." Here are a couple suggestions on how we can experience that:

1. Draw near to Christ. Ellen White aptly states the following: "The cause of division and discord in fami-

lies and the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another."* Analyze your relationship with Christ and others as it is right now. Have those relationships been better in the past? Is there room for improvement right now? Discipline yourself to get closer to Christ in prayer and study and then reanalyze your relationships and note any differences.

2. Love one another. "'A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another' " (John 13:34, NKJV). Have you this week been patient when you actually wanted to lose your cool? Have you really been kind to someone this week financially, emotionally, or otherwise? Keeping no record of wrongs—tried that lately? Happy and successful families trust and show trust. It has often been said that trust is the foundation of a relationship. We need to be trustworthy. Be involved.

*The Adventist Home, p. 179.

Juan Maart, Midrand, South Africa

Thursday January 5

We Aren't What We're Not

OPINION

2 Sam. 14:1-39; 1 Cor. 12:14-27

Absalom seemed to have it all. He was well liked, ambitious, and was the son of the great King David. "In all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks. From the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him" (2 Sam. 14:25, NKJV). He would stand by the gates of the city where business was conducted and listen to the problems of the people. The Bible says that in so doing he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (15:6, NIV). But Absalom carried a heavy burden in his heart as he constantly recalled how his brother Amnon had mistreated his sister Tamar. Revenge escalated the sibling rivalry until Absalom ultimately murdered his brother.

But this was not enough for Absalom. After killing his older brother, who was

heir to the throne, and with a mind full of devious plans, he went into battle with his father to usurp his throne. David's army defeated Absalom's Israel-



ites in the forest of Ephraim. Twenty thousand men died that day-including Absalom.

Does this sound similar to another story you know? In the perfect family of God, Satan decided that there could be more to his life than the paradise that God had given to him. As humans we often tend to look at other people and imagine that we would be better off in their shoes—or, perhaps, if we had one of our shoes and one of theirs. After a while we have collected a wardrobe of shoes, which we juggle as the occasion calls. It is important for us to remember Paul's metaphor of people in their uniqueness constituting the body of Christ. All of us are handmade. We were created by the most powerful Being in existence, with a specific purpose, for a reason; and it is this reason that fits us into God's great and awesome family.

Take time to reconsider your stance on your peers, role models, and siblings. Are there jealousies, grudges, or hindrances that prevent you from performing like a well-toned body?

REACT

How can we differentiate between healthy competition and jealousy?

Friday January 6

Family Matters

EXPLORATION

Rom. 12:48

CONCLUDE

Amazing fact of life: You cannot choose your biological family. And unless you choose not to associate with them, you're stuck with the one you have.

Likewise, we don't have much of a say in who will respond to God's invitation to become a member of God's family. Sometimes, just as we clash with members of our natural family, we have trouble relating to other members of God's family. But what brings us together as believers is more significant than that which separates us. If God calls us into a relationship with Him, He calls us to relate to one another as Christians, with grace and understanding.

CONSIDER

- Writing a one-page spiritual autobiography. In it, list and describe at least three people who influenced your spiritual life.
- Thinking of someone who influenced you to follow Christ, and write a note, email message, or make a phone call to tell that person how he or she contributed to your spiritual development.
- Producing a three- to five-minute video recording of "man on the street" interviews. Ask the subjects what characteristics they look for in spiritual mentors.
- Writing a five-minute screenplay in four acts that portrays your family's spiritual pilgrimage, capturing some of the pivotal events that brought it to its present situation.
- Imagining the members of your family as tools. How would those particular tools contribute to the building of a strong, vibrant family?
- Creating a sculpture that epitomizes your family's values. What would it show? What would it be made of?
- Doing an inventory of your family's strengths and weaknesses. Make a list of your family's top three, five, or ten strengths.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, pp. 67-75.

Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor*, pp. 1–10; Chris Karcher, *Relationships of Grace*, pp. 79–101.

Lesson 2 January 7–14

God's Word on Family Living



"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4, NIV). Sabbath January 7

Love Everyone?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 22:37-40

"Jesus said, ' "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence." This is the most important, the first on any list. But there is a second to set alongside it: "Love others as well as you love yourself." These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them' " (Matt. 22:37–40, The Message Bible).

One of the things that I really hate is when you are sitting down for supper and all of a sudden the phone starts ringing. I find myself muttering, "Who is it now?"

Inevitably it is a telemarketer. "Hello, I am calling from Agile's Plastic Doors." What do you say to them when they call? Do you yell at them; hang up on them; or simply check the caller ID and let it ring? Several times I have thought up really good things to say to these people later. For instance: "I'm having dinner right now with my family. Can you give me your number and I will call you back?"

But what does God tell us to do in this situation? He tells us to love God with



everything we have and to love each other as we love ourselves. Is God saying that we should love everyone? Everyone? You might ask, "But what about that

person who lied to me? What about that person whom I just cannot seem to get along with? Does God really think that I can love them?" Do we have to love those who have hurt us? Does He mean that we must love even the telemarketers, who annoy us? God does not say that we must love the people who love us in return; He commands us to love others as we love ourselves. My mother once told me, after my complaining about someone who did not like me, that we do not have to *like* everyone, but we have to *love* them.

How can we love everyone? I must say that it is not always easy. In fact loving someone else who has hurt you is one of the hardest decisions that you will ever have to make. I can tell you, though, that it is completely worth it.

This week we will explore what God meant when He commanded us to love Him and to love each other as we love ourselves.

Fundamental Family Living

Sunday January 8

EVIDENCE

Exod. 20:12; Ps. 127:3–5; Matt. 22:35–39; Eph. 5:22; 6:1, 2; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:17, 18

The family is described as a primary social group consisting of parents and their offspring, whose principal function is provision for its members.

In the book *Politics*, book 1, titled "The nature and necessity of the family," Aristotle identifies family as an association established by nature for the supply of men's everyday wants. He says that you can't talk about state or politics before talking about the welfare and management of households. It can therefore be recognized that every aspect of human living points back to the family—church, politics, and the state.

In ancient times it was deemed important for people to know their family backgrounds, and in order to do

that they traced their descent from available genealogies. Even though the family has undergone gradual changes—that is,

God designed the church to be an extended family.

from an extended one to a nuclear one-apparently some societies still embrace it.

In addition to that, however, there existed—and still exist—some cultural pressures, ideas, and values which stand in contrast to biblical values and ideas on family living. Therefore, in order for families to overcome them, they need to go back to God's Word.

God designed the church to be an extended family with many mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters; and according to the Scriptures, it is the basic unit of the church. Therefore it's because of this that He intended to have a family that is united—one that would work, play, eat, worship, and interact together. At the same time it must be recognized that collective worship finds its center in the church. It is a vital part of the family's social structure as well; they should pray, sing, offer thanksgiving together as this will result in healthy family worship time that provides security, stability, and maturation for family members.

In His Word God also stipulated the relationship of children with their parents and vice versa: Children are to honor parents and parents are to treat children with love, without embittering them. Jesus—when He was on earth—was living in a family yet was still found to be perfect in the eyes of God. This served as an example for families to follow in order to live according His Word.

Monday January 9

Family Values

LOGOS

Exod. 20:12; Ps. 18:2; Song of Solomon; Isa. 54:5; 62:5; John 10:11; 15:5; Eph. 5:21-25

As I write this, the United States is exhaling after an often bitter presidential election. Promises were made—some to be kept and most to be forgotten or denied if history is any guide. Things were said and done during the election that I hope are regretted by all. Lies, character assassination, and charges of aiding the enemy were thrown around so liberally that the issues at times seemed to be immaterial. Only after the election was over and the pundits were analyzing the results did it occur to most of them that there had indeed been an issue to the election. "Moral Values," or "Family Values," were seen to trump all, according to the now-knowledgeable analysts.

Lots of subtext to that of course, but two keys were Christian views on the abortion issue and calls for same-sex marriage. This is quite appropriate to our empha-

Why not have human procreation by parthenogenesis? sis in this lesson study when you think about it.

As instituted by God, the marriage relationship is all about life. As a model of our relationship to our Creator,

the marriage relationship gives companionship, emotional life, and a sense of wholeness. Out of that relationship comes life.

It is curious that in our supposedly liberated society we allow so little of the true wonder of heterosexual marriage that God instituted in Eden and that is celebrated in the lush language of the Song of Solomon.

More aware cultures than ours have luxuriated in the language of the Song and seen it as God's approval of a true celebration of the union of male and female. Yes, the book is also an allegory of the relationship between the church and her Lord. But to keep it at that level alone is to deny the literal level of all Scripture and to miss the higher value of the marriage/male-female relationship.

Why not have human procreation by parthenogenesis? Surely God could have set us up for that—if He had intended nothing more than perpetuation of the species. Clearly He intended more. He wants us to understand the nature of life, as we in our limited way "create" life. He wants us to experience a model of closeness to the divine, as we blend in marriage.

There is something prudish in the way we ignore the real meaning to the Song of Solomon while gathering the many other direct Bible images of the marriage closeness of God to His people. We are quite ready to see the marriage relationship as a transaction, because it puts us under obligation to our Creator—just as many retrograde cultures treat marriage today. But "wives submit" (Eph. 5:22, KJV) means something very different, we should know, than a property arrangement. Yes, in some cultures the arrangement can be terminated as simply as the man speaking the words of divorce (at least our Western model requires a judicial action). But surely when we read that "Christ . . . loved the church" (verse 25, KJV), we are on another level altogether than transactional. In the upper room, Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends'" (John 15:13, NKJV). The value of family/marriage must therefore be sacramental and integral to the spiritual-ity that God IS.

The same-sex marriage discussion in the Western world presumes to read into some very clear Bible texts an allowance for other than heterosexual union. The Bible is clear on the topic and condemns the practice as roundly as it does adultery. Obviously there is some sort of pleasure and fulfillment in any number of condemned practices. In fact as an incomplete or distorted version of what God has proscribed, there may be partial fulfillment—but partial is always the devil's way. Cain offered the fruit of his labor as a sacrifice and felt fulfilled, as the practice was intended to do for sinners. But he was deceived because in failing to follow the method God gave, he missed the whole point of the exercise. Just so, adulterers and homosexuals think that a partial pleasure is "good" and godly, and absolutely miss the point of spirituality and modeling of the divine that informs marriage and the family. To suggest other than what God has given is to offer a "strange fire" (Lev. 10:1, KJV) relationship.

" 'Honor your father and your mother' " (Exod. 20:12, NKJV) is language similar to the call to honor God "that thy days may be long" (verse 12, NKJV). I think it biblically axiomatic that any society that breaks down the family will not long prosper or survive. Prophecy puts it that way, and modern trends tend to support that scenario.

And there is something grotesque about a society that claims to respect life and is willing to terminate babies in the womb. We must not close our ears to their cry just because the right-to-life activists are shrill and objectionable. The reminder that "Your Maker is your husband" (Isa. 54:5, NKJV) puts a very sacred reality to the marriage relationship and its progeny. God is the Life-Giver. Through His marriage relationship with us, He gives spiritual life and hope of an eternal existence with Him. If we have the "family values" view of our relationship to God, we will cherish and guard the human model He has given to us.

REACT

- 1. What does it really mean to belong to the family of God?
- 2. How can we honor God the Life-Giver in dealing with contemporary issues?
- 3. Is marriage sacramental or transactional? Explain your answer.

Tuesday January 10

It Pleases Him Well

TESTIMONY

Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20, 21

Families are to be living in peace and are to show love one to another, with Christ at the center of their relationships. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Eph. 6:1, NKJV).

God saw how much these principles would benefit us, so He not only made this a commandment, but He placed a promise along with it. " 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth' " (verses 2, 3, NKJV). Jesus was our Example. When His mother and earthly father came looking for Him in the temple, even though He was about His Father's business, He returned with them until His time was come. Sometimes it seems that our way is harmless, but the bottom line is still to obey your parents in all things.

But you know what is so great about this? The apostle points out something that would make the whole situation easier: "Do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Col. 3:21, NKJV). Discouraged at life perhaps? It is often

If parents are to be true Christians, they must first begin at home. said that in the way fathers deal with their children it would make it easier for a child to develop a true image of the character of God.

"Parents, God desires

you to make your family a sample of the family in heaven. Guard your children, be kind and tender to them . . . one well-ordered, well-disciplined family is a greater power in demonstrating the efficiency of Christianity than all the sermons in the world."*

If parents are to be true Christians, they must first begin at home. It is from their example that the children learn how best to depict the love of Christ to others. Children best learn to love their siblings from looking at their parents' example of love one to another. It is from this example that they will know how to build their own families.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:22, 25, NKJV).

Everyone has a part to play; let us put our all into it, just as Christ has instructed us to.

^{*}The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 6, p. 1118.

Wednesday January 11

Brother Jesus

HOW-TO

Prov. 22:6

"Out of the heart are 'the issues of life' (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household."*

All of us experienced being a child, and those delicate years were spent at home under the guidance of adults. Whatever we learned there was brought on as we grew up. Jesus is no exception to that. He spent 30 years of His life quietly with His family. During those years no miracles were done and no throng followed Him around. He was an ordinary brother and son, submitting to discipline, doing the household chores, dealing with ordinary issues of family, and learning a great deal about life (Luke 2:52).

Quietly as it is, His life's mission has started. He was already setting an example for us. Jesus was always family oriented. On the cross He was more concerned

about His mother than His bleeding flesh. Throughout the Bible we could see verses intended to keep the family relationships.

1. God, the Head of the

Jesus was always family oriented.

family. God is as concerned as you are about your families. Involve Him in any decision making you do for your family—like career, travel, and more. He promised that whoever abides in Him, He will abide in them (John 15:5).

2. Pray together. The Bible advises that we must pray everywhere (1 Tim. 2:8). Prayer is the most effective cord that binds family members together. The perfect time to do this aside from mealtime is during the evening and morning worships. Here, concerns for each member are heard and enlightened. You talk over issues like moralities, problems of life, and society—pray together for guidance from the heavenly Father.

3. Submit to each other. "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3, NKJV). Each member must recognize and respect the role of the other. God designated a father and a mother for a reason. He put them there to guide the little ones. Thus, they must do their part well for their children and each other. Children in return must honor their parents (Exod. 20:12), as written in the Ten Commandments.

4. Discipline children. The education of children begins at home. Parents therefore see to it that their children learn properly (Prov. 22:6). Children sometimes are tempted to rebel under restraint, but after that they will realize the blessing of their parents' guidance.

*The Ministry of Healing, p. 349.

Thursday January 12

A Mother's Selfless Love

OPINION

1 Sam. 1:22; Eph. 5:2

The story of Hannah asking the Lord for a child and then giving him back to the Lord is a reminder of how important is a mother's influence in the family. Hannah, mother of Samuel, left "the child Samuel to be trained for service in the house of God, under the instruction of the high priest. From the earliest dawn of intellect, she had taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord's. By every familiar object surrounding him, she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother's solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little

The Word of God is a complete guidebook to a successful family relationship. garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness

which Heaven values-that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.

"What a reward was Hannah's! and what an encouragement to faithfulness is her example!"*

A mother who fears the Lord and loves her husband and her children is a priceless jewel in a family. It is because her love makes a difference in the home.

A family is not complete without a mother or a father or children. It is not a happy home without God. It is only when He is in the family that there is complete joy and peace. There is no happiness therein when love is not found.

The Word of God has many examples on family living for every family member to learn a lesson and follow it. It is a complete guidebook to a successful family relationship. Yet many Christian families today are unsuccessful because they fail to pray and read the Holy Word. God is teaching us through the Bible. Therefore we need to seek and search His Word to have a successful and meaningful family life.

REACT

What is the best advice you could give to a friend if he tells you that his mother or his father doesn't love him anymore?

* Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 572.

Mylene Lomiteng, San Andres, Philippines

Friday January 13

Family: A Basic Need

EXPLORATION Rom. 12:9–12

CONCLUDE

When asked to list humanity's basic survival needs, most people would mention shelter, food, water, and clothing. But this week's lesson has introduced a fifth element: family. The words of the song "No Man Is an Island" remind us that people weren't created to live lives separate from each other. We can't make it on our own. We need family—our individual family units and also our church family.

CONSIDER

- Designing a simple family tree and with the help of other family members and some personal research, learn more about your genealogy.
- Watching a TV sitcom that involves family, thinking about these questions: What messages about the family does it give? In what ways was it realistic? unrealistic?
- Skimming through the newspaper to look for reasons for the breakdown of family ties.
- Reading through or singing from The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal songs that deal with the importance of the home, e.g., no. 651, 652, 654, 655.
- Inviting someone who is alone or away from their family to spend Sabbath with you. Share your family with them.
- Interviewing a couple who have been married for at least 30 years. Ask them to share with you their ideas on what makes a family successful.
- Assessing your interactions with your other family members and how you relate to them. In what areas could you make improvements? Set some goals for yourself in these areas that can be reached in the next few weeks.

CONNECT

The Adventist Home, pp. 31–34, 190–194. Video series by Gary Smalley, Keys to Loving Relationships, Video #5, Becoming Best Friends With Your Family. Kay Kuzma, Working Mothers, pp. 235–259. Lesson 3 January 14–21

Restoration



"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Heb. 13:4, NIV).

Sabbath January 14

The Power Is in Union

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 41:6

"Hey, don't leave that man in the waiting room with the other patients!"

Those were the words that I heard when I was attending a man in the emergency room who had been shot in the foot. The fact was that a woman who was brought in minutes earlier with a hammer wound to the head was confused. And now her aggressor was getting in the room with a wounded foot. They were lovers. When she had discovered that he had another lover, however, she'd tried to kill him. To defend himself, he'd hit her with a hammer.

Moments later the woman's husband came into the emergency room. He didn't know that she had a lover. And then the lover's lover arrived too, who didn't know that he had another lover! Can you follow all this? It's difficult but I'm sure that for these four people that meeting on that night at the emergency room was even more difficult.

The family relationship should be a blessing; however, sometimes it turns out to

be a nightmare. It happens when couples seek alternatives (alcohol, drugs, affairs, etc.) that destroy the love that is the very basis of matrimony. True matrimony is a friendship

The family relationship should be a blessing.

between a man and a woman and is a self-donation to each other (Isa. 41:6).

Family is an institution created by God. Since Eden, it is God's designation that man and woman leave their father's homes to build their own home (Gen. 2:24). We were created to live an eternal life, to make eternal alliance, and it is only under God's guidance that we can do that. Only under God's direction can a family grow. Satan has tried in many ways to destroy this precious institution because it is in a family example through which we can understand on earth the celestial relationship (Luke 15:11–32). It is a supreme gift of God, and it is a type of the relationship that Christ established with humanity when He gave Himself to die on the Cross.

Sunday January 15

Believe It Can Be Fixed

LOGOS

Gen. 1:26–28; 2:24, 25; 3:1–24; Matt. 19:3–5; Luke 17:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 1:4; 6:2; Eph. 3:17–19

Some university friends of mine were talking about a party that happened the night before. It was a gothic party. Decorations were dark, with inscriptions on the walls on the theme of death. One of my friends went into the bathroom, where he interrupted two young men of the same sex kissing each other. As they saw my friend's shocked face, one of the young men said, "I don't know why you are so shocked. Being gay is very common nowadays!"

Some decades ago, the word "couples" was used to designate a man and a woman. Today two persons of the same gender are called "couples" too, and in some countries it is possible for them to get married. The homosexuality that is forbidden by God (Lev. 20:7–21; Rom.1:24–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–11) is one of many of Satan's strategies to corrupt marriage.

There is another kind of trap that may seem less outrageous, but may be just as damaging in that it is outside God's original plan. Sexual immorality of any kind is forbidden by God (1 Thess. 4:3–8). The fall of the human race brought sin to this world, and God's plans were corrupted. Sin has damaged the institution of marriage throughout the ages. For too many people, achieving personal happiness has become a primary goal. If a couple ceases to feel happiness with one another, they merely discontinue the marriage. Today marriage is considered more of a quaint tradition than a blessing, an option that can be adapted to personal desires.

The institution of matrimony that God has bestowed on us is important to society too. A couple who are loyal to God and His law are a positive influence on others around them. They will be like a light for those families who live in darkness, who suffer from unfaithfulness, violence in the home, lack of love and respect. These factors damage a home, bringing consequences that affect not only man and wife but children and other loved ones. Without divine guidance, a child's character is hampered. These bad influences can extend through many generations and affect the lives of those who never experienced the beautiful gifts of a Christcentered home. Through Eve's temptation, Satan tried to destroy the first home on earth. Home is not just a social environment—it is an Eden, a piece of heaven if Christ lives in it.

Not so long ago (no need to go very far) the normal way of things was for a man and woman to date one another for a time, to become engaged, and then to be married (Gen. 2:24). During this time, they became increasingly well acquainted with one another to the extent that they could decide whether this was a relationship that they could invest the rest of their lives in. From this balanced, monogamous relationship, children were born (1:28). This is the kind of marriage that God created for us. This is the closest relationship that humankind can have with one another.

This is why Jesus performed His first miracle at a marriage party. This is why He describes His relationship with His people as a marriage, i.e., He is the Groom and the church is the bride (Eph. 5:22–33). These indicate the intimacy in the alliance between God and His people. It is His wish that we have this kind of close relationship with Him. That's why when we disobey these heavenly laws it means that we're unfaithful to that relationship. Unfaithfulness in marriage is the greatest cause for divorce. Being unfaithful to God causes a separation between man and heaven. The experience of marriage—and of our relationship with God—must include kindness and patience.

Sometimes we should look backward to see the future. The biblical representation of marriage shows us that even despite the damage that sin has caused (Gen. 3:17–19), God keeps His promises. God's love for us, His children, compelled Him to pay the price so we can have another chance (Gal. 1:4; 6:2). God in heaven will restore us from the impact of sin. There we will be free from the consequences of

sin, because God has won. But restoration can be attained even while we're still in this world: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV).

"I was expecting nothing less from you!"

What a relief, what a wonderful assurance of God's care for us. Unfortunately we live in sin and we face problems every day. We try human solutions for our problems. But salvation is God's gift to us. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV). With this beautiful promise, what do you ask God for in your prayers?

Once when I bestowed a little favor on a friend, he thanked me with the following phrase: "Thanks. I was expecting nothing less from you!"

What do you expect from the Creator of the universe? A little help in your life? Human solutions from the Almighty? God came to this world so we could be set free and live eternal life. He died for this. So do not expect less from God. Believe in heaven. Ask for restoration. And begin to live the happiness of the heavenly family in this world now, with the restoration that He wants to give you.

REACT

1. Based on the lessons that you study, what would you say to a couple who were getting divorced? Is there any hope for them?

2. Why does God give so much importance to marriage?

3. What are the factors that make restoration so difficult to the sinner?

Monday January 16

And Now, How About My Freedom?

TESTIMONY

Gen. 2:18

The current word is "freedom." Freedom in religion, freedom of expression, freedom in sex, freedom in everything. But what is the worldly concept of freedom? When God said that it was not good for a man to live alone, was He taking freedom from him or was He freeing him from something else?

The world seems to profess the opposite of what God is saying. The world is telling you that it is nice to live for yourself because you'll always be free when someone interesting appears. One of the worst lies to the young is: "If you marry, you'll lose your freedom."

Marriage is the opposite of losing freedom. "In your life union your affections are to be tributary to each other's happiness. Each is to minister to the happiness of the other. This is the will of God concerning you. But while you are to blend as one, neither of you is to lose his or her individuality in the other. God is the owner of your individuality." Marriage is really the ultimate in freedom. Now you have your house,

"God is the owner of your individuality."

plans, dreams, and more, someone special with whom to share your victories or losses. Someone to share with you some pleasure on physical, emotional, and spiritual levels!

Someone whom you chose. That is freedom!

"The choice of a life companion should be such as best to secure physical, mental, and spiritual well-being."² "Let those who are contemplating marriage weigh every sentiment and watch every development of character in the one with whom they think to unite their life destiny."³

There are two principles for a happy life. First, God didn't make you to live alone. Second, marriage should last forever, so enjoy your freedom of choice. God wants you completely free to love someone whom you choose.

- 1. Messages to Young People, p. 451.
- 2. The Ministry of Healing, p. 357.
- 3. Ibid., p. 359.

Tuesday January 17

Back to Eden

EVIDENCE

2 Cor. 5:17

In His endless wisdom, God created man and woman to crown the work that He did. The first couple should live in complete harmony and happiness, not only between themselves, but with the Creator too. Even after sin, the first families were to preserve the same model of a home that God had purposed. In Palestine most of the families consider the father a compassionate man. They loved him and had a great loyalty and respect for him. In these cultures the man was the head of a family and the wives accepted and respected this tradition that was created by God in the Garden of Eden. "Your desire will be for your husband'" (Gen. 3:16, NIV).

When man and woman were created, they lived on the same level, one fulfilling the other. It should be like this for eternity. "Eve was created from a rib taken from the side of Adam, signifying that she was not to control him as the head,

When man and woman were created, they lived on the same level.

nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him. A part of man, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, she was his second self; showing the close union and the affectionate attachment that should exist in this relation. 'For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it.' 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one.' "*

Since the creation of the world, Satan has tried, through sin, to destroy all the beauty and perfection that existed in the first home. Through His blood, Christ gave us a chance to live that beauty again in this world and promises eternal life when He comes back and returns us to the restored Eden. God created a perfect, happy couple: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27, NIV). Sin destroyed the family nucleus: It "entered the world ..., and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12, NIV).

Christ will come to restore and save our home. " 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full' " (John 10:10, NIV).

*The Adventist Home, p. 25.

Beauty Restored

HOW-TO

2 Cor. 5:17

Bacteria are damaging historical edifices and documents throughout the world. Micro-organisms damage buildings, allowingin humidity and acid that causes erosion. To work with historical documents more than 300 years old, you have to implement a special kind of handling.

Considering the important process of restoration of historical materials, I've noticed parallels in the restoration of objects and relationships of humans.

1. Recognize the real value of an object. I have an old trunk that belonged to my grandmother. It has been in my family since our first ancestors emigrated from Germany to Brazil. It needs an investment in restoration because of its rich history to our family. Similarly the richness of marriage (Heb. 13:4), the Sabbath (Rom.

The more dedication the easier and faster will be the restoration.

7:12), and other divine institutions deserve our consideration as elements of real and sacred ancestry (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7; Eph. 2:10; 4:24; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:9).

2. The process takes time and dedication. Restoring or repairing

a marriage or a friendship between brothers or church members takes time. We must invest time in prayer, in reading the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, in seeking more information about the condition of the original (Prov. 3:5, 6; 9:10; 11:17). We must listen to what others have to say and express our feelings sincerely. The opinions of others should be welcomed, because they have a unique view of the situation. When you recognize faults in yourself, try by God's grace to remove them, even if it turns out to be hard work and takes a long time (Col. 3:13, 18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–12). The more dedication the easier and faster will be the restoration.

3. Be aware of the details. Care for small misunderstandings each day. Speaking harshly, having no respect for the limits of others, forgetting special occasions, and refusing to apologize: These are some powerful bacteria that can bring down a relationship.

Powerful ability is offered to us through Someone who has that power. Only God is able to make the changes in our lives to make us capable of doing something that seems to be humanly impossible (Eph. 3:20). Let's learn from Christ, the great Master of restoration, the skills and equipment to restore the value of a friendship, the power of love between a man and woman that walks on the path of the Lord, the partnership of the members of a family, and the influence of Christian homes in our society. The beauty restored will make us forget the damage that was there before the restoration (1 Pet. 4:8).
Thursday January 19

Finally, the Cure!

OPINION

Matt. 5:18; John 17:17

The high number of homosexual unions around the world should come as no surprise. More and more people have become accepting of this. It is common to see corrupted families in our culture: young mothers struggling to educate their children alone, homosexual couples seeking to rear sons and daughters, wives and husbands living separated, and abandoned children.

And, further, we have the changes in dating behavior. To caress and kiss someone that you just met at a party is considered normal to a lot of people—even teens and younger. It works in a destructive way: You look for someone who interests you, use her or him however you wish, for whatever length of time that suits you, and then just leave. There is no respect, no loyalty. This is the diagnosis of a sick race. Sick from its origins in Eden. The human race has forsaken their beginnings. They

have forgotten their Creator. My law professor says that there is no absolute righteousness but different kinds of understanding of this term. With this kind of thinking, real truths like Sabbath and mar-

Our duty is to share this balm to the suffering souls of our culture.

riage have become desecrated and rejected by society.

God's Word is unchangeable (Matt. 5:18) and shows His character. Many have tried to make some changes in His Word to suit their own desires. As Christians we should seek biblical instruction and live in conformity with the real truth (John 17:17). Satan, a master strategist, has corrupted two God-given institutions: the Sabbath and the family.

Family is a divine gift that is facing a terrible crisis. If the situation is difficult for us who have such a great Christian hope, think of a child of a divorced couple who has two homes—or consider the child who has no home at all! We know that our home is not here and we have a loving Father waiting for us to live with Him for eternity. Our duty is to share this balm to the suffering souls of our culture, to point others to a home in God's family. We have the obligation to make the world aware that Christ is coming to restore the human family and finally give it the cure. Friday January 20

All in the Family

EXPLORATION

Gen. 1:26–28; 2:24, 25; 3:1–24; Job 31:1; Matt. 19:3–5; Luke 17:21; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal 1:4; 6:2; Eph. 3:17–19

CONCLUDE

The family is under attack by strong and sinister forces. Sexual immorality is the temptation that is destroying lives and relationships both inside and outside the church. Worse yet, the temptations feel natural, or so our culture tells us. The ways in which sexual immorality wreck our hearts and homes are complicated. The way we are to express our love and sexuality is simple. Biblical direction from God is clear. After all, He designed our heads, hearts, and bodies to enjoy sensuality in one way. All the other alternatives leave us broken and empty.

CONSIDER

- Writing a love sonnet or poem, from a Christian perspective, that promises faithfulness, integrity, and commitment.
- Asking three people to keep track of the names of all the people whose hands they shook at the beginning of the church service. At the end of the church service, compile the data to illustrate the exponential nature of infidelity.
- Reflecting on the implications of Job 31:1 and how it applies to you.
- Interviewing Christian singles in your church with the question, "How does the biblical understanding of dating differ from the world's view?"
- Wrapping a fragile glass or goblet in a towel. With heavy shoes, step on the wrapped glass so that it shatters. Try to glue it back together. Share your restoration attempts with your Sabbath School class.
- Researching the rate of divorce that is caused by infidelity over the past ten years. Graph your data in comparison to the rate of divorce within the Christian church.

CONNECT

The Ministry of Healing, chap. 10. Arterburn and Stoeker, *Every Man's Battle*, chaps. 1–12. <http://www.lifeway.com/tlw>.

Rey Descalso, Longwood, Florida

Lesson 4 January 21–28

Living with Lambs



"He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young" (Isa. 40:11, NIV). Sabbath January 21

Twinkling Little Stars

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 9:6

Once upon a time there was a couple who, for a very long time, were childless. Their minds were always wandering from one point to another about who would inherit their material wealth when they died.

The wife wanted only a daughter. On the other hand, the husband wanted only a son. For reasons best known to them, each party wanted his or her preference to come first. So the search for the two twinkling little stars continued.

After a time the woman realized she was expecting, and a wave of relief swept across their faces. It was the beginning of a journey that would lead them to a transitional point: The experience of becoming a parent. And it came to pass that on the delivery day, the woman gave birth to twin babies—a son, followed by a daughter. Their joy knew no bounds—but there was yet a big task ahead of them to be accomplished.

As a family grows larger, the parents receive additional responsibilities. A child spends the first seven years of life most closely with the parents. The life of the child is molded progressively by the parent till he or she attains the maturity of an



adult. Living with children, hence, is a responsibility which a parent should undertake with the greatest care. "The family circle is the school in which the child receives its first and most enduring lessons. Hence par-

ents should be much at home. By precept and example, they should teach their children the love and the fear of God; teach them to be intelligent, social, affectionate, to cultivate habits of industry, economy, and self-denial. By giving their children love, sympathy, and encouragement at home, parents may provide for them a safe and welcome retreat from many of the world's temptations."

This week we are learning about how to coexist harmoniously with our children—the most wonderful gifts God has bestowed upon us to care for, nurture, and bring up for His own cause. When parents employ divine tactics in dealing with their children, the particular home will derive real happiness—"a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed."²

As we study the lesson this week, let us fix our minds on what the Bible says about how these younger members of the Lord's family should be treated.

- 1. Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 65.
- 2. The Adventist Home, p. 15.

Sunday January 22

A Choice of Destiny

EVIDENCE

Ps. 127:3

"Bearing children is one characteristic in which all human beings are equal," commented Julius Nyerere, a former Tanzanian president, speaking at an official function, "but the difference lies in the way they bring up the children." Child rearing is one of the most challenging tasks in human life.

Some parents enter this territory with traditional qualities of harshness and arrogance. Others try it with bookish knowledge, employing psychology and logic. Still others undertake it with common sense. No matter what method is used in child rearing, however, the parenting approach will be evident in the child's character.

Child behavioral trends are dictated by the situation on the ground: What they see their parents and guardians do. This is what makes the difference. Young minds are usually susceptible to what they observe, and once they register it in their memory bank, it becomes quite difficult to erase. Thus children's experiences

become ultimately important for better or for worse.

Even in an effort to bring our children up well, if it is not in accordance with the definitions of heaven, then it's in

vain. "Children are a heritage from the Lord" (Ps. 127:3, NKJV). They should therefore be brought up in an atmosphere that is consistent with the principles of heaven. Listen to what the Spirit of Prophecy says about one parent: "Eli did not manage his household according to God's rules for family government. He followed his own judgment. The fond father overlooked the faults and sins of his sons in their childhood, flattering himself that after a time they would outgrow their evil tendencies. Many are now making a similar mistake. They think they know a better way of training their children than that which God has given in His Word. They foster wrong tendencies in them, urging as an excuse, 'They are too young to be punished. Wait till they become older and can be reasoned with.' Thus wrong habits are left to strengthen until they become second nature. The children grow up without restraint, with traits of character that are a lifelong curse to them and are liable to be reproduced in others....

"When parents regard every wish of their children . . . [Eventually they] are led captive at the will of Satan."*

*Child Guidance, p. 231.

This is what makes the difference.

Monday January 23

Parent-Stewards of the Creator

LOGOS

Gen. 16:1; Deut. 8:5; Ps. 30:1-9; 50:10-12; 127:3; Prov. 3:11, 12; Mic. 6:8

Parental Passion (Gen. 16:1)

The attraction of parenthood strikes virtually every human heart. As precious as they are in the eyes of God, so are children in the eyes of humankind. Parenthood imposes a unique sense of responsibility as stewards. This responsibility can be met successfully only when the stewards focus on Christ.

On this issue both the father and the mother are challenged to perform their parts adequately as parents and, of course, leaders of the family. "The father should do his part toward making home happy. Whatever his cares and business perplexities, they should not be permitted to overshadow his family; he should enter his home with smiles and pleasant words."



On the other hand, "the mother is the queen of the home, and the children are her subjects. She is to rule her household wisely, in the dignity of her motherhood. Her influence in the home is to be paramount; her word, law."²

Loving Discipline (Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11, 12; Mic. 6:8)

In the book of Proverbs parents and guardians are instructed to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6, NKJV). This kind of training requires modes of administration which are biblically acceptable. Our Father in heaven, who bestows upon us the responsibility to be a parent-steward, is a loving disciplinarian. "Whom the Lord loves He corrects" (Prov. 3:12, NKJV). The main aim in this kind of discipline is purely for correction in the direction of righteousness.

Weeping Only for a Moment (Ps. 30:1-9)

Security and love that our heavenly Father offers to His children is similar to that which a loving parent administers to his or her child. How beautiful it is when parents administer Christlike discipline upon their children, when they embrace them with security in the circle of the family.

A Precious Reward (Ps. 127:3)

Of all the gifts that we may receive, our children remain the best of all. God has instilled in our minds the responsibility of being a parent-steward to show that together we belong to Him. As much as the parent is responsible for correction on the part of the child, he or she is also subject to correction by God. We must therefore care for our children with the prayer of Hannah, who "did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness which Heaven values—that he might honor God and bless his fellow men."³

Honoring God With Our Children (Ps. 30:1-4)

Our world has changed greatly over a very long time. Technology has increased; population has increased a great deal, forcing some societies to adopt a one-child policy to cope with the fixed size of our planet. Even so, however complex life may seem, the cord connecting us to God should grow stronger and stronger to enable us stay connected with the Creator in all spheres of life. The number of children that God has given us should not be an obstacle for serving Him.

Thus, to be accepted before Him, our family, including our children, should be on their knees every day for heavenly communion. This is one area our enemy uses to attack us.

Preparing "the Lambs" for Heavenly Accomplishments (Prov. 29:15; 22:6)

If parents are to be good stewards, working for the fulfillment of the church's mission, they need not disregard the potentiality for gospel accomplishment that lies in their children. By instructing children the Bible way, parents should also teach them how to apply and live up to the heavenly principles in their present lives. Action is part and parcel of our faith and knowledge about God.

From the earliest age to the time when they become adults, parents should ensure their children's involvement in church life. Family worship should be a daily matter, not one taken trivially and governed by circumstances. When this is done, everyone will find pleasure in praising the Lord, and, with Joshua, parents may exclaim, "'As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord' " (Josh. 24:15, NKJV).

^{1.} The Adventist Home, pp. 211, 212.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 232.

^{3.} Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 572.

Tuesday January 24

He Was a Kids Fan

TESTIMONY

Matt. 19:13, 14

The Spirit of Prophecy makes it clear that Jesus was ever a lover of children. "One great reason why there is so much evil in the world today is that parents occupy their minds with other things than that which is all-important—how to adapt themselves to the work of patiently and kindly teaching their children the way of the Lord. If the curtain could be drawn aside, we should see that many, many children who have gone astray have been lost to good influences through this neglect. Parents, can you afford to have it so in your experience? You should have no work so important that it will prevent you from giving to your children all the time that is necessary to make them understand what it means to obey and trust the Lord fully."

Mrs. White makes it clear to parents concerning training that harmony should exist between a parent-steward and the children. "Parents, in the training of your

"Follow the method of the gardener."

children, study the lessons that God has given in nature. If you would train a pink, or rose, or lily, how would you do it?"²

She likens it to a gardener tending the most delicate species of plants. "In dealing

with your children, follow the method of the gardener. By gentle touches, by loving ministrations, seek to fashion their character after the pattern of the character of Christ."³

Parents who have wisdom and insight need to be good stewards of their children. They are co-workers with God in the continuous nurture of family harmony. "The Lord will give to fathers and mothers grace to interest their little ones in the precious story of the Babe of Bethlehem, who is indeed the hope of the world."⁴

"Many parents do not understand how much they are responsible for these traits in their children. They have not the tenderness and wisdom to deal with the erring ones whom they have made what they are. But Jesus looks upon these children with pity. He traces from cause to effect."⁵

Saline K. Liyenzero, Ndhiwa, Kenya

^{1.} The Adventist Home, pp. 183, 184.

^{2.} The Desire of Ages, p. 516.

^{3.} Ibid.

^{4.} Ibid., p. 517.

Wednesday January 25

The Tree and Its Grapes

HOW-TO Prov. 20:11

Maintaining purity of character in children is one of the basic challenges in child development.

The Bible says that "even a child is known by his deeds, whether what he does is pure and right" (Prov. 20:11, NKJV). Achieving this goal requires daily doses of intimate communication with our Creator, who is our Role Model in this challenging task. So what must parents do to excel in this battlefield?

1. Be a God-led parent-steward. Any instruction, any teaching or training, should be done with the principal focus on the Bible. Only then will this attempt yield its intended fruits. "Teach the children to see Christ in nature.... Teach them that He made the laws which govern all living things, that He made the laws for us, and that these laws are for our happiness and joy."

2. Be loving. Love summarizes the moral laws. With it come peace and harmony that only heaven can provide. Parents and guardians alike should be loving enough to accommodate their children's widely diversified characteristics. A loving

The justice of the Bible

should guide us.

parent will be directed in the mind to know that "to a very great extent, the mother [parent] holds in her own hands the destiny of her children."²

3. Be just. As our Father in

heaven is just, so we should be just in our operations regarding our children. As a matter of fact, justice spells out the mistakes committed and their consequent punishments. In this case the justice of the Bible should guide us. Let our children know and respect all that belongs to God including the Sabbath, the hour of prayer, and the tithe.

4. Be a faithful steward. No stone should be left unturned lest we miss a very important part in child rearing. As parent-stewards, we are to identify with our Master, who is Christ. When we accept the responsibilities of a steward, we must act in our Master's stead, doing as He would do if He were presiding. Should we act selfishly, and turn the advantages gained by trading with our Lord's goods to our advantage, then we have perverted the trust reposed in us. In this attempt, therefore, parents should remember to be orderly in themselves because "In a great degree parents are responsible not only for the violent passions and perverted appetites of their children but for the infirmities of the thousands born deaf, blind, diseased, or idiotic."³

1. The Desire of Ages, p. 516.

- 2. Patriarchs and Prophets, p. 244.
- 3. Ibid., p. 561.



Thursday January 26

United in Christ

OPINION

Gal. 3:28

The Bible teaches that as a family, we are united in the body of Christ. Children, as part of the earthly family, are precious in the eyes of God. As fragrant flowers in a fine vegetation, they make the air around the family atmosphere more desirable. Any earthly parent, in dealing with his children, should look first at the larger picture of the family of God.

"Parents and children are to educate themselves to co-operate with God. They are to bring their habits and practices into harmony with God's plans."

Usually not all children in any given family are the same in character. Some may be slow to learn, others quick. Some may be law-abiding, others lawbreakers. However, whatever stamp of character that prevails in our families, the parent should provide an umbrella of love and discipline under which the diversified culture thrives.

"The education and training of their children to be Christians is the highest service that parents can render to God. It is a work that demands patient labor—a life-

"The education and training of their children to be Christians is the highest service that parents can render to God." long, diligent, and persevering effort. By a neglect of this trust we prove ourselves unfaithful stewards."²

A good parent should, hence, be both dictatorial and diplomatic. And, while doing all this, it should be noted in the mind that our Father in heaven

disciplines those whom He loves. This unconditional love should form the bedrock upon which training and discipline for the young minds are developed. They should be taught that they belong to a higher caste, that which is heavenly, and not worldly. "Every child brought into the world is the property of Jesus Christ, and should be educated by precept and example to love and obey God; but by far the largest number of parents have neglected their God-given work, by failing to educate and train their children, from the first dawning of reason, to know and love Christ."³

With our children, properly led in the way the Spirit requires, grand things lie just ahead of us when we finally gather in the heavenly kingdom, one magnificent assembly of all the redeemed: one family in Christ.

^{1.} The Adventist Home, p.19.

^{2.} lbid., pp. 268, 269.

^{3.} lbid., p.183.

Friday January 27

Parents as Stewards

EXPLORATION 1 John 3:2

CONCLUDE

Since our heavenly Father created us in His image, we have a responsibility to raise our children to reflect the image of God. Yet parenting is likely the most difficult role we have as stewards of God's gifts, for these gifts have a will of their own! Our only hope of succeeding as parent-stewards lies in maintaining a constant and close connection with our Father. He will give us the wisdom to train our children lovingly and consistently.

CONSIDER

- Producing a videotape as a resource to new parents. Interview "experienced" parents in the congregation, asking them what advice they would give to new parents, what their children have taught them about God, how they find time to maintain their relationships with God and with each other, what disciplining strategies they use, etc. Place the video in the church library.
- Singing "Oh, Be Careful Little Eyes What You See" with your children (or a group of children if you are not a parent). Pause after singing each verse to talk about what it means to be careful of our eyes, ears, feet, hands, mouth, etc.
- Role-playing difficult parenting situations and brainstorming about constructive ways to handle them better. Act out each situation again using the suggestions received. Look for principles that parents can apply when faced with similar situations in real life.
- Organizing a network to support single parents. Offer to baby-sit or help the children with their homework.
- Reflecting over this statement: "Managing our children begins with managing ourselves." Write down your reaction and develop a plan to encourage youself to live a more thoughtful and consistent life.
- Studying the parenting habits of three types of birds or mammals. Try to pick birds or mammals with different parenting techniques.

CONNECT

Ephesians 6:1-4.

Child Guidance; The Adventist Home, chaps. 27-33.

Bill Hybels, Honest to God—Becoming an Authentic Christian, chap. 7; Kay Kuzma, Building Your Child's Character From the Inside Out; Easy Obedience: Teaching Children Self-Discipline With Love.

Lesson 5 January 28–February 4

Disciples making **Disciples**



" 'All your sons will be taught by the Lord, and great will be your children's peace' " (Isa. 54:13, NIV).

Sabbath January 28

Like Parent, Like Child

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 18:6; Eph. 5:17; 6:1-4

"You want a piece of me?" I overheard a three-year-old boy tell his mother in a church restroom, his little fists clenched at his side and his face tight. His mother looked down on his small frame and with her hands on her hips said, "Yeah, I want a piece of you!"

No sooner than the words had left her mouth did the little one begin to hit her repeatedly. And in retaliation, she yanked him by his upper arm and began to spank him, much harder than what would seem appropriate for a child that age. But what was most disturbing about this scene was that after the beating, the little boy stood there emotionless. He didn't cry. This behavior was apparently a normal occurrence, and he had grown used to this treatment. This little boy did not learn

"You want a piece of me?"

to behave this way all by himself, but had been taught that this behavior was OK.

Too many children today are not being raised in a godly

manner. Christ is not at the center of many households, and it is resulting in broken homes that lack unity. Many parents today aren't following the Lord's counsel on parenting. The Word of God states that parents are to "train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6, NIV). But in order to train a child in the ways of the Lord, parents must also be earnestly and actively working on their own walk with Christ as well. For how can the blind lead the blind?

As well, children are commissioned to obey their parents. They are to respect their authority and honor their wishes. But if a parent isn't living a life that glorifies God, what is that child gaining? What example is being set before him? Each member of a family affects another member in some way. They can either lead someone toward or away from Christ. Jesus warns about the dangers of leading one of His children away. He loves each of us and is protective over us. As Christians we are to adhere to that same love. As Christ is with us, we should be humble and gentle with each other, patient in bearing with each other in love. And we are to make every effort to keep peace and unity with one another.

By following these basic principles, the hurt and disloyalty that reside in the heart of families would diminish. Christ is to be our Example and in Him none of these things can exist.

Sunday January 29

Fathers and Lambs

LOGOS

Exod. 29:38–42; Prov. 1:8; 22:6; Matt. 28:18, 19; John 8:31; 13:35; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 6:1–4

Have you ever sat down with your child, boy or girl, and dreamed with him or her? Have you ever used words to paint a picture of what you thought was most precious? Do you look up at the sky with your child and talk about the stars and the star Maker?

Think back. Gaze through the centuries and imagine fathers with their children. Picture fathers talking to their sons, hoping desperately that their words—only words—will fall into their children's hearts and spring up as seeds of salvation.

Here sits Jacob with Joseph. He listens to his child and he opens his heart to his son. He confesses his weakness. "How I longed to serve God. How I failed. But it worked out in my life. 'In all things God works for the good of those who love him'

He listens to his child and he opens his heart to his son.

(Rom. 8:28, NIV). As I lay with that stone for a pillow, God opened the heavens to me. There is a ladder between God and us. On the ladder, holy angels come to us from God

Himself. He loves people. He loves me. He loves you."

In the heart of Joseph seeds are springing up, seeds that will carry him past Potiphar's wife, past prison, past prime ministerial power to salvation.

Aaron has presented the evening sacrifice. His sons gather beside him as he comes from the tent of meeting. " 'This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two lambs a year old. Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning—a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.

" 'For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord. There I will meet you and speak to you' " (Exod. 29:38–42, NIV).

The Spirit moves on Aaron. He sees a glimpse of what God is saying: "The perfect lamb is God's gift, a wealth greater than sheep or camels, than silver or gold. The fine flour is bread more satisfying than any food on earth. The olive oil is God's Spirit bringing a peace more soothing than fine oil. The wine is sweetness in our lives, sweeter than the sweetest new pressed juice of the sweetest grapes." Tears fill Aaron's eves as he turns with his boys to go home. His sons never hear a word.

Later they will turn from the sweetness of the Holy Spirit to stagger drunkenly in the direction of other alcoholic spirits.¹

Joseph ponders the little Boy who lives in his home. Not his Boy (Matt. 1:20). God has told him how He loves this Child, but He is not Joseph's child. The Spirit moves Joseph. "Have you not spoken to other children in the neighborhood? Surely this child too."

He calls little Jesus to him. For the first time, he puts his arm around Him. "God is so good," he says. "His Spirit fills my life with hope and peace."

He looks down into Jesus' eyes. His Son understands. The soil of His heart is rich. The seeds of Joseph's words are growing. They will produce trees. Trees for a cross and a conquering of the world (Matt. 28:18, 19).

Joseph shares more. As he speaks his hope, he begins to love Jesus.

My wife has just told me the news. A baby girl shall be my firstborn child. I tremble. How can I share the beauty and the truth that anchor and power my very existence? How can I help my child to have faith in God?

Today's society has made me feel attacked. My words seem so small. Dare I even touch this baby? Perversions and agendas have made it hard for a man to show tenderness toward a child. Yet I must find a way to communicate my hopes and dreams to this little girl. Solomon said, "Listen, my [child], to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (Prov. 1:8, NIV).

God will lead me as I work with her mother. I can love her. My words can be living seeds of salvation. My touch can be true and tender. As her mother and I work together for this child, the Holy Spirit will bring Malachi's prediction to fulfillment: "He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Mal. 4:6 KJV).

"Fathers, ... combine affection with authority, kindness and sympathy with firm restraint. Give some of your leisure hours to your children; become acquainted with them; associate with them in their work and in their sports, and win their confidence. Cultivate friendship with them, especially with your sons. In this way you will be a strong influence for good."²

"During the first few years of a child's life the molding of the disposition is committed principally to the mother; but she should ever feel that in her work she has the co-operation of the father."³

Douglas J. Hosking, Williams Lake, British Columbia

^{1.} Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 360-362.

^{2.} The Adventist Home, p. 222.

^{3.} Ibid., p. 221.

Monday January 30

An Awesome Responsibility

TESTIMONY

lsa. 54:13

Ellen White had a lot to say about parenting. When you read her writings, it's pretty clear that parenting isn't something we ought to take lightly. And for sure there are consequences for both fulfilling one's responsibility as a parent and neglecting it. Here's just a sampling of what she had to say:

"Generally speaking, the youth have but little moral strength. This is the result of neglected education in childhood. A knowledge of the character of God and our obligations to Him should not be regarded as a minor consequence. The religion of the Bible is the only safeguard for the young.

"Happy are the parents whose lives are a true reflection of the divine, so that the promises and commands of God awaken in the child gratitude and reverence; the parents whose tenderness and justice and long-suffering interpret to the child

"Happy are the parents whose lives are a true reflection of the divine." the love and justice and longsuffering of God; and who, by teaching the child to love and trust and obey them, are teaching him to love and trust and obey his Father in heaven. Parents who impart to the child

such a gift have endowed him with a treasure more precious than the wealth of all the ages---a treasure as enduring as eternity."

"Help your children to prepare for the mansions that Christ has gone to prepare for those that love Him. Help them to fulfill God's purpose for them. Let your training be such that it will help them to be an honor to the One who died to secure for them eternal life in the kingdom of God. Teach them to respond to the invitation, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.'...

"Unless parents shall make it the first business of their lives to guide their children's feet into the path of righteousness from their earliest years, the wrong path will be chosen before the right."²

- 1. Child Guidance, pp. 480, 481.
- 2. lbid., pp. 488, 489.

Tuesday January 31

Your Children Are Listening

EVIDENCE Prov. 1:8

King Solomon wrote the book of Proverbs because he had a lot of wisdom to share. In his lifetime he had taken so many forbidden roads. Thankfully he later reflected upon the results of his choices and recorded his findings, which now gives us the privilege of looking at his inspired perspectives, knowing that he knows what it is like to have gone both ways—the way of the world and ultimately down the path of righteousness.

Proverbs 1:8 says, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching" (NIV). Think about this carefully. Here the son is already listening. What the father is trying to ensure is that the son is listening with the intent to respond in action, following the ways set by the father.

The Bible says in Acts 13:36, "David had served God's purpose in his own generation" (NIV). David understood the culture and times in which he lived. He had to in order to understand his God-given purpose for his generation. Paul understood

his culture: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22, NIV). Your



children will need to understand today's generation so that they understand their purpose in God's plan for the world's redemption.

Fathers, your children are listening. When Bobby comes home from school and says, "Dad, we got into a discussion at school about morality," then Dad responds, "Well, son, 1 Corinthians 6:18 says to flee from sexual immorality." What the son is thinking, but may never say, is that when Dad quotes the Bible around the table, it is quite effective. But when the son quotes 1 Corinthians 6:18 in the classroom amongst his peers in response to the topic of morality, it's quite ineffective. In hopes of understanding today's generation, the son is really asking why, Dad, do you believe 1 Corinthians 6:18?*

Solomon understood his generation. We can understand ours without making all the poor choices he did. Your children are listening. What will you say to their existential questions wondering how the Bible is a relevant, authoritative, and credible guide in today's generation? That's the level they're asking on. The answers will help them respond in action, producing disciples fit to serve God's purpose in this generation.

*This scenario was adapted from Ravi Zacharias's audio series Why I Am Not an Atheist <rzim.org>.

Wednesday February 1

Going by the Book

HOW-TO

Deut. 4:9; 32:46; 11:18; Prov. 22:6; 3:12

When you go to the store to buy an appliance—a TV, a DVD player, a computer—it includes an instruction guide. So why don't children come with an instruction manual? When I look around at a lot of kids today and see the way they act, I often wish that the parents had gotten the manual (and followed it) when they got the kid. Think about it. When you want to get a driver's license, they make you take driver's education, study the rules, and pass a test. If you want to learn to fly a plane, you have to go to pilot school. So why doesn't anyone have to take a class or study a textbook to become a parent?

Fortunately as Christians, we do have a manual: God's Word. The problem is that we're often like the do-it-yourselfer who'd rather piece it together the hard way than consult the manual or the cook who prefers to add a little dash of this or that rather than consult the cookbook. Sometimes things turn out OK in spite of our fail-



ure to follow directions. But in most cases we could save ourselves a lot of headaches if we'd just go by the Book. And when it comes to Christian parenting, winging it is a lot more

risky than cooking without a cookbook. Raising children without God's guidance is a sure recipe for disaster.

Though there's no guarantee for success, your chances are much greater if you follow some basic principles:

1. Be what you want your children to be. How many times have you heard a parent say, "Do as I say, not as I do?" Children are like little sponges. They soak up everything they hear and see, especially at home. They're also like little tape recorders. If you want your children to be Christians, the choice is obvious. You have to be and act like one yourself. (Deut. 4:9; 32:46).

2. Make the Word of God the center of your home. There are no lessons more valuable for teaching children than the ones found in God's Word. If you teach your children to value, respect, love, and obey God's Word, you'll give them a gift that will last for eternity (Deut. 11:18; Prov. 22:6).

3. Focus on character development. Teach the principles of honesty and integrity. Instill in them the value of hard work. And most of all, discipline them. Help them to understand right from wrong and help them to learn the consequences of bad choices (Prov. 3:12).

Thursday February 2

Being on Guard

OPINION

Ephesians 6

Everyone desires security. Boldly proclaiming such a straightforward thing is often not advised, but I believe that this phenomenon is a product of human nature that no individual possesses complete control over. People's compelling need to defend themselves dates back to Old Testament days.

But humans are not entirely self-centered. Along with the longing for personal safety comes the desire to protect loved ones. Markets are blanketed with home security systems and car alarms. Locks are used on everything from school lockers to office buildings. Airports have electronic security checkpoints. Police officers patrol every town.

At first glance this might lead to the conclusion that we are a paranoid society. But when evaluating statistics such as those presented by the National Vital Statistics

Report in September 2001, one might be convinced that such behavior is necessary. Over half of the increase in the prison population since 1995 is the result of an increase in the prisoners convicted of violent offenses, and gun homi-

Isn't this the kind of selfdefense youth should be learning?

cides by teens and young adults rose sharply beginning in the mid-1980s.

So where does the discrepancy exist? Why do individuals, especially young people, feel the need to tear others down through violence instead of defending each other? Larry Bumpass, Ph.D., sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, establishes a correlation between insolent youth and unstable family life.

While it is a major factor in the well-being of both adults and children, the stability of family life is clearly decreasing. There is an array of correlated outcomes: teen sex, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, and unmarried childbearing, all of which the literature associates with family structure.

Maybe that's why in Ephesians 6, the family relationships chapter, Paul transitions from advising parents to raise their children in the discipline of the Lord in verse 4 to instructing everyone to put on the full armor of God in verse 11. God knows that His children need to feel protected. That's why He left specific instructions on how to combat Satan's forces—truth, righteousness, peace, and salvation obtained through prayer and study of God's Word.

The procedure is simple. No fancy alarms or burly guards, just reliance on the strength of an almighty God. Isn't this the kind of self-defense youth should be learning? After all, that's what Joshua did. By acting on faith, he defeated his enemies' elaborate defense system by putting on the armor of God.

Friday February 3

"Into All the World"

EXPLORATION

Eph. 6:1-4

CONCLUDE

In the Great Commission spoken by Jesus to His disciples in Matthew 28:18–20, He urges them—and us—to go into all the world sharing the gospel with everyone we meet, making disciples of all who wish to follow God. In reality most of us may never have the opportunity to "go into all the world," but there is a mission field that will grow up right under our noses, and that field is children. Parents, guardians, and all who love children are given the awesome task of making disciples of children who enter their sphere of influence. Only by constant surrender to God, by a willingness to follow parental guidance as outlined in Scripture, and by living a godly life can parents hope to make disciples of their children and lead them to heaven.

CONSIDER

- Creating a montage of different concepts of what it means to be a family today. The montage should show new concepts of family that differ from the traditional family of father, mother, and children, and whether these new family structures can disciple children effectively.
- Writing a paragraph about the most important spiritual lesson you learned from your parents, guardians, or perhaps an adult who had a deep spiritual impact on your life.
- Listening to Stephen Curtis Chapman's "When Love Takes You In" on his Declaration CD (2001), which talks about his love for his three adopted children. Answer the following: Whose responsibility is it to disciple parentless children?
- Developing a silent role-play or skit on what it might have been like for Jesus to work with His father Joseph in their carpentry shop.
- Meditating on the story of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 21 and 22. What does Isaac's willingness to be killed on the altar of sacrifice say about Abraham and Sarah's parenting of him?

CONNECT

Deuteronomy 4:1-31.

The Adventist Home, chap. 26.

Karen Ladd and Jane Jarrell, *The Frazzled Factor: Relief for Working Moms*, pp. 25–31.

Dwain Esmond, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Lesson 6 February 4–11

Wise words for Families



"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV). Sabbath February 4

Is Family Really Important?

INTRODUCTION

Prov. 4:1, 20; 29:15, 17; Eph. 6:1-4

I have always liked to repeat this thought to myself as it reminds me of the value of family.

If we have a messed-up family, we will have a messed-up home.

If we have a messed-up home, we will have a messed-up community.

If we have a messed-up community, we will have a messed-up parish/state.

If we have a messed-up parish/state, we will have a messed-up country.

If we have a messed-up country, we will have a messed-up world.

Family is indeed important. God instituted this unique unit and has many blessings in store for families. Yet many persons take this precious unit lightly and do not plan for the responsibilities that come with it. Many families become messed up due to lack of communication, abuse (verbal, physical, and sexual), and so many



other issues. Family is the backbone of our society and the way our society lives depends on how we live at home. If families do not maintain peace and love among themselves, how will they be able to maintain peace and love to interact with the

wider society. Many wonder why our world has become evil, vicious, and unfair.

If we will just understand how important primary socialization is to tertiary socialization, then we would get the answer to that question.

If parents don't pray for special guidance and wisdom to train up their children and be an example to them and pray that their children will take heed to their instructions, we will indeed have messed-up homes and hence, a messed-up world.

We have to pray every day that the Lord will bless our homes with peace and love and laughter, with understanding and loyalty. We must pray that together we will follow Christ the Master and know the blessing of His sovereignty. Then in that spirit may we live united and find in God our deep security. May He forgive the hurts our selfishness inflicts on those we love best, heal the scars, and draw us all together in Him whose will is peace and joy and rest.

In gratitude for homes and loved ones, we should open our hearts to all humankind. We must ask God to grant us His Spirit-love for one another. This week the Lord is once again ready to help us to build better families.

Sunday February 5

Hindsight's 20/20

EVIDENCE Eccles. 12:13, 14

Want a piece of major irony to go with your daily Bible study? Solomon—the icon of wisdom, who built the temple in Jerusalem, created strong allies and trade agreements with other countries, consolidated the nation of Israel in 40 years of peace, and wrote so many famous proverbs and wise sayings that even non-Christians regard his words as a timeless guideline for righteous living—was by no means a model family man. He married women and took concubines (I'm sure no one marries 700 wives out of love!) and allowed them to introduce cultures that centered on idolatry and mysticism, and his son Rehoboam was such a weak leader that within a few years of his rule, the tribes of Judah and Benjamin formed their own nation.

In light of all this, it would seem like total hypocrisy for Solomon to write to us today, telling us what should constitute a good, God-fearing family. But I'm willing to bet, although there may not be much historical or scriptural basis for this, that

Solomon wrote many of his proverbs near the end of his life. Considering the successes and failures—the positives and the negatives of his reign—I think it makes sense that God

Wisdom isn't something that you are born with.

would inspire him to write to the future generations of potential success stories. I can imagine him, weary and feeble, yet with a mind full of divine wisdom, looking over his material wealth and crying, " 'Meaningless! Meaningless!' says the Teacher. 'Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless' " (Eccles. 1:2, NIV). I can see him, with the full knowledge that a son who is an incompetent leader, partly due to inattentive parenting, will soon assume the throne, summing up life in one simple phrase: "Here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil" (Eccles. 12:13, 14, NIV).

Wisdom isn't something that you are born with; it's generated over time and nurtured through experience. Our triumphs and failures, our lessons learned, and the people God puts in our path: It all makes sense in the long run if we let the Savior mature our spiritual being. Are we listening and learning from life the lessons God is trying to teach us, or are we content to wait, or ignore wisdom, until we have to endure life the hard way?

Imagine looking back over your life and the mistakes you've made (and we've all made some). Can you identify the major life lessons that God has already taught you throughout the course of your life? What advice would you have to give the next generation that can help them in today's world?

Monday February 6

Families in the Family of God

LOGOS

Prov. 5:3-14; 13:22; 14:26; 17:22; 23:13; 31:10-31; Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 7:3, 4

The First Family

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have been a family as long as they have existed—forever. They also desired man, created in Their own image, to be a family-oriented creature (Gen. 2:18). The result was the creation of Eve. If Eve, the helpmeet for Adam, would have known and followed the counsel that was later given God's church in Solomon's day (and would have applied it to the other gender), she, along with all of us, would have been much better off (Prov. 5:3–5, see Genesis 3:1–8). If Adam, the priest of the home, would have had "trust in the Lord with all [his] heart" (Prov. 3:5, NKV), believing that God would have provided another help meet for him, we might still today be walking in the Garden of Eden.

The enemy of the family is still lurking about to destroy the lifelong unity that



God originally designed. Jesus was merciful in giving the earth's first family another chance. He promised Himself as a restorative gift to the lost, brokenhearted couple that had given up everything by listening to the silver-tongued serpent

(Gen. 3:15). He had, as a loving Father, to follow through with the consequences of their sin, and He sent them from the Garden (verses 23, 24). That couple wanted to do right, they wanted to raise their family with the merry heart that does good like a medicine, but seemed to fail as parents (Prov. 17:22). One can hardly imagine that a child from the hand of God would purposely rear up a murderer. What went wrong? Who are you fearing and walking with today? What percentage of your family has chosen the right or wrong path? What can help?

Surely Adam scolded Cain with a rod when he was a child (23:13, 14). Should not Adam have been able to expect God to deliver his dear child's soul from hell after following His counsel? Did Adam's other son not "have a place of refuge"? (14:26, NKJV). Was there no protection from the evil coming into the home? Was one of the angels encamped around the tree of life—the one who was supposed to be encamped around his son Abel—the one who feared God?

Multitudinous are the dynamics that cause people to follow one Leader or the other. The Bible too often says it right: "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a

child" (22:15, NKJV). Adam, a perfect creation, was a child of God, and so was Lucifer. So what happened? Great is the mystery of iniquity. Have you a place of refuge? Are you causing tears to fall from the eyes of your parents due to the unwise choices you have made? Are you walking in the footsteps of Cain or Abel?

Your eternal destiny rides upon the choices you make today, tomorrow, and every day until Jesus comes. Be sure to meditate prayerfully on the words our Divine Parent has sent to us.

The Wise Man's Family's Future

Solomon, the author of the books of wisdom, had to deal with a disaster in his life. He was given wisdom from the Lord and flourished therein, but had a huge price to pay for misusing it. Consider the words of the wise man in Ecclesiastes 2:9–11. He had everything but failed to use it aright. He knew, understood by his own words, that his life would have consequences. He understood the blessings and the curses of the commandments of God that say, "I do not leave unpunished the sins of those who hate me, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. But I lavish my love on those who love me and obey my commands, even for a thousand generations' "(Exod. 20:5, 6, NLT). He knew his actions would affect other people, even his children; therefore, he wrote to and warned his son, saying, "Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad" (Eccles. 12:13, 14, NLT). Considering the commands of God throughout the Bible, in what ways could you follow the counsel of the wise man?

Regeneration of Our Families

Families are one of the greatest gifts that God has given to humanity. But too often they seem to be a curse, especially when the devil has been allowed to mess things up. The Holy Bible has given great counsel in regard to the marriage or family relationships. One good practical application is found in 1 Corinthians 7:3–5. If there are struggles in the family, defraud not one another of the love that Christ wants us to give, but rather give ourselves to fasting and prayer for a time. Prayer is one of the more powerful tools that God has given us, along with the study of God's Word for correction and instruction in righteousness. Let's allow God to do all that He can do in our families, for Christ is coming soon to take us home.

Tuesday February 7

Let There Be Family—Forever

TESTIMONY

Genesis 6; 18:19; Josh. 24:15

From Creation God had a high purpose for the union found in marriage. It should be looked upon as an ark of safety ferrying its precious cargo to gloryland; a sanctuary from the depravity of the world:

"God instructed Noah how to make that immense ark, for the saving of himself and his family. He also instructed Moses how to make the tabernacle, . . . The women wrought, with great ingenuity the embroidery of silver and gold. Skillful men were not wanting to accomplish the work of making the ark, the tabernacle, and the vessels of solid gold."

Nobody is idle: Everyone plays a part! There's no such thing as no-man's-land in this battle! A spiritual ambience has to be fostered at all times; otherwise a daily dose of poisonous family atmosphere will bring ruin forever!

"Our own words have an effect upon our character, but they act still more pow-

Build a kaleidoscope, and not splintered glass.

erfully upon the characters of others. The infinite God alone can measure the mischief that is done by careless words."²

"Your every deed is making

you either better or worse. If your actions are on Satan's side, they leave behind them an influence that continues to work its baleful results. Only the pure, the clean, and the holy can enter the city of God."³

Struggling with differences among you? Strive to turn them into advantages not conflicts. Build a kaleidoscope, and not splintered glass.

"Marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist in the same family, for it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together. . . . The blending of the varied temperaments may be a benefit to each."⁴

Don't live to leave anyone behind on this upward journey. Look beyond the present to eternity. We should long to spend it with our family. Impress this thought upon each other daily and help keep all on track.

- 1. Spiritual Gifts, vol. 4A, pp. 154, 155.
- 2. The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 1159.
- 3. The Adventist Home, p. 358.
- 4. Child Guidance, p. 205.

Principles of Family Functions

HOW-TO

Prov. 2:2–7

Family, to God, is a model of His love for the world. That is why this allimportant piece of the fabric of society and of life is addressed in the book of Proverbs. In Proverbs, we find God's instructions to maintain this model.

The instructions involve three intricate parts of the human body:

1. The ear. The ear is the part of the body that specializes in sensing sound. It can also recognize differences in sound. Similarly, each member of the family has to play the role of the ear. In order to make the family relationship work, every member must display a receptive spirit. Just as the ear is designed to recognize differences in sound, the family must take the time to recognize and hear each other. And in recognizing the differences, then true hearing is achieved.

2. The heart. The heart is also a major organ because it, as the central component of the body's life, pumps life-giving blood throughout the body. It is the center of our feelings and emotions. After hearing, the family members must then

exhibit a pursuing spirit. Family unity is something that has to be sought after because it is not easily accomplished. Only through a consistent and active selflessness can it be



achieved. The family is then able to pump the all-important life blood—involved personal emotions—throughout its interactions.

3. The mind. The mind concludes the physical triangle as the center of reason and intellect. The mind fits prominently into the human body's intellectual and volitional activity. The family, after listening and feeling, must now demonstrate understanding. Each of the organs mentioned previously are powerful influences on the mind because the mind has to take what is heard, which then is translated into what is felt, and then come to some kind of outcome. To the family, this means that they can then become more sympathetic to each other's needs. More understanding then translates into thoughtfulness, kindness, and acceptance—a stronger family bond.

These are the organs needed to develop a strong, central relationship with Jesus Christ. This is why Solomon's words in this chapter ring true. One has to be open to hear Christ. After hearing Him, one has to seek after Him with the desire to feel and experience the power that He is. Finally, after seeking and feeling the power, one can come to a rational understanding of who He is.

Thursday February 9

The Family Heavenly Heritage

OPINION

Deut. 29:29

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29, NKJV).

That which was designed for our good, the devil has always sought to destroy. It is this thing that Satan seeks to destroy that we are to guard.

Family was designed for our great good. It was to be a blessing; it is a gift given by God for our good. Yet this very institution the destroyer has sought to transform into a weapon of mass destruction. His efforts have been largely successful—from Eden down through to our day.

What methods can be employed to counteract the devil's objectives and accomplish the most good for and through our families?

Deuteronomy 29:29 should not be employed to cut short our thinking. It is part



of what has been revealed to us; hence it belongs to us and we can contemplate on it. Doing so unfolds to us counsel overlooked by many.

Our living God cares for our

families and has bestowed Scripture for each of them. "In the scripture we have the revealed will of God; it is ours."* We are thus to meditate on God's Word to us.

Because the Bible belongs to us and to our children forever, it is a very important aspect of our heritage. Normally we pass on to our children the things that belong to us. The Word should be a part of the heritage that we pass to our children. God addresses the law of inheritance in the book of Deuteronomy, and this would certainly include the spiritual inheritance which He expects us to pass on to our children.

This is what the book of Proverbs presents: a parent admonishing a son in regard to the Word of God (Prov. 1:8). The way to guard our children from the devil is to guide them to the Word of truth (Ps. 119:9).

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 1, p. 1059.

Cherish the Gift

EXPLORATION

Gen. 2:20–24

CONCLUDE

When the Lord placed Adam in the Garden, the first gift He gave him was family. Paradise wasn't enough without someone to share it with, and God met that need for Adam by introducing him to the most intimate of relationships. For millennia since that first marriage, the human race has sensed the beauty and sought to understand the experience of becoming one in family unity. God used King Solomon to give plenty of advice on family relationships. Perhaps he's so qualified to speak on the subject because he tried it both ways: God's way and his way. His inspired conclusions, recorded in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, are worth learning from!

CONSIDER

- Using a concordance to look up family words like "father," "mother," "son," "daughter," "husband," and "wife." Write out the verses in the book of Proverbs that use these words. Journal your thoughts on what these verses have to say.
- Writing a song or poem about what your family—or someone in your family—means to you.
- Making a list of TV families famously portrayed in recent years and think about how the family has changed in your society.
- Searching for a marriage enrichment seminar or program (if you are married) that both you and your spouse respond to and make a commitment to attend within the year.
- Starting a family night (if you have children) once a week or once a month during which you reserve time to be together and have fun.
- Beginning a prayer journey for your family. Make a commitment to pray for each member of your immediate family. You could cover them all each day or select one person you will pray for each day of the week. Ask God for specific things and see how He works!
- Putting together a memory book with a photo of a significant occasion from each year with your family. Write a little bit beside each picture about the event and what it did for you as a family.

CONNECT

The Adventist Home, pp. 1–35. Celeste perrino Walker, Adventist Family Traditions.

Sonia Huenergardt, Independence, Kentucky

Lesson 7 February 11-18

The royal Love Song

FOTA 05.

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

Sabbath February 11

What's Love Got to Do With It?

INTRODUCTION

Song of Sol. 8:6

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, an English poet from the mid-1800s, immortalized her feelings for her husband in Sonnet XLIII:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight For the ends of Being and ideal Grace. I love thee to the level of everyday's Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light. I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.* —Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Browning's poem continues on from there, but from this short excerpt it is clear that the author has a very altruistic concept of love. It all sounds fine and well, but what's with all the talk about love? What does that have to do with being sexy? Can she be sure that they have the right chemistry?

I mean, after all, it's the real world, right? We all have to learn the road rules, become the best survivor, and avoid temptation island. It's the year 2006, and though we may have forgotten the "Fear Factor" of years past, it's still a dog-eatdog world, whether you're "The Batchelor" or "The Batchelorette." From a depiction of prime-time television and "reality" shows, one would think that love and life are limited to bulging biceps, whittled waists, and perfectly bleached teeth, but what about that thing called love?

Without the Bible as our guide, it's easy to measure our beliefs and ourselves and to "cut ourselves a little slack." Some of the guests on reality shows would make Mary Magdalene—in her early life—seem like a prude, but that doesn't mean we can't take a look at our own lives and find a lesson or two.

As Christians we believe that sex is a special, sacred part of marriage. But just how special? How does our sexuality affect us as singles? And for those of us who are married, how can we learn to enjoy and appreciate this special aspect of love? This week's lesson will explore these issues and much more.

Sunday February 12

What Jesus Had in Mind

LOGOS Song of Solomon

Despite the conclusion of many Christian interpreters that the Song of Solomon is solely an allegory about Christ's relationship to the church, the book itself does not indicate this. The Song of Solomon can be used to illustrate the love between Jesus and the church, but first and foremost it is the love story of Solomon and the Shulamite. In beautiful and sensuous language this love song describes the ideal expression of sexual love in marriage. It demonstrates what Jesus had in mind when He created Eve for Adam in the beginning of time.

Sexual love celebrates commitment (Song of Sol. 2:16; 6:3; 7:10).

The defining characteristic of sexual love (not lust) is a couple's exclusive com-

The Song of Solomon is the most sensuous book in the Bible.

mitment to each other. Again and again the Shulamite exults, "My lover is mine, and I am His!" This oneness, this union, is a mutual interdependence that binds one heart to the other in the "golden bonds of a love that

is enduring." In the context of exclusivity (and only in such a context), a couple grows in trust, forbearance, and appreciation. In this atmosphere each member will become their best self and fulfill the intention of the Creator for their marriage. Sexual love celebrates and undergirds such exclusive commitment. Without this commitment to be solely with each other, the sexual act is selfish, self-centered, and ultimately self- and mate-destructive.

Sexual love celebrates comeliness (Song of Sol. 4:1-7; 5:10-16).

The Song of Solomon is the most sensuous book in the Bible. The lovers in the text are enthralled with each other's looks. Her hair, teeth, lips, neck, and breasts are adored by him. His hair, eyes, lips, cheeks, arms, legs, and torso capture her imagination. He is held spellbound by her from her sandaled feet to her head crowned with hair like a "royal tapestry" (7:5, NIV). This is extraordinary language for Scripture, yet the Holy Spirit has inspired it. This language of love is just an echo of the declaration of Jesus that Adam and Eve were "very good" (Gen. 1:31, KJV) at the end of the Creation week.

Though not the only—nor the most important—criterion for a long-lasting marriage relationship, physical attraction between mates is surely a desired component. "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" and "is only skin deep," but it is a part of what draws human beings to each other. When married couples express their appreciation for and compliment the beauty they find in each other, they strengthen their relationship and heighten the joy of their sexual union. "The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction."²

Sexual love celebrates contentment (Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:9; 7:6; 8:10).

A happily married couple revels in contentment with each other. They are excited to have found each other. Their relationship is a peaceful, contented harbor in a stormy sea of fractured, contentious, spiteful alliances. The spouses are pleased with each other. They are satisfied with the gift God has given them in the other. Hear Solomon coo, "My dove, my perfect one, is unique" (Song of Sol. 6:9, NIV). He perceives her as perfect, in spite of her own misgivings (1:6). He rejoices in the wife of his youth (Prov. 5:18). And she is completely content with him. Their sexual life is a thrilling thing because they are happy with each other.

Sexual love celebrates courage (Song of Sol. 5:2-6:13; 8:6, 7).

All relationships have their difficult times. It takes courage to stay the course. A sage once noted, "Married life is a marathon. It is not enough to make a great start toward a long-term marriage. You need determination." According to Thurber, "Love is what you've been through with somebody."³ Someone has quipped, "Marriage is not for wimps!"

For some undisclosed reason the Shulamite had become estranged from Solomon. When she desired to reconcile, he could not at first be found. When the couple at last reunites, they come together with kind words and complimentary speeches. "Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects."⁴ When a couple survives the tests and trials of marriage over time, not only may their love be deeper and stronger, but their expression of that love in sexual union will be especially sweet. Solomon said it best: "Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away" (Song of Sol. 8:7, NIV). Love never fails!

REACT

1. Given the deep joy and lasting satisfaction that can come only from sexual expression in a marriage between committed Christians, why do so many settle for something less in premarital or extramarital sexual experiences?

2. What can be done to better "advertise" the fact that sex in marriage is fun, exhilarating, and better than any sexual experience between uncommitted, unmarried persons—that it is worth waiting for?

^{1.} The Adventist Home, p.113.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 107.

^{3.} James Thurber, cited in God's Little Instruction Book for Couples (Honor Books, Inc., 1995).

^{4.} The Adventist Home, p. 105.

Monday February 13

An Agent for Blessing

TESTIMONY

Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:7; 5:10

"[Jesus] referred them to the blessed days of Eden, when God pronounced all things 'very good.' Then marriage and the Sabbath had their origin, twin institutions for the glory of God in the benefit of humanity. Then, as the Creator joined the hands of the holy pair in wedlock, saying, A man shall 'leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one' (Genesis 2:24), He enunciated the law of marriage for all the children of Adam to the close of time. That which the Eternal Father Himself had pronounced good was the law of highest blessing and development for man.

"Like every other one of God's good gifts entrusted to the keeping of humanity, marriage has been perverted by sin; but it is the purpose of the gospel to

"The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be." restore its purity and beauty. In both the Old and the New Testament the marriage relation is employed to represent the tender and sacred union that exists between Christ and His people, the redeemed ones whom He has purchased at the cost of Calvary. 'Fear not,' He says; 'thy

Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is His name; and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.' 'Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you.' Isaiah 54:4, 5; Jeremiah 3:14. In the 'Song of Songs' we hear the bride's voice saying, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His.' And He who is to her 'the chiefest among ten thousand,' speaks to His chosen one, 'Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee.' Song of Solomon 2:16; 5:10; 4:7.

"In later times Paul the apostle, writing to the Ephesian Christians, declares that the Lord has constituted the husband the head of the wife, to be her protector, the house-band, binding the members of the family together, even as Christ is the head of the church and the Saviour of the mystical body.

"The grace of Christ, and this alone, can make this institution what God designed it should be—an agent for the blessing and uplifting of humanity."*

*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 64, 65.

Tuesday February 14

Sex: An Expression of Praise

EVIDENCE

Song of Solomon 5

Among the books of the Bible, the Song of Solomon is one of the smallest, most difficult, yet one of the most popular books with both Jews and Christians. Over the centuries hundreds of books and commentaries have been written about it and unnumbered sermons preached on it.

How is it that this little book of only 117 verses can cause so much difficulty and yet be one of the most popular books of the Bible? Song of Solomon is difficult and popular because it arouses humanity's curiosity in sexuality while challenging the sexual ethos of the home, church, and society at large.

On the sixth day of earth's creation, God observed that perfection was not complete until Adam was one as God is one. So as Adam slept, God took a part of him

to form and fashion Eve. Though Adam and Eve were whole individually, it was not until sex that they truly became "one flesh." In addition Genesis 1:27 declares that male and female together is to

Adam and Eve's joining together became God's crowning act of Creation.

be the ultimate expression and representation of the image and oneness of God. Sex, therefore, was Adam and Eve's highest expression of true love and praise to God as they became one mentally, physically, and spiritually as God is one.

Furthermore, Adam and Eve's joining together became God's crowning act of Creation which ushered in the Sabbath which God also blessed, sanctified, and called good. God, then, is ever so delighted when male and female come together in marriage to become "one flesh." It is this joyous theme of sex in marriage that is central to the Song of Solomon.

With this theme as a stage, the poet of Song of Solomon attempts to express adequately the joy, excitement, and emotion that accompany true love when fulfilling God's original marital paradigm. Sex, then, is viewed as attractive, beautiful, creative, fun, priceless, tasteful, and wholesome.

Song of Solomon is written to lead humanity back to Creation to model and value God's original paradigm for sex in marriage. For sex within marriage was designed to be an experience of excitement, joy, as well as an expression of true love and praise that is to completely reflect the image of a joyous and loving God.

Wednesday February 15

How to Make Love

HOW-TO Song of Sol. 8:6

Many people would feel uncomfortable with sex as the topic for the Sabbath morning sermon. Some would be embarrassed. Others would be offended. Let's face it. When we go to church, we're probably not expecting the pastor to tell us how to be a better sexual lover. But, then, why shouldn't he?

Sexual love was God's idea in the first place. But our enemy has co-opted it and made it his own special plaything. Marriage has been dishonored and sex devalued in today's society. This is a part of Satan's plan. A person who waits to be married before engaging in sex is not cool by popular standards. But the Bible sees things differently (Song of Sol. 8:10). A whole Bible book has been written to celebrate the joy of marital sexual love. The Song of Solomon reveals that there is much more to lovemaking than sex. True lovemaking includes the following:

1. Love as God loves. God loves us unconditionally—warts and all. And despite the fact that He loves all of His children, His love for each of us is exclu-

Marriage has been dishonored and sex devalued in today's society. sive. He loves each of us as if we were the only one to love on earth. We may love many people, but our commitment and sexual expression must be exclusive to only one—our spouse. In addition, our love must be unconditional. Through

good times and bad times our love for our spouse should be never failing.

2. Publicly acknowledge your love. One thing that really impressed Solomon's wife was his public display of affection for her (Song of Sol. 2:4). He fawned over her in front of everyone at the banqueting house. God also has publicly shown His love for us by dying on the cross for our sins. He openly declares His love and His intentions for us. Let your spouse know before the entire world that he or she is special in your sight. Of course, make sure that you also back it up in the way you act in private!

3. Compliment, compliment, compliment. Throughout each day compliment your loved one. Especially let your spouse know how good he or she looks to you (Song of Sol. 1:16; 4:1). Everyone wants to be appreciated. Someone has said that everyone has an invisible sign on them that says, "Please make me feel special." If you aren't sure what to say, just tell them what my grandmother tells me, "You're a sight for sore eyes!"
Thursday February 16

A Most Sacred Activity

OPINION

Matt. 5:28; Phil. 4:8

The Bible in Song of Solomon portrays the intimacy of a wedded couple. In addition to that book of poetry, the Bible documents many other examples of individuals who experienced happiness through intimacy according to God's will, as well as those who suffered from the consequences of lust and sexual immorality. Take for example the story of Mary and Joseph, and the story of Abram, Sarai, and Hagar. Mary and Joseph directly followed the instructions of the Lord for their relationship, and in return they were afforded the privilege of bearing and rearing the Son of God on earth. On the contrary, Abram and Sarai were faced with a predicament in their relationship, and instead of waiting on the Lord, they involved another person in their marriage life. Consequently, much pain, jealousy, and needless suffering followed.

Living in a world in which standards, such as marriage and love and respect for

your counterpart, are lessened by society daily, how do we know what is sexually acceptable for us as Christians? God created us to experience the joys of sexual intimacy. Song of Solomon reminds us that our pleasure is truly fulfilling, but,



only when pursued in accordance with God's standards of marriage, purity, and love. Sexual intimacy is a most sacred activity that God sanctioned only for marriage. In His infinite wisdom He knows the outcome when we choose any other way than what He has outlined for us in His Word.

"Those who regard the marriage relation as one of God's sacred ordinances, guarded by His holy precept, will be controlled by the dictates of reason."* If we learn to constantly seek God's will for our lives, the Holy Spirit will direct our thoughts and actions, and teach us the difference between love and lust. When lust is allowed to reside in our minds, it tends to consume our thoughts, and the light of God is pushed aside. Lovingly, God will show us the difference between our human urges, and the appointed time for love and intimacy with a little faith and self-control.

*The Adventist Home, p. 121.

Friday February 17

Love Is in the Air!

EXPLORATION

Song of Sol. 8:6

CONCLUDE

The Song of Solomon is a beautifully written song that expresses the love between a married couple. Some Christians have viewed the book as an analogy of Christ's relationship with the church. However, one thing is certain, the Song of Solomon has been deemed too racy to discuss as a recurring sermon subject. The perception has been that sex is a taboo subject that shouldn't be discussed in church. If we can't discuss part of God's creation in church, where can we discuss it? That is precisely the problem. In our modern-day society, most discussions about sex take place in the media and the entertainment industry. It's time to bring the discussion of sex back to the healthy confines of the church, where God intended it to be.

CONSIDER

- Thinking of your favorite secular or Christian love song and bring it to Sabbath School to share it with the others.
- Selecting a picture from Vogue, Cosmopolitan, or another popular fashion magazine that depicts sexuality. Think about these questions: How does the secular world distort sexuality? Why is there an emphasis on attractive appearance rather than on intelligence or inner beauty? Why is this problematic?
- Building an altar in your home around which your family can worship. It need not be ostentatious. Remember, the objective is to consecrate a spot where God is worshiped in the home.
- Writing your own love poem. You may simply use the Song of Solomon as inspiration or a more modern writer like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was mentioned earlier this week.
- Figuring out how much money it would cost to get married if you're single and how much you spent if you're married. Is the money worthwhile just to make "love happen"?
- Illustrating a greeting card to send to a loved one.
- Complimenting a loved one. You may be surprised: A love compliment can go a long way in showing the genuineness of your love.

CONNECT

Song of Solomon 3:1–3. *Mind, Character, and Personality,* vol. 1, chap. 25.

Fabian Carballo, Colton, California

Lesson 8 February 18–25





" 'That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me' " (John 17:21, NIV). Sabbath February 18

Go All Out in Your Love

INTRODUCTION

Eph. 5:21-6:9

"What's Goin' On?" a song released a short time after 9/11, featuring some of the most sought-after artists in secular music, including Bono, Alicia Keys, P. Diddy, Justin Timberlake, and several others, asked a simple question: What's going on? What is going on in our world that would cause us to hurt each other, to take lives, to not love each other? What has made us so cynical, so indifferent?

In this world that is dangerously self-serving, it's almost impossible to find anything or anyone self-sacrificing. Love, the most self-sacrificing concept, has become a word that now describes anything: "I *love* that movie. I *love* that song." We have lost the significance of this little word. Our definition of love is ridiculously obscure. Love should be the foundation of our relationships. It's the reason we commit, the reason we let our guard down, the reason we endure the smooth and rough patches of life. Without this four-letter word, we are desperately handicapped.

As we all live our own disconnected lives, relationships become obsolete. They



become these human speed bumps on our speedway lives. And as Christians we have accepted that mentality. We refuse to give ourselves completely to the people around us. We shortchange our fami-

lies and our coworkers. We have forgotten what our place is.

But we are no longer unknown. We belong. We are loved.

And Christ's love makes us whole. It makes our families whole. He causes our lives to come full circle. Without Him—without His love—we are unaware of our *true* calling. We need Him to reveal to us, in His patient and merciful way, that our true calling is to our families, to love those who have given us so much. Christ's commandment is to *go all out in our love*. He is building us up in love. He's building our families up in love. As we study various keys to family unity this week, focus on Paul's words to the Ephesians and reflect on them as you make Christ the cornerstone of your relationships:

"God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what He is building. He used the apostles and prophets for the foundation. Now He's using you, fitting you in brick by brick, stone by stone, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone that holds all the parts together. We see it taking shape day after day—a holy temple built by God, all of us built into it, a temple in which God is quite at home (Eph. 2:19–22, *The Message*)."

Go ahead! Go all out in your love!

Alejandra Torres, Miami, Florida

An Action Plan

EVIDENCE

1 Cor. 12:12-14

Living in Miami, Florida, I have learned by experience an action plan for a category 4 hurricane. Get water, get nonperishable foods, put the shutters up,—Get OUT! With much thinking and trying to plan my best "action plan," the thought races continuously—Andrew, not Hurricane Andrew, but my 20-month-old son, my daughter, and my wife—basically my family. The plan of action that suits us best is GET OUT! As young people, we tend not to realize how important a plan of action is in our Christian life—it is a do-or-die situation.

For example: Exhibit One from *The Great Controversy:* "Before the entrance of sin, Adam enjoyed open communion with his Maker; but since man separated himself from God by transgression, the human race has been cut off from this high privilege."*

Adam forgot his plan of action: constant communication with his Maker. Adam's

action plan of spending time with his Maker changed, and so did his future. The Isrealites forgot their plan of action in the desert. Read Exodus 20:1–5. The "I am the Lord your God" relationship was missing. Again we see that when things begin to get a bit hectic, our action



plan tends to be diverted. An action plan must always have the same end result. The end result of God's action plan is eternal life.

Being an old New Yorker and remembering that dreadful day of 9/11, I can picture my two firemen buddies running up those stairs with their plan of action of saving who they could. They met their fates that day and died doing what they were trained to do. The NYC Fire Department code of ethics includes brotherhood, family, unity, and bravery—a lot of the adjectives that describe Christians.

Going back to that dreadful day of 9/11, the immediate plan of action of the military was to freeze all airspace around New York City and the major ports of the United States. In the days that passed we saw the response of the majority of the citizens of this great nation unite as one with a demonstration of displaying the old red, white, and blue on cars, shirts, windows—"United We Stand."

* Page v.

Monday February 20

What's Your Story?

LOGOS

Gen. 33:12–14; Ruth 1:16–18; John 17:21–26; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:11–22; 5:21–6:9

Every family has a story. Every member of the family has a story of their own. Each member of the family is unique. The members belong to the same family, they carry the same family name, yet they are different. The biggest challenge of family unity is how different each member is.

The Bible opens the story of the human race with the creation of the family unit. Adam and Eve were created perfect. As perfect, created human beings this family was broken. Since then not one family has been normal, one hundred percent happy, or completely fulfilled. The Bible tells the good, the bad, and the ugly of living in family. Cain killed Abel. Jacob deceived Esau. Ruth, a pagan girl, married an Israelite and then lost him to death. David killed one of his army officers after having sex with the man's wife. Throughout the Bible we see families that are dys-

The Bible presents the ideal family.

functional, abnormal, and troubled. Each of them was facing the reality of life here on earth. In this life we live in a sinful world—with sinful and broken people. When you add the sinfulness of people to the fact that everyone is different,

things can only get complicated.

The Bible presents the ideal family. This ideal is always permeated by shortcomings, troubled souls, broken hearts, unfaithfulness, and hate. Even the love that does exist is lived in the life of sinful people. Yet the ideal family—father, mother, sons, and daughters—working together for a common goal, still exists. Three characteristics are central to family unity.

Respect

Family unity is promoted when members have respect for each other. Respect means "to feel or show deferential regard for; to esteem." This means a willingness to set aside our judgment of the other person and see them for who they are, people created in the image of God. This respect is what keeps families united. Family members realize that each person is worthy because they are a person created by God in His image. It is not about how much money you have, your appearance, the car you drive, your family name. It's about looking at brothers and sisters with the eyes of God.

Love

Loving is tough. Paul says: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor. 13:4–8, NIV).

The challenge in family unity is loving at all costs. Loving is not easy, especially when we know all about the person, the good and the bad. We are commanded to love the unlovable, sometimes a sibling. We are even commanded to love our enemies. The way we love God is by loving each other. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:11, 12, NIV).

Jesus once asked a group of people, "'If you love only those who love you, what good is that?'" (Matt. 5:46, NLT). Love promotes family unity because love is giving of oneself when we don't want to give. Love is greater than ourselves. Love is a divine trait that reaches the deepest recesses of our soul. It transforms our soul, and a new person is born. We cannot love as God does. His love is holy and unconditional. Our love is in the process of becoming holy in unholy human beings. His unconditional love seeks to remove the conditional in our loving. We may not love perfectly. But love is stronger than death and makes a difference in family relationships.

Belonging

Family unity occurs when its members feel they belong. This sense of belonging is a feeling of being at home in a group. The family is made up of different members who are all unique. Creating the sense of belonging may not be as easy as we think, especially when people have different views on issues, make decisions that are different from the rest of the group, and live their lives in disagreement with the rest of the group.

True family unity is experienced in diversity. It is often tested. Belonging challenges people to create space for everyone to grow and to contribute to the wellbeing of everyone. Ruth decided that she would be part of Naomi's life no matter where that would take her. She knew she belonged with Naomi. Orpah too felt an attachment to her mother-in-law. The Bible says they "wept again." Orpah knew she had a place in Naomi's heart and home, but she left with Naomi's blessing. They were separated physically, yet were united in spirit, heart, and soul.

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Tuesday February 21

"His Good Purpose"

TESTIMONY

Eph. 5:24, 25

In light of the dire need for Christians to restore broken family relationships through the unifying power of Christ, it is important to understand God's definition of the term "submission" to one another. As in everything that God has created and that the world, through the enemy, has attempted to counterfeit, the worldly definition of submission has nothing to do with God's ideals.

More often than not, Christian men put special emphasis on Ephesians 5:24 without analyzing the context, without reading on so to speak, thus leaving the responsibility entirely to the woman to submit herself to man's every whim. But God is not a God of half-truths. In composing the wonderful Word of Life, the Master Editor made sure to include "all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3, NKJV).

So many biblical truths have been taken out of context because of failure to read the surrounding "small print." When understanding God's definition of submission, it is essential to note what is further conveyed: "Husbands, love your wives, just as



Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Eph. 5:25, NKJV).

In broken homes around the world, Christian men seem to think they are exempt of the great responsibility that God bestows upon them to "give [themselves]" (verse 25,

NKJV). They have a distorted view of the original plan that God has set forth through the institution of marriage. This type of mentality threatens to destroy the family unity that God wishes for us here on earth.

"When husbands require the complete subjection of their wives, declaring that women have no voice or will in the family, but must render entire submission, they place their wives in a position contrary to the Scripture. In interpreting the Scripture in this way, they do violence to the design of the marriage institution. This interpretation is made simply that they may exercise arbitrary rule, which is not their prerogative."*

The Bible as well as the Spirit of Prophecy is as *crystal clear* as it can ever be regarding the beautiful privileges and responsibilities which, if performed with the guidance of a loving Father as our Lord Jesus Christ, can foment love, unity, and peace in the home. Husbands and fathers are called by God Himself to perform these duties. Though it is indeed no easy task to undertake, God is faithful to work "in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

*The Adventist Home, p. 116.

How to Achieve Family Unity

HOW-TO John 17:21–23

In today's society, time is of the essence. We don't want to wait. We have instant meals, instant bill payments, and even instant credit approval.

In our effort to be time-conscious, we forget to dedicate time to our families. We tend to resort to the "instant family," where conversations are limited to brief, sporadic hellos and goodbyes. We expect that this limited encounter is enough to formulate trust and unity in the family. We forget that our ministry begins at home. We lose sight that our testimony as a family should reflect Christ as the center of our lives. How can we testify if we are not united? Luke 11:17 says that a house divided will fall. The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence ... outside the home.¹

Here are some steps that will help achieve family unity:

1. Make prayer a family activity. The Bible says that we should pray for one another (James 5:16). Learn to get together on a daily basis and give thanks for all the blessings bestowed. Communicate



with the Creator as a family. In tribulations, pray together for God's guidance and protection. Learn to depend on prayer for strength.

2. Learn to communicate effectively. Proper communication and listening skills may prevent disputes and quarrels. Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Practice empathetic listening before communicating your feelings. Avoid criticizing each other (James 4:11). Let love dominate communication.

3. Participate together in activities. Make an effort to include more family oriented activities in your schedule. Activities might include having dinner together, discussing the day's events, having worship service and Bible study together, and going to church together. Treasure the time you experience with each other.

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

^{1.} The Adventist Home, p. 37.

^{2.} Ibid., p. 179.

Thursday February 23

All the Comforts of Home

OPINION

Matt. 26:38

On August 24, 1992, my life and the life of my family were shaken to the core. Hurricane Andrew came at us with a vengeance. We lost it all. Thinking back on that experience now, as an adult, it amazes me that we, as a family, survived such an ordeal.

To me, family means comfort. It took us forever to "get back to normal" after Hurricane Andrew. All of South Florida went through—and is still going through—a lot to recover from the devastation. What I learned, however, was that at a time when I needed to feel comforted, our neighbors responded. I felt comforted by everyone around because we were all in the same situation. We all needed comforting. Everyone lacked water, electricity, food, and clothing. But not one person lacked in the gift of comforting. That's one thing we had plenty of.

Jesus desired to feel that comfort from His disciples but was left alone. Families are there to comfort, soothe, console, and relieve. I long for these in my relationships with my family and friends. It's something that even Jesus desired. At the most crucial time in His life, when death was inevitable, Jesus desired to feel that

comfort from His disciples but was left alone.

In Matthew 26, Jesus found Himself at the Garden of Gethsemane. He was going through an agonizing moment and asked His disciples to "keep vigil" (verse 38, *The Message*) and pray with Him. Three times Jesus returned to His disciples—His *fam-ily*—and they were asleep. Three times He wanted to feel comforted, to know that He would find it there with His friends. Three times He was left to rely only on His own strength.

Your family life may be like that. You may feel abandoned by the ones you need the most support from. Or it might be the exact opposite! You might find all the comfort you need with your family and friends. What a blessing! Families *should* provide comfort. If you find that at the times you're barely holding on, your family fails to provide you comfort, there's One who, in His relentless love, meets all of your needs.

In the end Jesus provided comfort to those He cared for the most. Even if you find yourself scraping to find it at home with your family, be the one to show grace and comfort. As He comforts you, use that as a motivation to be a comfort to others.

REACT

In what ways can I provide comfort to someone I know is in need?

Friday February 24

United We Stand

EXPLORATION

Ps. 133:1; Mark 13:12

CONCLUDE

Families may be the glue that holds society together. But it's God's power that holds our families together. Because of selfishness, family unity is not the automatic result of people living together in the same house. Unity must be set as a goal and accepted as a top priority. As we near Jesus' second coming, unity will be even more of a challenge. Families will need to turn their attention away from the distractions of the world and focus more and more on Bible study and prayer. Only then can true unity be achieved.

CONSIDER

- Drawing a symbol to illustrate family unity. Drawing another to illustrate disunity.
- Contrasting and comparing family life now with family life in Bible times. Think about this question: How has technology strengthened/weakened family unity?
- Creating an acrostic. On a sheet of paper write "FAMILY UNITY" vertically down the left margin of the page. Then using each letter as the first letter of a word or phrase, describe the features of family unity. For example, Fairness, Active love, etc.
- Listening to a piece of classical music. In what ways do you see a parallel between the composition and a successful family? (For example: Each instrument, and each member of the family, has a different function, but they all work together to create something of beauty.)
- Turning off the TV and any other distractions for a week, and as a family share the evening meal together.
- Creating a mission statement as a family.
- Considering each member of your immediate family. What could you do this week that would improve your relationship with each of them? Write your suggestions and then set one or two of them as a goal for this coming week.

CONNECT

The Adventist Home, pp. 312–316, 177–180.

Kevin Leman, *Keeping Your Family Together When the World Is Falling Apart*, pp. 17–56.

Lesson 9 February 25–March 4

Homes of **Peace** and **Healing**

" 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid' " (John 14:27, NIV).

Sabbath February 25

Pieces of Peace

INTRODUCTION

John 14:27

Bob was lying on the couch. The swollen blood vessels in his brain were causing painful pressure to his forehead. Work that day had been stressful. Now he was home trying to relax. He couldn't wait to see his wife. Maybe she'd massage the pain away or offer him a cool cloth for his headache.

Sarah burst in the front door complaining. This went wrong, that went wrong, life was going wrong. It didn't take Bob long to realize she was in a bad mood, but he was in no mood to be empathetic. He pretended to listen as he escaped to the bathroom, but really he was thinking, *Not again! Can't she see I'm not feeling well? All she thinks about is herself.*

Noticing her husband's lack of interest, Sarah became more upset. *Doesn't he care?* she thought. *He's not even lis-*

tening. How rude!

Both thinking their own needs were not being met, Robert and Sarah let angry feelings fester until finally doors were slammed and tears were shed.

Sound familiar? You've been in

relationship tiffs—whether with your parents, siblings, spouses, or friends. Maybe even with God. What advice would you give Bob and Sarah to find peace in their relationship? What do you do when those around you irritate you, don't meet your expectations, or hurt you emotionally?

Having a peaceful home—does that really happen in today's society? If we're honest, we'd admit that we are more likely to show our real emotions to those closest to us because we feel the most safe with them. They *have* to love us, right? Most of us have no problem letting them know how upset we are. While some of us struggle with angry outbursts, others go to the opposite extreme: They are experts at keeping the peace. They stuff their feelings and try not to trouble any waters. They don't realize that avoiding conflict does not bring true peace. Often the negative feelings, not dealt with, turn inward, causing bitterness or depression.

So how do we have homes of peace and healing? That is the focus of this week's lesson. Among other things we'll look at what God says about anger, handling conflict, and forgiveness. Remember, the same Jesus who said, "'Quiet! Be still!'" (Mark 4:39, NIV) to the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee is capable and willing to handle your stormy relationships. In fact, He promises to do so (Jer. 33:6).

Sarah Hillebert, Plainfield, Illinois



Sunday February 26

"With Jesus in the Family . . ."

LOGOS

Ps. 37:8; Matt. 5:22; 12:1-14; 18:15-18; Mark 7:6-13; Phil. 2:1-16; Col. 3:12-15

Quenching the Anger (Ps. 37:8)

The Hebrew word translated "fret" means to "burn" or be "kindled with anger." This verse gives us a spiritual truth: Anger brings evil into our homes. The context of this verse gives us the clue to quenching anger. The opposite of fretting is trusting in the Lord. Anger in the home can be traced to a lack of faith. For example, we become frustrated and discouraged when the "desires of our heart" remain elusive. When we look at Jesus, we see a man whose desires and daily plans developed out of complete trust in His Father. Following His example, as we learn to trust in the Lord, rest in Him, wait patiently for Him, and allow Him to direct our steps, our frustrations will be defused and anger will cease.

Taking Healthy Families Seriously (Matt. 5:22-24; 18:15-18)

God takes very seriously our family relationships. We must take emotions of hos-

Jesus makes it clear that reconciliation with the people around us is more important than sacrifice and worship. tility toward our family members as grave enough to affect even our eternal destiny. (See also Ephesians 6:1–4.) In Matthew 5:23, 24, Jesus makes it clear that reconciliation with the people around us is more important than sacrifice

and worship. We must not presume to be reconciled with God—enjoying service for and worship of Him—when we are unreconciled with our brothers or sisters. He challenges *us* to take the first step in reconciliation with a family member.

God's Hopes for the Family (Phil. 2:1)

Our homes should model the very best of Christian fellowship. Paul uses five Greek words to describe that fellowship in this verse.

"Encouragement" has a basic meaning of calling someone to oneself as a strong and persistent *request, appeal, entreaty;* or as an authoritative presentation of privileges and requirements: *exhortation, encouragement;* and as an offer of consoling help *consolation, comfort*.

"Consolation" means a persuasive power that points to a basis for hope and provides incentive: *encouragement, comfort*.

"Fellowship" means a relationship characterized by sharing things in common: *fellowship*, *participation*; and as giving so that others can share: *generosity*, *fellow-feeling*; finally, more concretely: *willing contribution*, *gift*.

"Affection" means, literally, *intestines, inward parts* of the body, located in the belly. Figuratively it means the deep, inner seat of tender emotions in the whole: *affection, love, deep feeling, compassion.*

"Compassion" means a motivating emotion sympathy, mercy, pity.

God wants our families to be described by these words. (See also Colossians 3:12–17 for another list of community blessings.) He wants them to be places of holy power, strength, safety, and certainty.

Needing the Mind of Christ (Phil. 2:2–8)

Paul goes on to describe what it takes to enjoy the blessings as described above. In these verses he lists (1) being of the same mind, (2) maintaining the same love, (3) united in the spirit, (4) intent on one purpose, (5) humility of mind, (6) regard others as more important than yourselves, and (7) looking out for other's interests. What hinders us from enjoying them are selfishness, empty conceit, and looking out only for our own interests.

Paul then points to Jesus Christ as the way to these blessings. We need His mind that did not grasp at, cling to, or demand even that which was His by nature (equality with God). Grasping includes in it a sense of desperation that leads its possessor to gain the desired item quickly before it moves out of his reach. Grasping can occur over physical items, abstract things (like time), intellectual ideas, or states of being. Grasping finds its root in human selfishness and is the expression of the human determination to control.

We need His mind that was emptied of Himself. He drained Himself of any focus on Himself. He took away the effectiveness of His self. His self had no effect on His life. It was completely for others that He lived.

We need His mind that humbled Himself. This Greek word literally means "to lower," or "to make low"; and of a mountain, "to level off." Jesus made Himself low. He leveled off the greatness of His divinity. He leveled off His "self." He was willing even to endure humiliation at the hands of evil people for the sake of advancing God's kingdom.

In Christ dwells "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3, NKJV). Our homes and churches can honestly enjoy these blessings by applying the gospel of Jesus Christ to our personal lives. As we accept Christ's death to take away what we were never created to be, we can be filled with His resurrected life—given the very heart and mind of Jesus—and become everything He meant us to be. It is our privilege to sing, "With Jesus in the family, happy, happy home!"

Monday February 27

Just as God Has Forgiven You

TESTIMONY

Eph. 4:30-32

"We know but little of our own hearts and have but little sense of our own need of the mercy of God. This is why we cherish so little of the sweet compassion which Jesus manifests toward us and which we should manifest toward one another. We should remember that our brethren are weak, erring mortals like ourselves."

"Let us walk carefully before the Lord; let us think how often we have broken our vows and marred our best resolutions, how often in the face of great light we have turned from God and sought our idols. It is highly proper for us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It is natural for us to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; but although it is painful for us to know ourselves as we really are, yet we should pray that God will reveal us to ourselves, even as He sees us. But we should not cease to pray when we have simply asked for a revelation of ourselves; we should pray that Jesus may be revealed to us as a sinpardoning Saviour. When we see Jesus as He is, earnest desires should awaken



in our hearts to be rid of self, that we may be filled with all the fullness of Christ. When this is our experience, we shall do good to one another, and use all the means within

our reach to attain unto godliness."2

" 'If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses' " (Matt. 6:14, 15, NKJV).

"Christ was the prince of sufferers; but His suffering was from a sense of the malignity of sin, a knowledge that through familiarity with evil, man had become blinded to its enormity.... He knew that without help from God, humanity must perish, and He saw multitudes perishing within reach of abundant help....

"Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal."³

3. The Desire of Ages, pp. 752, 753.

^{1.} Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, pp. 246, 247.

^{2.} Selected Messages, bk. 1, pp. 312, 313.

Tuesday February 28

The Bedrock of Humility

EVIDENCE

Phil. 2:1-16

Perhaps the most potent text of this week's lesson is found in Philippians 2:1–16. This chapter begins with four verses of daunting, yet foundational, commands that if followed would make any home healing and peaceful. Yet this seems like an impossible list, and it is, unless we hear the rest of the passage. Therefore verses 5–8 give the basis for all the commands in the first four verses.

Philippians 2:5–8 present Christ's humility as demonstrated in the plan of redemption. Several key words describe the extent of Christ's humility in His self-emptying. These are "form" (morphe), "likeness" (homoiomati), and "appearance" (schemati, NASB). Morphe refers to the physical form of something. Christ, before coming into this world, existed in the form (morphe) of God. Christ gave up that form, and took on the form (morphe) of a servant. Because of the necessary limitations of

the *morphe* of a servant, Christ relinquished the free use of His divine prerogatives.

But the humility of Christ goes far beyond this! Verse 7 says that Christ came "in the likeness

This seems like an impossible list.

(homoiomati) of men." This phrase must mean more than just taking on our physical form, since the word *morphe* already has dealt with that issue. The word likeness (homoiomati) when used in this context indicates that Christ was truly made like those He came to save.

But there is yet another step in this revelation of the humility of Christ. Christ was "found in appearance *(schemati)* as a man." The best translation of this word seems to refer to the manner in which all people must face life. Paul uses *schemati* in this way in 1 Corinthians 7:31. In context Paul refers to the manner of life in this world that is passing away. So Christ was found in the "manner" of humanity. Christ, the Lord of heaven, humbled Himself to face life in this world as we must face it, and in every point was the Victor through faith.

Having taken all these steps, Christ took the final step: He was obedient to death, which for Him was the equivalent of the second death. When we behold this self-sacrifice, it will change the way we relate to our spouses, our children, and our parents. Letting this mind be in us, which was in Christ, will enable us to fulfill the commands given in the first four verses of Philippians 2, and our homes will certainly be places of peace and healing.

Wednesday March 1

Points for Healing and Peace

HOW-TO

Phil. 2:13

How can we find healing and peace for ourselves and our family relationships?

1. Commit your life and relationships to Jesus. "It is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, NKJV). Spending time with God in prayer and Bible study allows us to listen to His will and gives us the opportunity to communicate our concerns to Him.

"Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. . . . His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterances of them. Take to Him everything that perplexes the mind. Nothing is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds, He rules over all the affairs of the universe. Nothing that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice."

2. Follow Jesus' example. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, NKJV). We know in our heads that Jesus is the only source of true healing. But relationships are formed in our hearts. Unless we truly believe



and imitate the example of Christ, we will not have the healthy relationships that God desires for us.

"It is not enough to believe about Christ; we must believe

in Him. The only faith that will benefit us is that which embraces Him as a personal Saviour; which appropriates His merits to ourselves. Many hold faith as an opinion. Saving faith is a transaction by which those who receive Christ join themselves in covenant relation with God. Genuine faith is life. A living faith means an increase of vigor, a confiding trust, by which the soul becomes a conquering power."²

3. Serve others. "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (verse 4, NKJV). As you are busy serving, your problems will fade into their proper place. You will have joy and peace.

2. The Desire of Ages, p. 347.

^{1.} Steps to Christ, p. 100.

Thursday March 2

Communicate Your Heart

OPINION

Lev. 19:17

Conflict is frustrating enough, but what happens when faulty methods of reconciliation are used? Discussing the marriage relationship, Bill and Lynne Hybels said, "They often heap hurt upon hurt."¹ Discussing the parent/child relationship, Mrs. White said that "we should guard against a tendency to faultfinding or censure."² Not only does this frequent scolding fail to produce the desired reformation, but it results in creating "discouragement and hopelessness, often concealed under an appearance of indifference or bravado."³ "What is important in correction is not venting your feelings, anger or hurt; it is rather, understanding the nature of the struggle that your child is having. What is important is understanding the 'why' of what has been done or said. You need to understand . . . what is going on within your child."⁴

Maybe Leviticus 19:17 has something to say about proper reconciliation: "'You shall not hate your brother in your heart'" (NKJV). The first action commanded in

verse 17 toward an offending brother is that of examining the condition of our own hearts. There is no mention of immediately giving that guy a piece of our minds. We



must remember that out of the abundance of the heart, our mouths speak. "Communication is the art of expressing in godly ways what is in my heart and of hearing completely and understanding what another thinks and feels."⁵ It is impossible to rebuke in the right spirit, if we have not faithfully obeyed the first part of verse 17, which commands there be no hatred in our hearts. It is interesting to note that the text seems to indicate that the reverse situation is true as well. If one fails to rebuke a brother, they have failed to love their brother in their hearts. The Bible combines here the concepts of good communication with conflict resolution.

5. Ibid., p. 99.

^{1.} Bill and Lynne Hybels, *Fit to Be Tied* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 128.

^{2.} Child Guidance, pp. 280, 281.

^{3.} lbid., p. 281.

^{4.} Ted Tripp, Shepherding a Child's Heart (Wapwallopen, Pa.: Shepherd Press, 1995), p. 77.

Friday March 3

Hurting or Healing at Home?

EXPLORATION

Ps. 37:8; Matt. 5:22; 12:1–14; 18:15–18; Mark 7:6–13; Phil. 2:1–16; Col. 3:12–15; Eph. 5:21–6:4

CONCLUDE

The great Protestant Reformer Martin Luther called it the *haustafel*, which means literally a bulletin board for the home or a table of duties. The Scriptures are clear on the importance and nature of humility and self-sacrifice in the home. Though some passages specifically address husband, wife, and child, the passages that speak of the individual having the mind and character of Christ are the starting point. Our own hearts, not the moods of our spouses or the circumstances around us, are the key to a home of healing and safety.

CONSIDER

- Reading Ephesians 5:21–6:4, then writing job descriptions for the husband/father, wife/mother and children in a Christian home.
- Reading Ephesians 5:21–6:4, then drawing an organizational chart with the members of the home in boxes. Lines should be drawn from one box to another to show rights and responsibilities one to another.
- Memorizing Philippians 2:1–11. Recite it in your Sabbath School class.
- Recording the kind words you've said to family members over the last seven days. Write them down on a sheet of paper in the left column. On the right column, write down the negative things you've said. Reflect on both columns and what needs to change.
- Using a camcorder to interview parents at your church. Ask the following question: How do you disciple or lead your children to become followers of Christ? Share your interviews with the class.
- Writing a play or skit revolving around a frazzled wife and an unsympathetic husband. Provide two different endings, one with reconciliation and forgiveness and the other with hurt feelings and hardened hearts.
- Discussing the skit above with friends and asking for their input.

CONNECT

The Sanctified Life, chap. 10. Bill and Lynne Hybels, *Fit to Be Tied*, chaps. 2, 5. http://www.family.org>.

Lesson 10 March 4–11

Families of Faith



"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:1, 2, NKJV). Sabbath March 4

Why All the Fuss?

INTRODUCTION

1 John 5:1

My first trip back to my parents' home country of the Philippines oozed anticipation, and I was ready to meet my extended family for the first time. Arriving at the home of my aunt, I was greeted by a mass of relatives. Most of them were squeezed into two rattan sofas.

"Come, we've made lunch for you!" exclaimed one aunt. Starving from a long trip, my parents, my brother, and I plopped down at the dining table ready to gulp down whatever didn't move on our plate. The other relatives remained seated in the sitting area adjacent to the dining room.

"Please, join us!" I entreated. I was a little uncomfortable at the thought of being watched while eating.

"No, no, we've just had lunch. Go ahead." They dismissed us with a wave.

We carried on the conversation with the relatives in the next room, but the other



cousins who were serving the food were an easy distraction. We devoured our meal but left behind quite a few leftovers.

With our meal soon over, we opted to take a nap in the

guest rooms. Minutes later, just after my head had hit the pillow, the dining table erupted with energy. The remaining relatives developed an appetite after all and feasted on our leftover meals. Low conversation suddenly exploded into spirited chatter and forks clanged against the china plates.

"They didn't want to eat with us?"

"They won't," my mother explained. "They are shy. It's their way of being polite." It was the same story the next day. Insisting that they were not hungry because they had already eaten before I came to the table, my relatives would sit in the living area and watch lunch happen.

I wanted relationships, not courtesy. After a few days of insistence on inclusion of all of the relatives, the wall of humility began to crumble into familiarity between the members of the family. Meals were finally taken together.

"Why all the fuss?" I asked. "They don't even know me!"

"Because you are your parents' daughter. Because you are family," were the consistent replies.

Sunday March 5

Culture's Families Vs. God's Families

EVIDENCE

Gen. 1:26; 2:18; 3:16-19

The family as God designed and structured it was intended to live joyfully with each other, their God, and their world (Gen. 1:26; 2:18). Humanity, however, soon ignored God's original plan. And the Lord in His mercy needed to redesign the family structure (3:16–19), but He did not change their original responsibilities.

Instead of joint partnership and leadership the structure became hierarchical. The man was to lead out and speak for the family (Josh. 24:15; Eph. 5:21). Generally humankind has not followed this plan either. Men and women in families and society have sought for power and control, using whatever tools were available. Strength, seduction, and manipulation are only some of these tools.

When the Christian family has this power struggle going on, it says to the needy world, "There is no difference between us and we have nothing to offer you." Therefore the gospel is shackled instead of spread. There is no winsomeness to

be shown, no good news to share. The gospel of Jesus Christ offers a different life than the world now sees. The family model Paul presents in Ephesians 5 is clearly God's

Culture and self-esteem resist this call of God.

revised model of His original plan: Wives submitting to husbands is just as offensive to the mantra of the sinful self as husbands laying down their lives for their wives.

Culture and self-esteem resist this call of God. In order to spread (by demonstration) the gospel of Jesus Christ, Christian family members must emulate their Lord who came not to be served but to serve (Matt. 20:28; Luke 22:27). The Lord Jesus Christ truly had power and control and chose to lay them down. The husband or wife who has the illusion of power and control must voluntarily lay it down (2 Cor. 12:10) for the good of the other. If and when we do, our minds and the world tell us we won't get what we want—which is often true. However, we will get what God wants for His plan and His kingdom, resulting in our getting so much more than we could have ever imagined.

When the family of faith adopts the principles of Scripture, it can truly demonstrate the gospel—the good news that God's way is the only way that we will ultimately receive those things God so fervently wants to give us. When God wins, all His people win.

Monday March 6

O Ye of Too Much Faith?

LOGOS

John 1:12, 13; 3:7; Acts 10:1–28, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1

Born of God (John 1:12, 13; 3:7)

To be born of God, to be born again through the Spirit of God, is a lifetransforming experience not just for individuals, but for families as well. Godcentered spirituality, more than any other factor, is responsible for producing healthy, happy families and children who are most likely to grow into healthy adults. God-centered spirituality in a family means that God is the number one priority in the lives of both parents and children and that two extremes are avoided.

First, the pretense of claiming to put God first in our lives when that is clearly not the case. Kids easily see through such hypocrisy. And second, a religiosity that is overly proscriptive and rigid. This produces one of two results in kids, both of which are negative. Kids either rebel against or reject such a religion, or they blindly accept it as a second-hand faith that has not been properly internalized and self-defined.

The Inclusiveness of God's Family (Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35)

One of the greatest adjustments for Christ's Jewish disciples after Pentecost was the revelation that Gentiles were also to be included in the family of God. It is also a real adjustment for many fragmented families in our culture today to be willing to accept stepparents, stepbrothers, and stepsisters who are suddenly imposed on a family system with no previous history. But God's Spirit calls us to be accepting of such adjustments today, just as surely as the disciples were called to adjust two thousand years ago. This does not mean that family fragmentation is God's will, but that making the best of even the most difficult circumstances (Rom. 12:21—overcoming evil with good) is His will.

The Focus of Faith (1 Cor. 2:2)

It is possible for people to be very moral and even very spiritual, but lacking in faith. Jesus continually expressed disappointment to His disciples in this context, saying, "O ye of little faith."

By the same token, Jesus could point to a Roman centurion who grew up worshiping pagan gods, and say, "I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" (Matt. 8:10, NKJV). Faith is a specific dimension of spirituality that grasps the awesome power of God. Prayer has unlimited potential in the mouth of faith. Families that make prayer a priority in the context of genuine faith will experience God's works and blessings in a manner that is totally foreign to those who are not willing to take the risks of faith.

As Adventists we are often like the people of Nazareth who claimed to know Jesus best, but "He did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (13:58, NIV). If we are going to err, let us err on the side of too much faith, for Jesus never said, "O ye of too much faith."

The Fruits of God's Family (1 Thess. 5:21, 22)

Paul counsels us to "test all things," to "hold fast what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21, NKJV), and to "abstain from every form of evil" (verse 22, NKJV). The fruits of faith require each of these steps. Faith can easily be distorted into "charismania," which Jesus warns against in Matthew 7:20–22.

Emotion in religion is a good thing, not a bad thing, but it must always be tested by the Word of God. Second, cherished sin will act as a major barrier to faith (Ps. 66:18; Prov. 28:9; James 5:16). This is why Paul calls us to abstain from what is evil, because the practice of cherished sin short-circuits faith and thereby undermines the fruits of faith. Therefore, Paul says to "hold fast what is good" (1 Thess.

5:21, NKJV) to practice the principle of substitution. We overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21), not by focusing on evil or trying to overcome it through our own power.

It is possible for people to be very moral and even very spiritual, but lacking in faith.

Negative Christianity is no

Christianity at all. Spiritual things can only be spiritually discerned and conquered (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 6:10–18). The family that applies these principles will be used by God to accomplish much for His kingdom.

The Birthright of Belief (1 John 5:1)

The ultimate question in the kingdom of God is, "Who do you say that I [Jesus] am?' " (Matt. 16:15, NKJV). John says, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God" (1 John 5:1, NKJV). Liberalism, humanism, naturalism, and post-modernism all teach that Jesus was just a great man, but that He was not God. Even some of our own Adventist universities now employ professors who teach and embrace these philosophies. Yet John declares that the divinity of Christ (see also 1 John 4:1–3; John 1:1–3) is the benchmark of belief. How can we as Adventists prevent our children from being sucked into the world of unbelief that is growing so rapidly in our culture today? The answer is, not just by teaching this truth, but by living this truth. We must model in our own lives that Jesus is Lord, that He is our God, that His priorities are our priorities, and that we are on this earth for one holy purpose—to live His kingdom life from womb to tomb.

Tuesday March 7

The Power of a Single Family

TESTIMONY

Luke 10:29

"One well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached. Such a family gives evidence that the parents have been successful in following God's directions, and that their children will serve Him in the church. Their influence grows; for as they impart, they receive to impart again. The father and mother find helpers in their children, who give to others the instruction received in the home. The neighborhood in which they live is helped, for in it they have become enriched for time and for eternity. The whole family is engaged in the service of the Master; and by their godly example, others are inspired to be faithful and true to God in dealing with His flock, His beautiful flock.

"The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the

"One well-ordered, welldisciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached." world is a well-ordered, welldisciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart."*

Can you read these words without feeling a little guilt? Has your family dramatically impacted and transformed the neighborhood you live in?

We've lived in the same neighborhood for 20 years now, and up until a couple years ago, didn't even know most of our neighbors' names. We have 15 homes on our street, and for years we didn't even know who lived in nine of those homes. It is so easy these days to become comfortable and isolated even in our own neighborhoods. But God wants us to be beacons of light in our communities.

A couple years ago we felt convicted to take baskets around to our 14 neighbors at Christmastime and at least get acquainted with those we didn't know. These baskets included some fruit, some goodies, and Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose Driven Life*. The response was so positive that we have been praying for each of our neighbors daily, and repeated giving out the gift baskets again this last holiday season. It doesn't take a lot to break down the barriers of isolation that have become so common in our society today. Like the loaves and the fishes, God can do a lot with a little.

*The Adventist Home, p. 32.

How to Live With Other Jelly Bellies

HOW-TO

Matt. 22:39; Acts 10:1-28; Eph. 2:19, 20

Have you ever eaten Jelly Belly jelly beans? In the mixed bag there is an assortment of jelly bellies with different colors, various swirls and freckles, and each contains a flavor that is unique in aroma and taste. The Jelly Belly Company has appealed to the population by creating different flavors and colors anyone and everyone can appreciate and enjoy. And though not all Jelly Belly jelly beans are the same color or flavor, each is still considered a Jelly Belly jelly bean.

This is how the world is: We are an assortment of jelly bellies because we are of various colors and unique flavors. Although we are not all the same color or flavor, we all are children of God, belonging to Him. Because we are children of God, this must mean that we are also brothers and sisters in Christ.

Knowing that we are family, why do we sometimes not act like it? Let's refer to the story in Acts 10:1–28, in which Peter meets with Cornelius, the Gentile, and his family:

1. Peter's vision. At first it may seem as if this vision has to do with clean and unclean foods, for when Peter sees unclean animals, he is told to kill and eat.



Wednesday March 8

2. Explanation of the vision. Peter says in verse 28, "'God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean'" (NKJV). And he continues, "'I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right'" (verses 34, 35, NIV).

3. Application to us. Just as God accepts people from every nation and does not show favoritism, so we too can accept our brothers and sisters from every nation and not show favoritism.

4. Going out to all the world. We all appreciate knowing that we are loved and cared for, either by the families we grew up in, or by our church families, or by our inner circle of friends—and, of course, by our Savior. And because Jesus commanded us to " 'love your neighbor as yourself' " (Matt. 22:39, NKJV), so we need to love each other with our different colors, flavors, and aromas. Just like the Jelly Belly jelly beans, we are each unique and are bursting with something to share.

We are "God's people and members of God's household, ... with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:19, 20, NIV).

Thursday March 9

Our Sufficiency and Unification

OPINION

2 Cor. 12:9, 10; Heb. 12:2

In a society in which independence is deemed a virtue and single-handed achievements are revered, families of faith must unite in deposing the reigning culture of self-sufficiency, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, NKJV).

Society applauds the efforts of those who "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." Those who have risen from lowly mire to lofty brilliance are heralded as heroes. While we should celebrate one another's successes and triumphs, we must guard ourselves against the cultural trappings of a boastful society that presupposes that innate strengths and aptitudes are the catalysts of achievements.

The self-sufficient has no need to ask for anything. Self-sufficiency is conceived in the womb of pride and, by its very nature, rejects the sovereignty of God and the

The self-sufficient has no need to ask for anything.

solemnity of family. Where self-sufficiency reigns, God is dethroned, the family is fragmented, and the power of the gospel is rendered ineffective. "God writes our new name

only on those places in our lives where He has erased our pride, self-sufficiency and self-interest."

On the other hand, as we acknowledge and rejoice in our weaknesses and God's sufficiency, the power of the gospel is effectively manifest in our lives and in our homes. "Rejoice not in the possession of power, lest you lose sight of your dependence upon God. Be careful lest self-sufficiency come in, and you work in your own strength, rather than in the spirit and strength of your Master. Self is ever ready to take the credit if any measure of success attends the work.... When we have a realization of our weakness, we learn to depend upon a power not inher-ent."²

2. The Desire of Ages, p. 493.

Laurie Pernas, Anaheim, California

^{1.} Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Discovery House Publishers, 1992).

Friday March 10

First Place in Our Lives

EXPLORATION Matt. 20:25–28

CONCLUDE

From the moment we learn to express ourselves, our response to others is "Me first!" When He summed up the Ten Commandments, Jesus made it clear that God doesn't share our order of priorities. Jesus should have first place in our lives as our Savior and Lord. Our families should come second, no matter whether we are referring to our nuclear family, our church family, our neighborhood family, or the human family. When we align our priorities with God's and serve Him and others before ourselves, we witness of God's grace and love in our lives.

CONSIDER

- Evaluating the time you spend in service during a week. Keep a record of each activity in your day and how much time you spend on it. At the end of the week, add up the hours that you spent on yourself and the hours that you spent serving God or others. How do they compare? Do you wish that the totals were different? Plan the coming week so that your time reflects your priorities.
- Researching the culture/customs of one of the people groups that live in your area. Find out how they relate to their families, celebrate birthdays and other holidays, etc. Imagine that you/your family are a part of that group and write a story describing an experience from your new perspective.
- Listening to Andrew Peterson's "The Chasing Song." Compare the lyrics with the text for this week's lesson, Hebrews 12:1, 2. Make a commitment to "chase God."
- Getting to know your neighborhood family. In Tuesday's portion of this week's lesson, Erlys Daily shares her family's strategy for establishing contact with their neighbors. Reread this article to refresh your memory and plan a strategy to help you and/or your family extend its influence for God.
- Reading the book of Proverbs every day during a month (31 chapters). Solomon says a lot about family relationships. Write down his advice for families in your journal.

CONNECT

Genesis 15:1-6; the book of Proverbs; Gal. 3:26-29.

The Adventist Home, chaps. 4, 5.

Philip Samaan, *Blood Brothers;* John Ortberg, *Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them.*

Lesson 11 March 11–18

What's in Your House?



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

Sabbath March 11

"Love Each Other or Perish"

INTRODUCTION

Ps. 68:6; Luke 11:11

When I was a little girl, I remember feeling afraid of the dark, so much so that if my whole family had gone to bed and I was still awake, I was terrified because I thought I must be the only person in the whole world who was still awake and wondered what would happen if no one woke up again.

I also remember times when I would go into my room with my dad who would turn on the light for me. Before his hand would reach the light switch, I would grab it and say, "It's dark, Daddy." His big hand, holding my small one, would assure me that life would be OK for me as a little four-year-old.

As I've grown older, my relationship with all my family members has grown deeper, and we've shared many memories, such as travelling together, weddings, funerals, laughter, holidays at the beach, and so much more. Although I am now married and live far away from my mum and dad, there is still a strong connection

that exists only between us. My parents always told me, "Friends come and go, but family stays forever."

One of my favorite books, *Tuesdays With Morrie,* is the I wondered what would happen if no one woke up again.

reflection of life from a dying man. He writes about family, "The fact is, there is no foundation, no secure ground, upon which people may stand today if it isn't the family. . . . If you don't have the support and love and caring and concern that you get from a family, you don't have much at all. Love is so supremely important. As our great poet Auden said, 'Love each other or perish.' "*

When I think about the love of my family, I can't help feeling God's love through them. Psalm 68:6 says, "God sets the lonely in families" (NIV). If you are feeling lonely today, perhaps you could tap into the strength of your family. You may not realize how much they really are there for you.

Jesus says in Luke 11:11, " 'Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?' " (NIV). In this same way, our heavenly Father won't give us things that will harm us when we ask for something. If you feel as if the world is dark and you need to reach out for a father's hand, don't forget that the ultimate Father is there, even when no one else is.

*Mitch Albom, Tuesdays With Morrie (Sydney: Hodder, 1997), p. 91.

Sunday March 12

Too Close to Home

LOGOS

Isaiah 38; 39; 58:6, 7, 10–12; 1 Cor. 7:12–15; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2; 3 John 11

A Home Worth Visiting (Isa. 39:4)

It was customary in the times of the Old Testament kings and governors for these leaders to visit each others' countries and kingdoms. They would bring with them large gifts such as spices, gold, silver, cattle, and other fine treasures and leave them at the royal storehouses. Especially, if the visiting governor or king was subject to the king.

An example of how God used the kingdom of Israel to demonstrate His power and authority to other royalty was the Queen of Sheba. I believe her response best summarizes God's purposes: "'Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! ... I didn't believe it until I arrived here and saw it with my own eyes. Truly I had not heard the half of it! Your wisdom is far greater than what I was told.... The Lord your God is great indeed!'" (2 Chron. 9:5, 6, 8, NLT).



When King Hezekiah received royal visitors, what did they see? He did not use his house as a place to glorify Yahweh but to exalt himself (Isa. 39.4). God was utterly dis-

pleased with his behavior, and Hezekiah paid dearly for it.

It was God's original plan to establish the kingdom of Israel as the evangelistic center of the world; nations were to see God's greatness established through His people, their worship of Him, and their lifestyle practices. The surrounding nations would have had no doubt that God was truly the only God. Thus, they too would be converted and choose to follow Him. How unfortunate that Israel, being so close to God's ideal, messed up and refused to follow God's perfect plan. This story parallels what God envisions for our families even today.

Ongoing Family Relationships (Matt. 5:48)

For most people family and their home is the only thing in the world that brings them comfort and a sense of safety. Yet it is at this core institution that the devil tries to attack on a daily basis. Maintaining a positive and healthy family life is sometimes quite difficult. Home is to be a place where the golden rule applies ever more so, where actions still and always will speak louder than words. "Follow only what is good. Remember that those who do good prove that they are God's children, and those who do evil prove that they do not know God" (3 John 11, NLT). In a world of individualism and narcissistic behavior, should not our close family relationships prepare us for an attitude of godliness and selflessness?

Different People Under One Roof (1 Pet. 2:9)

Just like learning to live and deal with your family's "ugly" side, it is important to remember the gifts of forgiveness, acceptance, patience, tolerance, and—most of all—love. These are the most important life-enhancing gifts you will ever need and share. It's these same characteristics that God has called not only His families to practice but also His body, namely, His church. It is to this accord that we are called to something higher and more prestigious that any title we may ever have, a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). If that's not responsibility, what is?

Welcome Home, Jesus

An important litmus test we need to ask ourselves is: Would my house pass the Jesus, welcome-to-my-place test? If Jesus were to knock at your door tonight (Rev. 3:20), could He share a meal and stay for a few hours, a night, or a year without feeling intrusive and uncomfortable?

As followers of Jesus, we must allow the Holy Spirit's guidance to permeate our lives. This is what the Bible refers to as living in step with the Spirit, "If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another" (Gal. 5:25, 26, NLT). That includes all areas of our lives—work/study habits, family relationships, friendships—so that we are living lives of integrity.

Ellen White reminds us of the sacredness to which we ought to consider our home life: "The home circle should be regarded as a sacred place, a symbol of heaven, a mirror in which to reflect ourselves. Friends and acquaintances we may have, but in the home life they are not to meddle. A strong sense of proprietorship should be felt, giving a sense of ease, restfulness, trust."*

What a powerful witness platform and awesome responsibility. There are many things in life that demand our attention, yet how much more must we focus on trying to have Christ at the center of our home so that through His power and grace we can begin to reflect His character to our friends, workmates, spouses, and children in order to bring about the process of reconciliation of humanity to God.

REACT

1. What are some of the characteristics of healthy families?

2. If your family environment doesn't depict God's love to you, where else can you see God's love reflected in the world?

3. Why is early home life such a crucial factor in determining "success" in life's spiritual journey?

*The Adventist Home, p.177.

Monday March 13

A Lifelong Blessing?

TESTIMONY

1 Pet. 2:9

Ellen White has made various compelling statements on the topic of family and how it should show love in the home and also in public. Her comments at times can seem almost impossible to achieve. Our lives seem to be run at break-neck speed, and we find it hard even to sit together for a meal sometime during the week. Yet, it's this crucial nucleus of society that is the heart of real and true education, such as values, morals, and general wholesome living.

Today's insights will hopefully challenge us to consider her views and determine if they are still relevant to us today. Check out these statements:

1. "From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action. It should flow out in all home intercourse, showing itself in



thoughtful kindness, in gentle, unselfish courtesy."¹

2. "Make the evening a pleasant social season, a family reunion after the day's duties. . . . The influence of the home would be to par-

ents and children what God designed it should be, a lifelong blessing."2

3. "Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another.

"The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides. If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence."³

Ellen White's statements consistently show what God's intention for our happiness is and where we can find it. Referring to the "sweetest type of heaven" and "a lifelong blessing," she is surely stating that this is where love is truly to be revealed as "a holy light" in the home and family.

^{1.} The Adventist Home, p. 37.

^{2.} Ibid., p.110.

^{3.} lbid., p. 15.

Tuesday March 14

Trophies of His Grace

EVIDENCE

1 Pet. 2:9

One shelf in my room is devoted to trophies, nothing outstanding, but memorabilia that are precious to me because they remind me of who I am. Each trophy is a testament to my activities and accomplishments throughout my school and college years. If a stranger were to examine my trophy collection, they would learn a number of things about me.

According to one writer, 1 Peter 2:9 identifies each one of us as "trophies of God's grace." We are living trophies, a testament to His grace manifest in our lives. Just as my trophies have a special place in my life, so do we hold a special place in the eyes of God. This special relationship with God is described in our text through the use of four descriptors that distinguish our standing with God.

1. A chosen people. The Jewish nation was God's original chosen people. To them He gave the responsibility of sharing the good news about God, but their rejection of Jesus and exclusive attitude to salvation resulted in a widening of God's family to include all nations

(Isa. 43:10; Gal. 3:28).

2. A royal priesthood. We are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. We are called to be



totally devoted to Him (Exod. 19:6; Heb. 7:24-28; Rev. 1:6).

3. A holy nation. God has set us apart as Christians to be His witnesses and ambassadors in the world. We are His treasured possession (Deut. 7:6).

4. A people belonging to God. The word "peculiar" is used in some translations. It does not mean strange or weird as colloquial usage defines it, but rather it stems from the Greek word *peripoiesis*, ² which translated, reads literally "a people into possession" or a people who belong to God. We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Christ as the Founder and Foundation. Everyone in this community is related—we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God. This becomes important when we stop and realize that our foundation as a family is in Christ (Deut. 14:2; Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:4, 5).

1. Robert T. Boyd, World's Bible Handbook (Grand Rapids, Mich.: World Publishing, 1991), p. 647.

2. The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 562.

Wednesday March 15

Your House as an Evangelistic Tool

HOW-TO

3 John 11

Have you ever thought of your house as a witnessing tool? We were created a social people, with fellowship being something that comes with that. "We declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3, NKJV).

The home, being an informal setting, can make it an extremely versatile place for sharing God's Word. But what do people see when they come to your home? Can people tell the lifestyle that you lead or the beliefs that you subscribe to by looking at your home? By entering your house, do they feel as if they are entering a peaceful sanctuary or a place that angels fear to tread?

But witnessing is so much more than simple fellowship. Sometimes it is easier to start conversations involving religion simply by leaving the Bible lying around. With God as the focus, there is little else that could be needed.

Witnessing is so much more

than simple fellowship.

Put your house in order (2 Kings 20:1). This is what God told Hezekiah, and

others, on their death beds. It was meant as "get your life in order for it to end," but has other meanings as well. Our homes need to reflect the relationship that we have with our

heavenly Father, as though He may walk through the door at any second. We need to look at our lives, thinking *What if Jesus walked in that door this instant? What would He see?*

But one important thing remains different between us and Hezekiah: he was facing immediate death. He was dying, and God gave him plenty of forewarning. Most of us do not get that luxury. Like the return of Christ, nobody knows the hour or the day when they are going to die. It will come, as in Christ's return, like "a thief in the night."

As far as giving you guidelines for having a "Christian" home, the truth is mostly in the eye of the beholder. The Bible does not clearly state which pictures you should have on the wall, which CDs should or should not be in your rack. The truth is that the first thing that a visitor sees is your home. When they walk in, do they see a warm, caring Christian atmosphere, or are they unsettled more than welcomed when they enter? This is what you must ask yourself when the question is asked, "What have they seen in your home?"
Thursday March 16

What Sort of Role Model?

OPINION

Isaiah 38; 39

Following King Hezekiah's miraculous recovery, the king of Babylon, Merodachbaladan, sent ambassadors to "congratulate him on his recovery and to learn, if possible, more of the God who was able to perform so great a wonder." What an amazing opportunity was presented here to Hezekiah to tell the Babylonian king of God's power and love.

But we are told that "pride and vanity took possession of Hezekiah's heart, and in self-exaltation he laid open to covetous eyes the treasures with which God had enriched His people. The king 'showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, and the spices, and the precious ointment, and all the house of his armor, and all that was found in his treasures: there was nothing in his house, nor in all his dominion, that Hezekiah showed them not.' Isaiah 39:2."²

The fact that Hezekiah had riches was not the problem. After all, God Himself had bestowed these upon Hezekiah. However, it became a sin when Hezekiah used

The fact that Hezekiah had riches was not the problem.

the riches to glorify himself rather than to bring glory to God.

Had Hezekiah used the opportunity wisely, the ambassadors would have returned to their king bringing a knowledge of the true God. Who knows how the course of history could have changed had the king of Babylon learned of the God of Israel! Instead, the ambassadors returned with reports of the riches of Judah, and as a direct result of Hezekiah's sin Judah would be invaded and its riches carried off to Babylon.

Every action and interaction we undertake has a powerful influence either for or against God. Every word we utter, every decision we make, every action we take can leave indelible impressions on the minds of those with whom we associate. This can be a powerful witness to bring people closer to God, or, if our witness has been negative, "we may have set in motion a train of circumstances, a tide of evil, which we are powerless to stay." What a challenge this is—to live in such a way that we will be good influences to everyone we meet, especially to our families.

^{1.} Prophets and Kings, p. 344.

^{2.} Ibid., pp. 344, 345.

^{3.} Ibid., p. 348.

Friday March 17

A Place of Solace?

EXPLORATION

Rev. 3:20

CONCLUDE

What is the home to be in the challenging times in which we live? Hurried, stressed-out people crave a place of solace, but few are willing to make God the center of their lives or their homes. The home is designed to be God's outpost from heaven, a place where He dwells comfortably and where His angels move freely. When the home is intentionally built around God, the spirit radiating from it gives safety and comfort to the inhabitants, and healing to all who come under its influence. The "peculiar" Christian home is one of the most powerful arguments in favor of God's existence and His love for humanity.

CONSIDER

- Getting a map of your neighborhood. Identify the spot where your home is and what kind of influence it has on the people who live in your neighborhood.
- Measuring the "spiritual temperature" of your home by asking your family members to rank the level of spirituality in your home on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being excellent.
- Crafting an argument in favor of the following statement: The Christian home is the cornerstone of society versus just the home in general. Cite specific reasons that you believe this statement is true.
- Recording secretly the sounds of your house for a day or so—perhaps what happens in the family room or TV room. Think about whether Jesus would feel welcome in your home.
- Purchasing a greeting card for each member of your family. Share with each of them the special contribution they have made in your life to make you feel loved.
- Reading John 17. Then, journal in a paragraph or two the family relationship that Jesus wants us to have with Him and with God the Father.
- Inviting a visitor from your church to your home for Sabbath dinner. Let your family know that the visitor will be coming ahead of time so that preparations can be made to love him or her well.

CONNECT

John 17. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 349–355. Mike Menard, *Shall We Gather at the Potluck*, chap. 6.

Lesson 12 March 18–25

Turning Hearts in the end time



" 'I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse' " (Mal. 4:5, 6, NIV). Sabbath March 18

Grace in the Grocery Store

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 18:35; Col. 3:13

I told him I didn't feel good. But my poor dad—in a rush to finish his errands and believing I was just acting my usual melodramatic, four-year-old self—took me grocery shopping anyway.

When we arrived, Dad tucked me snugly in the shopping cart seat. We flew through the aisles, tossing in cans of mixed vegetables and boxes of macaroni.

Every few minutes I'd meekly plead, "Daddy, I don't feel good."

"I'm sorry you don't feel good, Baby," he'd say and speed up the cart, trying to get me home as fast as he could.

As I recall the memorable grocery store visit, I believe we'd made it to the cereal aisle when our shopping trip came to an abrupt and messy halt. Out of the blue, and all over the grocery store floor, flew my breakfast.

"I'm sorry, Daddy," I said, sadly.

"It's OK," he replied, feeling both horribly guilty and utterly embarrassed. He

I told him I didn't feel good.

alerted the store's employees and quickly exited the building. Our groceries stayed behind.

Although we laugh about

the grocery store incident today, looking back, I know there were many other times when I thoroughly embarrassed my parents. There was the time I cut the Slinky out of my hair, leaving for weeks a shaggy mess in the back of my head. There was also another ugly episode when I became an instant fashion designer, taking a pair of scissors to a beautiful new church dress.

Aside from these lighthearted incidents, there were many other more serious moments when I angered my parents, when I hurt my parents, when I disappointed my parents. But no matter what or how severe my offense, they still forgave me every single time. Forgiveness—complete and untainted—is vital to healthy relationships. Forgiveness is vital in our relationship with others, and it is vital in our relationship with God.

In order for families' happiness to be complete, they must first practice Christ's forgiveness with each other. Though at times very difficult, Jesus asks us to forgive our brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, from and with all our hearts (Matt.18:35). Only then will we experience grace in all kinds of ways and places—even, I believe, in grocery stores.

Sunday March 19

Who Turns First?

EVIDENCE

1 Kings 16:29-17:24; Matt.18:21-35

We have been challenged this week with the historical role of Elijah the prophet to the Israelites as they waited through their earthly bondage for redemption from Roman rule at the coming of their "Messiah"—and prophetically for us as we wait through spiritual bondage for our redemption from Satan's rule at the coming of our "Messiah," Jesus. Malachi 4:5, 6 set Elijah's historic course, and Matthew 18:21–35 parallels the prophetic course. It appears that in both cases, historic and prophetic, we should turn from unkindness to kindness in our treatment of others. We are called to turn back to the people who matter in our lives, with whom we interact on a regular basis, as the evidence that our redemption is near.

Malachi takes the historical Elijah and transitions his hearers to a relationshipbased spirituality that will reflect readiness for redemption. Elijah was a man who knew how to call sin by its right name and to demonstrate to the sincere in heart

that God's power is greater than flour barrels and oil flasks lacking content—or bad leaders lacking moral conviction (1 Kings 16:29– 17:24). Whether that was through in-your-face confrontation as it

The turning apparently begins with me.

was for King Ahab, or in-your-faithfulness commendation as it was for the widow of Zeraphath, Elijah was called to turn the wicked to repentance and the weak in faith to reassurance. Turning seemed to be the calling of this prophet of doom and delight.

Matthew references Jesus' use of the historical Elijah to present the way He wanted His disciples to understand this turning in their relationship with each other and with those they would be called to serve. When they couldn't understand forgiveness, He illustrated in Matthew 18:21–35 the ever-present wickedness in contrast with the mercy of forgiveness.

So fathers will turn to sons and sons to fathers according to Malachi; and masters will forgive servants and servants should forgive fellow servants according to Matthew; and we should learn a lesson from both as we turn inward to our families, as Malachi encourages, and outward to those around us as Matthew illustrates. And since I cannot force someone else to turn to me, the turning apparently begins with me. Monday March 20

When Elijah Prayed . . .

LOGOS

1 Kings 16:29-17:24; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 3:2; 11:14, 15; 17:10; 18:20-45

An Elijah Message

As Adventists we are inclined to read Malachi 4:5, 6 with an eschatological forward look at end-time events while, at the same time, looking back at the times of the incarnation of Jesus and the ministry of the prophet Elijah. We particularly recognize the profound role this unique prophet played in bringing the people of Israel together on Mount Carmel and leading them to a crucial, heart-turning decision about the true God (1 Kings18:16–46).

The way he actually draws people together around the altar of this God resonates with the sentiment in Malachi's words: "I will send you Elijah the prophet.

Looking at the whole story of Elijah, we see a person just like us. ... And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers' " (Mal. 4:5, 6, NKJV). This was a call to unity of faith around the altar of sacrifice and worship. We are not surprised

when, in New Testament times, Jesus has to alert His disciples to the realization that the ministry of John the Baptist had, indeed, fulfilled the expectation that an Elijah message had been revived (Matt. 3:1–3; 11:14; 17:10–13). John had turned the hearts of many to focus on Jesus, the Lamb of God. Adventists today have a similar task: To be an Elijah message that will focus the attention of the world on a returning Jesus.

A Bigger Picture

But we are kept from seeing a bigger picture of the Elijah message if we limit it to the kind of happenings on Mount Carmel only. Elijah was also the prophet of Kerith Ravine, of Zarephat, and even of Mount Horeb! The lessons drawn from other events in Elijah's prophetic ministry also shape our understanding of what his message, applied to subsequent times in history, should be. Another New Testament writer notes the role of prayer in Elijah's ministry. To illustrate the importance of church families who pray, James simply says, "Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit" (James 5:17, 18, NKJV).

One of the most effective ways that God turns the hearts of people is through the experience of prayer. Prayer draws individual people closer to God (1 Kings 18:30–39). Prayer also brings a nation to a knowledge of the true God. Prayer focuses needy family members on the provider God (17:7–16). Prayer turns the heart of a desperate mother to a life-giving God (verses 17–24).

Prayer Power

After Elijah prayed for the Zerephath widow's son, she said, " 'Now by this I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is the truth" (verse 24, NKJV). The powerful, miracle-working God had turned her heart.

After Elijah prayed and God had answered on Mount Carmel, the people fell prostrate and cried, " 'The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!' " (18:39, NIV). Their hearts had been turned from a focus on falsehood to the truth about the true God.

The ministry of a praying prophet was pivotal. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, NIV). But Elijah was a man just like us! And Christians today are also effective when, through prayer, they petition the true God on behalf of needy people around them. And God still turns the hearts of people today.

Just Like Us

Looking at the whole story of Elijah, we see a person, just like us, who could get discouraged—so discouraged he wanted to end it all (1 Kings 19). When he fled to Horeb, a gracious God accompanied him and even strengthened him to run the long journey. God then met with the praying prophet, teaching him that sometimes the power of prayer is found in listening for God's still small voice! Maybe this is where end-time faith begins. Maybe the quiet moment with God, amidst the clutter and business of life, is where faith can grow. This is the kind of faith that turns needy hearts to the provider God. And this is the kind of faith God can use when hearts need to be turned toward the returning Jesus. It is also the kind of faith that Jesus inspires in His waiting church when He comes to take His bride home. It worked for Elijah when God took him home (2 Kings 2), and he was a man just like us!

REACT

1. Look at the Zerephath widow's response in 1 Kings 17:24. She has become convinced that Elijah speaks God's truth. Does her understanding of truth relate solely to the miracles she had experienced? Explain your answer.

2. In what ways can you participate in the Elijah message today as John the Baptist did at the time of the first advent of Jesus? What does this mean for your life? Does God have a unique way to use you to turn hearts to Him?

Tuesday March 21

Relationships Should Be Like Triangles

TESTIMONY

Prov. 3:5, 6

When I got married in 1997, my dad gave me some important advice. He said, "Marriage is like a triangle, with you and your husband at opposite points and God at the top point of the triangle. The closer you each grow to God, the closer you will grow to each other."

This important piece of advice has proved true in my marriage. During the times when my relationship with God was weak, I have fought more with my husband and have been unwilling to compromise. But during the times when my relationship with God was strong, I was willing to put my husband's feelings, thoughts, and desires ahead of my own.

Since that day in 1997, I have come to realize that all family relationships, not just marriage, should be like triangles. My husband and I have a little boy now. And during the moments when our own personal relationships with God are strong, I



notice we are better parents.

Your relationship with God affects your relationship with others in your family—your parents, your siblings, even your friends. If you don't have a strong relationship with God,

you can't be a good friend, a good sister or brother, a good son or daughter, or even a good boyfriend or girlfriend. It is God who empowers you to be all you can be. He helps you to tuck away your pride and put others first. He enables you to control your anger. He shows you how not to be defensive and to listen to others when they are hurting. He leads you to spend your resources wisely. He offers wisdom beyond what this world offers—wisdom for building solid relationships with others.

Strengthen your relationship with God and get to know Him better. It will pay off in all your relationships. This will include daily study and prayer. Open your Bible and search His Word for practical truths you can apply in your own life and relationships. For God has promised, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NKJV).

Wednesday March 22

Of Course I Love You!

HOW-TO Matt. 18:21. 22

My mother often reminds my siblings and me about the special bond that we share because we're family. "And nothing on earth should ever let you forget that and break that bond," she always ends emphatically. I have seen her tears and heard her fervent prayers that in the mess of today and in the continuous search for something more, her children don't lose sight of the Lord—or of each other. Being fourth in a lineup of five children, and also the one who always insisted on learning things the hard way, I'm sure the temptation to disown me has been strong on numerous occasions.

All relationships require effort, especially in today's world where there is so much going on all the time. It soon becomes so easy to take things for granted, including familial support. That includes both the taking and giving of it. The word

"love" becomes just another truism, much harder to carry out than to spout. With time, familiarity breeds scathing remarks and thoughtless conduct, and words said by Jesus Himself to



" 'love each other as I have loved you' " (John 15:12, NIV) are easily ignored.

How then can we as members of a Christian family deal with the pressures of a very modern lifestyle? It would serve well to remember the following in this regard:

1. Respect. While this may sound cliched, respect is a key requirement to peaceful coexistence. Recognize one another's similarities and respect one another's differences. Be able to defer to ideals that may not match yours. God created each of us unique and special and accepts us unconditionally.

2. Support. A sister couldn't understand her brother's addiction to substance abuse. They were from a "happy home," where love abounded. He had good friends and he lacked nothing. She tried to figure out what could have caused it, but came up with only a blank. She soon realized that wondering over the cause wasn't going to help as much as supporting him in his very tough undertaking to kick the habit.

3. Forgive. Those closest to you are probably the easiest ones to wound, particularly when you're hurting yourself. This gives rise to the proverbial scapegoat. Trying to get even isn't going to do any good.

4. Love. Without love the three points mentioned above are void.

Thursday March 23

Undeserved Grace and Love

OPINION

Luke 15:20-22

I have made this statement to myself and to friends on many occasions: "If I were God, not even I would still be alive because I am too disobedient and too sinful."

When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, the world was perfect and sinless. By yielding to the temptations of Satan, they became the first earthly beings to turn their backs on God.

Let's look at this very closely. As we read through the books of the Old Testament, what we see is continual disobedience to and disregard for the law of God. From Genesis all the way to Malachi, it is a similar situation: God cares for His people and shows extreme concern, but then they would soon forget about all the good that He had been doing for them. Whenever they called on Him for help, however, He would rescue them and also restore them to where they should be.



For most of us the reaction would be different. If one has a friend who continually violates the law, at some point the reaction may be, "Too bad for him. I give up!"

When we read the story of the Israelites, we often comment about their ungratefulness for all

the blessings they had received from God. But are we, as Christians, any different today? That is a question that each of us needs to ask ourselves. God has forgiven me so many times that I have lost count. Yet I continue to sin and live not according to His will. Despite my wickedness, at the end of each day I can sit back and count numberless blessings that I have received for the day.

This shows the extent of God's love and grace for humanity. This is not to say that we could live any way we wish and expect God just to forgive us. When God forgives us, He expects to see a change in us. His love is beyond human understanding, but if it weren't for this love and grace, where would we be? Christ's death on the cross is a demonstration of His willingness to restore us to a lasting relationship with Him. As a matter of fact, it is because of Christ's death that we have reason to live and also have the hope of eternal life. His love demonstrated through His forgiveness should inspire us to want to live daily for Him and to maintain a close relationship with Him.

Friday March 24

In the Spirit and Power of Elijah

EXPLORATION

Matt.17:10-13; Luke 1:13-17

CONCLUDE

I suppose the Jews expected to see a resurrected Elijah eventually, since Malachi had prophesied, "1 will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes'" (Mal. 4:5, NIV). Jesus made it clear, however, that the prophecy referred to the man's work and message, not the man. John the Baptist, He said, was Elijah in their midst. But that wasn't the "great and dreadful day of the Lord." Apparently the same message that was necessary to prepare hearts to receive Jesus the first time is also what we need as His Second Coming approaches—a depth of repentance that restores relationships, a message for the healing of hearts, the spirit and power of Elijah.

CONSIDER

- Writing your own parable that depicts forgiveness between a father and son or daughter.
- Making a list of the significant teachings of Elijah and John the Baptist and using it to summarize the "Elijah message."
- Journaling a timeline of your relationship with your father through the years, noting significant events that either drew you together or drove you apart. Think about where you might need restoration in your relationship. Pray about how God might bring healing to your heart.
- Coming up with a list of questions about forgiveness and interview people from church, work, school, or on the street. Write an article about the responses for your church newsletter or videotape the responses to share with your church.
- Playing the song "What Would I Say" by Stephen Curtis Chapman for your class and discussing how understanding can be a path to forgiveness.
- Writing a script of the story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel and acting it out for your Sabbath School class. Or videotape your drama and play it for the class.

CONNECT

Prophets and Kings, chaps. 9–14. Esmie G. Branner, *Beyond the Veil of Darkness*. Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place.*

Next Quarter's Lessons

THE HOLY SPIRIT

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2006, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: The Personality and Divinity of the Holy Spirit

LOGOS: Gen. 1:26; 3:22; Isa. 6:8; Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4–11, 28; 2 Cor. 13:14

Memory Text: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28:19).

One doesn't have to read far in the Bible before one is confronted with the Holy Spirit. Genesis 1:2 reads, "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters" (NASB); meanwhile, at the far other end of the Bible, Revelation 22:17 reads, "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Of course, between these two texts, throughout the pages of Scripture, the work and ministry of the Holy Spirit are revealed to us. This especially is true in the New Testament, where we are given many insights into the reality, purpose, and function of the Holy Spirit, particularly in regard to the plan of salvation.

This week we'll concentrate on one often misunderstood aspect of the Holy Spirit: His Divinity. In other words, the Holy Spirit isn't just some impersonal force that emanates from God. Instead, He is God, one of the three Persons who make up the Godhead of the Christian faith. Let's take a look at this fundamental teaching of the Bible.

Lesson 2: The Holy Spirit Symbolized in Scripture

LOGOS: Matt. 3:11; 10:16; John 1:9, 32; 7:37-39; 2 Cor. 1:20-22; 1 Pet. 1:22

Memory Text: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and wither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

In addition to numerous references to the Spirit by name, both in the Old and in the New Testament, the Spirit is frequently alluded to through the use of a variety of symbols. It only is through an acquaintance with the symbols, emblems, or illustrations used for the Spirit that His work and ministry in the believer's life can be adequately understood.

This week we'l take a look at some of these symbols and what they mean.

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Emerciana Djedje of Beira, Mozambique

A trip to the store to buy her parents some beer was a daily routine for Emerciana, a teen living in Mozambique.



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But one day a woman stopped her and invited her to see a film on the life of Jesus.

The next day as she walked to the store, she heard singing in the church nearby and stopped to listen. She remembered the woman's invitation to see the film about Jesus. She asked her mother whether she could go, and to her surprise, her mother agreed.

Emerciana entered the church and sat down. She loved the singing, and the movie touched her heart. She did not respond to the pastor's appeal to give her heart to God, but later she talked to the pastor, who offered to visit her home.

Emerciana continued to attend the meetings and invited her mother to come as well. Her mother went, but just to make sure her daughter was really attending meetings and not playing around. When she asked her mother to let her take her younger brother, her mother urged her to take her brother, her nephew, her aunt—even the housekeeper.

So while her mother does not attend the church with Emerciana, she has urged other family members to attend. And now some of Emerciana's friends also attend the Adventist church with Emerciana.

Read Emerciana's whole story in this quarter's *Teen Mission*.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help upgrade Mozambique's seminary to a university.

