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PLANBOOK



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

STRENGTHENING DISCIPLES

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Centennial Edition



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

STRENGTHENING DISCIPLES

———— WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER ————

JEFFREY BROWN, ORATHAI CHURESON, CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA,
LARRY EVANS, AMAL FAWZY, TRAFFORD FISCHER, KAREN AND RON FLOWERS,
KAREN HOLFORD, AKSENIYA LIBERANSKAYA, GÁBOR MIHALEC,
DAVID AND BEVERLY SEDLACEK, JOHN AND MILLIE YOUNGBERG



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Managing Editor: Dwain N. Esmond

Editorial Assistants: Dawn Jacobson-Venn and Karen Miranda

Design and Formatting: Daniel Taipe

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The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy of all facts and quotations as cited in this book.

Contributors:

Jeffrey Brown, Orathai Chureson, Claudio and Pamela Consuegra, Larry Evans,

Amal Fawzy, Trafford Fischer, Karen and Ron Flowers, Karen Holford, Akseiniya Liberanskaya,

Gábor Mihalec, Willie and Elaine Oliver, David and Beverly Sedlacek, John and Millie Youngberg

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Revival and Reformation: Families Reaching Across

Available at:

family.adventist.org/planbook

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Department of Family Ministries

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

12501 Old Columbia Pike

Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA

family@gc.adventist.org

Website: family.adventist.org

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Preface

James, one of the brothers of Jesus and an early leader of the Jerusalem church declares under inspiration:

“CONSIDER IT PURE JOY, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS, WHENEVER YOU FACE TRIALS OF MANY KINDS, BECAUSE YOU KNOW THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES PERSEVERANCE. LET PERSEVERANCE FINISH ITS WORK SO THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE, NOT LACKING ANYTHING. IF ANY OF YOU LACKS WISDOM, YOU SHOULD ASK GOD, WHO GIVES GENEROUSLY TO ALL WITHOUT FINDING FAULT, AND IT WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU.”
JAMES 1:2-5 (NIV)

To be sure, God tells us to expect trials, and it is in our response to those trials that gives evidence that we are growing and being strengthened as true disciples of Jesus Christ. The believer who expects his or her life to be easy—especially in family relationships—is in for a major shock. Jesus warned His disciples, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” John 16:33.

Indeed, the good news is that as disciples of Jesus we have the advantage of His presence, wisdom and power to live meaningful and victorious lives in each of our relationships, despite the challenges we invariably face. And if we lack the wisdom to deal with the most difficult areas of family life, God promises to give us generous amounts of that wisdom without judgment or shame.

This year we celebrate 100 years of organized ministry to families in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Since before 1919 when the General Conference Committee created the Home Commission with Arthur Whitefield Spalding as director, who together with his wife Maud, gave able leadership in this area; families in and out of the church have continued to need encouragement, guidance and hope in this critical area of life. Because of this reality, it has been the aim of Family Ministries for these many years to strengthen disciples in the family, so that we might represent Jesus well in all of our relationships.

Ellen White offers in *The Adventist Home*, p. 31: “The home in which the members are polite, courteous Christians exerts a far-reaching influence for good.”

Thus, it is our hope that the assets in this resource will enable you as a leader of God’s people to be encouraged despite the trials you endure from time to time. That you will find significant modalities here to help you in your work of ***Strengthening Disciples*** in the family so that our work of Reaching Families for Jesus will become a reality in our churches around the world today.

Maranatha!

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors
Department of Family Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters
Silver Spring, Maryland
family.adventist.org

A HUNDRED YEARS OF MINISTRY

VII

Centennial Reflections

KAREN AND RON FLOWERS

Centennial celebrations send up balloons full of joy, satisfaction, and memories that inspire energy, focus, and commitment to fuel present goals and long-range vision. As two who can personally connect with more than half of the century of formal ministry to families in the Seventh-day Adventist Church which began in 1919 with the formation of the Home Commission and is now expanded to a colorful parade of organized ministries to families in all 13 world divisions, we stand joyfully among the well-wishers! It is a proud moment as the parade of leaders serving across 100 years pause before the grandstand and drink in the roar of the crowd. It is an occasion for thanksgiving to God from whom all blessings to families flow. It is a time for enjoying together the well deserved affirmation and gratitude of the many whose relationships have been blessed by the efforts of men and women called to this ministry by a passionate love for families and a deep desire to see them flourish in Christ. It is a season for congratulations to all who have lent their best efforts to make Family Ministries what it is today under the professional and inspirational leadership of Willie and Elaine Oliver at the General Conference World Headquarters. From our vantage point, we shout out to all who will listen: Praise God! Well done! Yes!

There are many who stand with us along the parade route—or would be standing here were they not resting, awaiting the return of Jesus.

Karen Flowers, PhD and **Ron Flowers**, DMin, are the former co-directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Springs, Maryland, USA

In our imaginations, we can see broad smiles of approval and satisfaction on the faces of Arthur and Maud Spalding, the first to serve officially in ministry to families in the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the Home Commission. Their service is memorialized in the Arthur and Maud Spalding Distinguished Service Medallion that honors an elite circle of individuals and couples who have ministered to families with distinction across lifetimes of service. Their successors Florence Rebok, Archa Dart and John Cannon would surely be here too, talking over each other with so many stories of firsthand encounters with real families looking to bring real life together with real faith.

Del and Betty Holbrook—the dynamic couple who presided over the reinsertion of ministry to families into church organization with the launching of Home and Family Service at the 1975 General Conference Session in Vienna, and eventually into its full incorporation in the departmental structure of the world church in the 1990's—would be grinning from ear to ear. We can see Betty holding quiet but animated conversation with a bystander. Nearby, Del would hold a crowd spellbound with his sanguine storytelling of the infectious spread of this ministry from an idea born at his wife's desk after a committee meeting where she took notes for the chairman to its incorporation into church organization around the world at every level.

And oh yes, Millie Youngberg would be standing there beside John, who lovingly laid her to rest only weeks ago. It is to Millie and John that so many of us owe our start in ministry to families. Through their attentiveness to our own

families, the creative and bountiful resourcing they joyfully shared, and their leadership in founding the annual Family Life Workshop East in the early 70's at Andrews University, a generation of leaders was born. And then there's Alberta Mazat, a much-loved professor of marriage and family therapy at Loma Linda University and director of the ensuing Family Life Workshop West. She would be smiling warmly at someone beside her who looked like they needed encouragement, always a gentle presence but on fire inside and where it mattered in defense of families in crisis.

Down the line in our mind's eye, we meet with warm affection all the gifted, warm, energetic, creative, dedicated, impassioned, tireless—the adjectives could stream on—colleagues with whom we shared the development of this ministry across thirty years of ministry to families from our post at the General Conference. It is a parade that would stretch as far as the eye could see. It is a celebration that will continue as families find one another and tell their stories into eternity. God knows all your names!

In this “What hath God wrought” moment, the words of Ellen White to Arthur Spalding at the beginning couldn't be more poignant:

I WANT TO TALK WITH YOU . . . ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE WORK TO BE DONE FOR THE PARENTS IN THE CHURCH. YOU ARE A TEACHER. YOU ARE ALSO A FATHER. YOUR WORK AS A FATHER IS THE MOST IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL WORK YOU HAVE EVER DONE OR EVER CAN DO. THE WORK OF PARENTS UNDERLIES EVERY OTHER. LET THE MINISTERS DO ALL THEY CAN, LET THE TEACHERS DO ALL THEY CAN, LET THE PHYSICIANS AND NURSES DO ALL THEY CAN TO ENLIGHTEN AND TEACH THE PEOPLE OF GOD, BUT UNDERNEATH ALL THEIR EFFORTS, THE FIRST WORK DONE BY THE PARENTS IS THE WORK THAT TELLS MOST DECIDEDLY FOR THE UPBUILDING OF THE CHURCH. . . . IT IS THE VERY MOST IMPORTANT WORK BEFORE US AS A PEOPLE, AND WE HAVE NOT BEGUN TO TOUCH IT WITH THE TIPS OF OUR FINGERS” (SPALDING, 1962, PP. 200-202).

With these words ringing in his ears, Arthur Spalding, along with his wife, Maud, grasped ministry to families with both hands. Though the church had only 178,000 members (Yearbook, 1921) and resources were limited, they made an indelible impression on the church for over two decades through the correspondence school they established. Their wise personal counsel and lessons connected them intimately with families nearby and in to the far-flung reaches of the globe.

No less, the same Spirit who blessed and multiplied their efforts continues to work through present leadership to strengthen relationships and bring healing and hope through the Word to families everywhere. John begins his gospel with the declaration that this Word became Flesh and moved into our neighborhood, graciously picking us up in our brokenness and extending to us abundant life in love beyond our wildest dreams. Embracing Jesus' new commandment, “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12) is at the core of ministry to families. It defines who we are and our *raison d'être*. It spurs us on as persons, marriage partners, and parents to be before we do, to live the graces and values we long to see in the next generation, and to relate to one another as children of the Light.

IX

It is this same John—the disciple Jesus *kept on loving*—who marks the indelible impression such love makes: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). It is such love that will see us through together to the last milemarker and the Grand Celebration of love and family that knows no end.

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100 Years of Family Ministries Around the World

On October 8, 1919 the General Conference Committee created the Home Commission, which became operative in 1922 with Arthur W. Spalding as director, who worked in this capacity with his wife Maud, until 1941. Spalding created literature for the education of the entire family. A series of leaflets were produced dealing with different phases of home life entitled, The Christian Home Series. Arthur W. Spalding wrote the lessons and Maud Spalding graded them.

Five books of the Christian Home Series came from the pens of Arthur Spalding and Dr. Belle Wood-Comstock, which provided instruction for family living.

Christian Home Day was set for the first Sabbath in February and is still preserved on the church calendar as Christian Home and Marriage Week, from the second Sabbath to the third Sabbath of February.

In June of 1941, a General Conference Convention on the home was held, perhaps the first Family Life International.

The Home Commission became part of the Department of Education in 1941. During the next three decades marriage and family life programs were promoted by Parent and Home Education Secretaries: Florence Rebok (1941-1947), Arabella Moore Williams (1947-1954),

Archa O. Dart (1954-1970) and W. John Cannon (1970-1975).

At the General Conference Session held in Vienna, Austria in 1975, to address the need for stronger, more stable Adventist homes, the Home and Family Service (HFS) was organized. A husband and wife team, Delmer and Betty Holbrook, were elected as directors. The Holbrooks organized and conducted training seminars for administrators, pastors and laity in every world division.

Karen and Ronald Flowers joined the HFS staff in 1980. D. W. Holbrook directed HFS from 1975 to 1982, and Betty Holbrook served as director from 1982 until 1985 when Home and Family Service became part of the Department of Church Ministries (CM).

Family Ministries continued as a strong section of the Department of Church Ministries through the efforts of Betty Holbrook, an Associate Director of CM until her retirement in 1988, and Karen and Ronald Flowers, Associate Directors of CM until 1995. D.W. Holbrook, Director of CM from 1985-1987 also assisted with Family Ministries.

At the 1995 General Conference Session held in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, the Department of Church Ministries was disbanded, with several separate departments being formed,

including the current Department of Family Ministries, with Ronald Flowers as Director, and Karen Flowers as Associate Director, until their retirement in June 2010, at the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, an infrastructure of Family Ministries Directors were elected at Division, Union and Conference/Mission levels; and the Family Ministries leadership training curriculum was put in place, as well as the publication of annual Family Ministries Planbooks.

At the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia, Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected on June 28, 2010 as Director and Associate Director, respectively, of the Department of Family Ministries. The Olivers came to the Department from a long career in Family Ministries, having directed the Department of Family Ministries of the North American Division (NAD) since its inception at the NAD Year-end Meeting in 1995; and Willie Oliver serving as Director of the Departments of Family Ministries for the Atlantic Union Conference (1994-1995), and the Greater New York Conference (1989-1993).

During their first quinquennium as Directors of Family Ministries, Willie and Elaine Oliver prioritized the training of all Division and Union Directors of Family Ministries in the PREPARE/ENRICH modality of premarital and marriage enrichment education; developed Real Family Talk with Willie and Elaine Oliver, a television program seen on the Hope Channel around the world; continued the annual publication of Family Ministries Planbooks; advanced the Family-to-Family evangelism process as a part of the Mission to the Families in the Cities—Mission to the Cities—initiative of the General Conference; became authors of the Real Family Talk column in Adventist World online, while continuing to write the Relationship Rx column in Message magazine. They also published the book *Real Family Talk Answers to Questions about Love, Marriage, and Sex*.

Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected to a second term as Directors of the Department of Family Ministries on July 6, 2015, at the 60th Session of the General Conference held in San Antonio, Texas. They have recently written the 2019 Missionary Book of the Year, *Hope for Today's Families*.

XI



How to Use This Planbook

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

XII

Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 9-16

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

Christian Marriage Day: Sabbath, February 9, (Emphasizes Marriage)

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

Christian Home Day: Sabbath, February 16, (Emphasizes Parenting)

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

Family Togetherness Week: September 1-7

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

Family Togetherness Day: Sabbath, September 7 (Emphasizes the Church Family)

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

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

This resource also includes Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars and handouts. Seminar facilitators are encouraged to personalize the Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations with their own personal stories and pictures that reflect the diversity of their various communities. To download them please visit: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2019>

SERMONS

Becoming Like Children

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

MARK 10:13-16

(MATT 18:1-6, 19:13-15;

LUKE 18:15-17);

I. Introduction

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Several years ago before we relocated to the Washington, DC area to work for the North American Division, we lived in South Lancaster, Massachusetts and worked at Atlantic Union College and the Atlantic Union Conference. During our time in Massachusetts, our cousin's daughter graduated from Oakwood Academy located in Huntsville, Alabama, so our family of four made the trip by car to participate in the festivities. After many hours of driving, we arrived in Huntsville on Friday afternoon, about two hours before sunset. I (Elaine) needed to be dropped off at the mall, and I (Willie) headed to the car wash with the children so we could have a clean car for Sabbath.

We arrived at the car wash only to find out that it was the kind where everyone had to exit the car as it went through the wash cycle. You could watch it as it proceeded through the wash. Once the car made it to the other side of the wash, Jessica, Julian and I (Willie) got

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, MA, LGPC, CFLE are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

into the car ready to head to the mall to pick up Elaine, check into the hotel, and get ready for Sabbath. I turned the key in the ignition, but the engine ignored me completely. I tried two more times with the same result, before the silence was broken by Jessica's voice from the back seat of the car.

"Daddy," she said, "the car isn't starting." "That's correct, Jessica," I responded. Five seconds elapsed before Jessica's voice invaded the silence again. "Daddy, can we pray?" She inquired. "Yes, Jessica," was my response, then I asked, "Would you like to pray, Jessica?" "Yup," she responded, and went right into her prayer: "Dear Jesus, please help Daddy to start the car so we can go pick up mommy from the mall, so she won't be afraid. Amen." Prayer ended, I turned the key in the ignition, and the Volvo roared to life.

We have titled the few thoughts we will share with you today, *Becoming Like Children*. Let us pray.

II. The Text: Mark 10:13-16

THEN THEY BROUGHT LITTLE CHILDREN TO HIM, THAT HE MIGHT TOUCH THEM; BUT THE DISCIPLES REBUKED THOSE WHO BROUGHT THEM. BUT WHEN JESUS SAW IT, HE WAS GREATLY DISPLEASED AND SAID

TO THEM, ‘LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME, AND DO NOT FORBID THEM; FOR OF SUCH IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD. ASSUREDLY, I SAY TO YOU, WHOEVER DOES NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A LITTLE CHILD WILL BY NO MEANS ENTER IT.’ AND HE TOOK THEM UP IN HIS ARMS, LAID HIS HANDS ON THEM, AND BLESSED THEM.

The setting of this narrative finds Jesus on His way to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. Jesus is also on His way to Calvary, to die for your sins and ours.

The Gospel of Mark is the second of the three Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, then Luke—which is at the beginning of the New Testament. Scholars believe the book of Mark was the first of the Gospels to be written—one of the reasons we have a penchant for preaching from this book. Of course, the term “synoptic” comes from the Greek word meaning to “see together,” which is characteristic of the similar stories and reports which populate these three Gospels. While the book of Mark is the shortest of the three, it is also more action-packed than the other Gospels. In fact, much of the evidence in the book of Mark proffers that the Gospel was written for a non-Jewish audience, since in it Mark has a penchant for explicating Jewish customs (15:42), and for being fastidious when using Aramaic words and phrases—the language Jews of Palestine used during the first century A.D.—to translate them to Greek (3:17; 5:41; 7:11, 34; 15:22).

Among other things, the Gospel of Mark has been called a Passion story, since so much of its narratives deal with the reality of Jesus’ suffering and death. And the final third of the book is dedicated to the last week of Jesus’ time on earth. This is where our instruction for today finds us: Jesus coming from His assignment in Perea—on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, which today would be in the country of Jordan—near Mount Nebo, from where Moses looked west to see the promised land before dying; near the place where Elisha saw Elijah go up in a chariot of fire, not far from where Jesus

was baptized in the Jordan River, and nearby the land of Moab, home of Ruth, the daughter-in-law of Naomi.¹

In Mark 10 Jesus utilizes an unusual modality of sharing the good news of salvation. Rather than employing symbols, miracles, types, parables, or proverbs, Jesus used paradoxes to make His point abundantly clear. Of course, a paradox is a declaration that gives the sense of contradicting itself, while uttering an authentic truth or principle. For example, “When I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). Also, when the apostle Paul describes himself “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:8-10), he is again employing a paradox to make a more compelling point.

Rather than preaching a long sermon, Jesus shared five substantial teachings by making use of five paradoxical assertions. 1. Two Shall Be One (Mark 10:1-12); 2. Adults Shall Be as Children (Mark 10:13-16); 3. The First Shall Be Last (Mark 10:17-31); 4. Servants Shall Be Rulers (Mark 10:32-45); and 5. The Poor Become Rich (Mark 10:46-52).²

III. Explication And Application

Today, we will focus on the second paradox utilized by Jesus in chapter 10 of Mark, verses 13-16. Thus, our topic, *Becoming Like Children*. Here Jesus draws attention to the children that were brought to Him by people in the crowds referenced in Mark 10:1 which states: “Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan (*Perea*). And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.”

In the process of sharing His teachings, after speaking about the blessings of “two becoming one” and responding to the Pharisees’ interest about the conundrum of divorce and remarriage, children are brought to Jesus, so that He may touch them.

Warren Wiersbe, a noted biblical scholar, suggests that the word *children* in this passage could refer to any age between infancy and

twelve years of age, although the central interest of this narrative is not so much the children but the kind of people who are most likely to enter heaven. Also worthy of note is Jesus' fondness for those who bring others with them when they come to see Him, and the truth that if you come to Jesus He is always willing to make time for you. This is a declarative story, and its legitimacy is certified by the fact that the teaching and behavior of Jesus were vastly different from that of most philosophies and practices of His time. The truth is, this story cannot be fully appreciated without an awareness of the lowly place and social location children inhabited in ancient society, especially in pagan communities like the ones on the eastern bank of the Jordan River where Jesus tells this story. While children in the Gospels often exemplify any helpless person, in this passage children represent the traits of *humility* and *trust* disciples of Jesus should have.³

Referencing the disciples' treatment of the people who brought children to Jesus, commentators suggest they were probably tired, tense, and stressed out about the thought of going to Jerusalem and perhaps were simply protecting Jesus' time.⁴

While the word *children* in vv. 13-14, 16 denotes actual children who were being brought to Jesus; the words such as these in v. 14 and *like a little child* in v. 15 represent actual children or adults who possess childlike traits and qualities, such as innocence, humility, lack of self-consciousness, approachability, and truthfulness. Even though it is true not all children share these characteristics, the primary aspects of comparison may be the unimportance, vulnerability, dependence, and helplessness common to children in ancient society and also of those who will enter the kingdom of God. Therefore the central application of the passage is not simply about the manner in which one comes to Jesus, but on the fact of approaching Jesus, the reason for our faith.⁵

Becoming *like* Children is also a simile. A simile is "a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing

of a different kind, used to make a description more emphatic or vivid (e.g., as brave as a lion, crazy like a fox).⁶ Becoming *like* Children then doesn't mean that adults must now become children, but become *like* children in certain God-like characteristics—humility, approachability, trust, vulnerability, forgiveness, and more—which is the only way to see God, and to develop the kind of relationships that will give honor and glory to Him. These child-like qualities strengthen discipleship when we possess them.

The concluding and most poignant pedagogy or teaching method of this second paradox in Mark 10 is how Jesus modeled and demonstrated His philosophy. Verse 16 dramatizes the truth of it all by stating Jesus' actions this way: "And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them," a visual display that Jesus practiced what he preached. By taking the children in His arms, Jesus demonstrated that all who come to Him will receive His blessing, for in His love and grace there are no outsiders.⁷ Jesus openly welcomes new disciples every time they come looking for Him.

So, in your relationship with your husband or wife; ex-husband or ex-wife; parents or children; other relatives, neighbors, co-workers, or friends, how are you becoming *like little children*? Are you humble and trusting? Are you approachable and unselfconscious? Are you becoming *like little children* in your relationships?

Despite the fact that as a part of our work we teach skills to maximize relationships, sometimes we find ourselves not being *like little children*. While we have written about the bad habit that humans often exhibit in their relationships—especially close relationships such as marriage or parenting—of correcting their spouse or children when they are telling a story, I (Willie) often find myself doing the same to Elaine when she is telling a story and I think all of her facts are not exactly accurate. Most times the details I am concerned about in Elaine's stories are really not that important. However, interrupting

her in the middle of what she is saying does not make her feel appreciated or cared for. Rather, doing so makes her not want to tell stories when I am around, because it is unpleasant and feels invalidating when she is constantly being corrected. In this instance, to be *like little children* means that I must be intentional about being patient, kind, and affirming, rather than saying what I am thinking when it is completely unnecessary. Truly, these are the virtues of *little children* that will strengthen relationships, and more importantly, discipleship.

IV. Conclusion

How do you need to be *like little children* today? Do you lack patience? Do you lack humility and the capacity to easily forgive? Do you hold on to grudges and spites? How do you need to be *like little children* today?

Are you ready to operationalize your commitment to grow in Jesus and be strengthened as a disciple, forgetting what is behind and moving forward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus for you? (Philippians 3:14)

Who needs to become *like little children* today, so you can bring laughter, joy, and peace to all of your relationships, including your relationship with Jesus?

Illustration: The Emotional Bank Account.

Many of you may have heard about the concept of the *emotional bank account*. It works just like a regular bank account. The more emotional *deposits* (patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness) you make into the emotional bank account of the people you are in relationship with—especially your closest relationships—the more currency (happiness, joy, peace, good feelings) you will have in those relationships. The converse is also true; the more emotional *withdrawals* (impatience, arguments, criticism, arrogance, invalidation) you make, the less currency and viability that relationship will have.

Our marriage is not perfect, but we trust God for patience and kindness each day to deal with each other in a way that brings honor and glory to Him. Every day we must ask God to heal us of our relational adulthood and help us become *like little children* every day, so we can develop the kind of marriage relationship that brings joy and contentment to our home every day. In the process we will become stronger disciples of Jesus and more like Him.

1 Corinthians 13:4 declares: “Love is patient and kind...” (ESV). Ellen White shares in *The Adventist Home*: “Parents, never speak hastily. If your children do wrong, correct them, but let your words be full of tenderness and love. Every time you scold, you lose a precious opportunity of giving a lesson in forbearance and patience” (p. 440).⁸

Ellen White continues in her counsel to married people in *The Adventist Home*: “Neither husband nor wife is to make a plea for rulership. The Lord has laid down the principle that is to guide in this matter. The husband is to cherish his wife as Christ cherishes the church (Ephesians 5:25). And the wife is to respect and love her husband. Both are to cultivate the spirit of kindness, being determined never to grieve or injure the other” (p. 106).⁹

John the Beloved wrote in 1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

So, remember the words of Jesus in Mark 10:15 when He proclaimed: “Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.”

That Friday afternoon at the carwash in Huntsville, Alabama showed me that negotiating the challenges of life as an ordained minister could be lightened and alleviated if I approached my problems like a six-year-old little girl sitting in the backseat of her Daddy’s car. The simple faith and trust of a child could make things right again, even when confronted with adult setbacks, hitches, and drawbacks.

It is our hope you will make the decision to ask Jesus to help you become *like little children* today, being able to develop genuine and authentic relationships each day that honor God, give glory to Him, and demonstrate that you are growing stronger as a disciple of His every day.

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

Notes

- ¹ Andrews Study Bible, 2010.
- ² Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. The Bible Exposition Commentary.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Holman New Testament Commentary: Mark, 2000.
- ⁵ Wiersbe, Warren W. 1989. The Bible Exposition Commentary.
- ⁶ Google Dictionary.
- ⁷ Holman New Testament Commentary: Mark, 2000.
- ⁸ White, Ellen G. 1952. *The Adventist Home*, p. 440
- ⁹ Ibid, p. 106

What's New Got To Do With It?

JEFFREY O. BROWN

The Text

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

“London is a bad place to have a wife.” So stated a journalist in an article titled, *“Till London Do Us Part”* (Djan 1995:34). Stating that at least 45 percent of British marriages end in divorce, the highest figure for any European Union country, Djan maintains that Christians of African descent in the west are unavoidably affected by this trend. “Marriage was once said to be for life. Not anymore. The more Africans abroad absorb Western ideas, the more their marriages break up. From Germany to America, the story is the same. In Britain the African community is in virtual crisis as their marriages break up all around them” (See also Rucibwa 1994).

The impact of divorce has affected culture and church alike, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church has not escaped unscathed. Tina Turner asked the question, “What’s love got to do with it?” (Brady 1995), but I ask the question, What’s new got to do with it? There is a Scripture that says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NIV). So what? What kind of behavior can people expect when Christians marry—and what happens

when they break up? What relationship ideals are held by Christians—and what happens when they break them?

Highest Standards of Morality

The New Testament presents the highest standards of morality possible, a reality where divorce is not normative. Ellen White states: “God’s ideal for His children is higher than the highest human thought can reach. The living God has given in His holy law a transcript of His character. The greatest Teacher the world has ever known is Jesus Christ; and what is the standard He has given for all who believe in Him? ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ Matthew 5:48. As God is perfect in His high sphere of action, so man may be perfect in his human sphere” (White 1913:365)

This high standard of Christian ethics was propounded by Jesus in what is perhaps His clearest statement regarding singleness, marriage, and divorce:

ONE DAY THE PHARISEES WERE BADGERING JESUS: “IS IT LEGAL FOR A MAN TO DIVORCE HIS WIFE FOR ANY REASON?” HE ANSWERED, “HAVEN’T YOU READ IN YOUR BIBLE THAT THE CREATOR ORIGINALLY MADE MAN AND WOMAN FOR EACH OTHER, MALE AND

Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is the Associate Editor for Ministry Magazine and the Associate Ministerial Secretary at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Springs, Maryland, USA.

FEMALE? AND BECAUSE OF THIS, A MAN LEAVES FATHER AND MOTHER AND IS FIRMLY BONDED TO HIS WIFE, BECOMING ONE FLESH—NO LONGER TWO BODIES BUT ONE. BECAUSE GOD CREATED THIS ORGANIC UNION OF THE TWO SEXES, NO ONE SHOULD DESECRATE HIS ART BY CUTTING THEM APART.” THEY SHOT BACK IN REBUTTAL, “IF THAT’S SO, WHY DID MOSES GIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR DIVORCE PAPERS AND DIVORCE PROCEDURES?” JESUS SAID, “MOSES PROVIDED FOR DIVORCE AS A CONCESSION TO YOUR HARD HEARTEDNESS, BUT IT IS NOT PART OF GOD’S ORIGINAL PLAN. I’M HOLDING YOU TO THE ORIGINAL PLAN, AND HOLDING YOU LIABLE FOR ADULTERY IF YOU DIVORCE YOUR FAITHFUL WIFE AND THEN MARRY SOMEONE ELSE. I MAKE AN EXCEPTION IN CASES WHERE THE SPOUSE HAS COMMITTED ADULTERY.” JESUS’ DISCIPLES OBJECTED, “IF THOSE ARE THE TERMS OF MARRIAGE, WE’RE STUCK. WHY GET MARRIED?” BUT JESUS SAID, “NOT EVERYONE IS MATURE ENOUGH TO LIVE A MARRIED LIFE. IT REQUIRES A CERTAIN APTITUDE AND GRACE. MARRIAGE ISN’T FOR EVERYONE. SOME, FROM BIRTH SEEMINGLY, NEVER GIVE MARRIAGE A THOUGHT. OTHERS NEVER GET ASKED—OR ACCEPTED. AND SOME DECIDE NOT TO GET MARRIED FOR KINGDOM REASONS. BUT IF YOU’RE CAPABLE OF GROWING INTO THE LARGENESS OF MARRIAGE, DO IT” (MATT 19:3-12, MESSAGE).

Eggerichs (2004:42) comments: “Realizing marriage demanded permanence and work, the disciples complained, ‘If the relationship... is like this, it is better not to marry’ (Matt 19:10).” Cornes (1993:125) states: “Jesus’ disciples never expected to hear that. When they blurted out: ‘If this is the situation between a husband and wife [no divorce and remarriage], it is better not to marry’ (Matt 19:10), they surely expected Christ to say, No, no. Of course it is always better to marry.’ Instead, he replied that singleness is indeed ‘given’ to many by God and that it is a most honorable state (Matt. 19:11f).” Bustanoby (1978:143) states:

KNOWING THEIR RATIONALIZATIONS, JESUS WAS SAYING, “YES, I AM PLACING A HARD BURDEN ON YOU, AND NOT EVERYONE WILL OBEY. BUT WHEN YOU DISOBEY, ACKNOWLEDGE THAT IT IS A SIN.” . . . MANY DIVORCED PERSONS WILL OBJECT TO THIS POINT. “YOU PUT ME IN A HARD PLACE,” THEY WILL SAY. “YOU ARE TELLING ME EITHER TO DO WITHOUT REMARRIAGE—SOMETHING I FIND DIFFICULT TO DO—OR REMARRY AND COMMIT A SIN.” IN RESPONSE, I WILL ANSWER THAT THIS IS EXACTLY THE POSITION THAT JESUS INTENDS TO PUT YOU IN. HE DOESN’T DO IT BECAUSE HE IS UNSYMPATHETIC, BUT BECAUSE HE WANTS TO RAISE THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE TO THE DIGNITY HE INTENDS FOR IT TO HAVE. IF YOU [HAVE REMARRIED] AGAINST THE BIBLE’S GUIDELINES, WALK IN THE LIGHT AND ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR REMARRIAGE IS A SIN. . . CONFESS YOUR SIN BEFORE GOD AND ALLOW HIM TO TREAT IT AS A FORGIVABLE SIN. BUT DON’T ASK HIM TO LOWER THE BIBLICAL STANDARDS OF MARRIAGE BECAUSE YOU DON’T WANT TO CALL YOURSELF A SINNER.

The question may be asked, if it is certain that God will forgive, will that not be an encouragement to sin? Richards (1981:83) states: “Christians, and the Church, must always live in tension. It is the tension between God’s call to the ideal and the pull of sin which drags us down toward the real.” Yet the experience of grace makes one more obedient, not less. Paul said, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:1, 2). Stott (2001:51) comments: “In Romans 6 he [Paul] refutes the slander that the gospel encourages sin.”

Lloyd-Jones (1972:8, 9) states: “There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than this, that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this, that because you

are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. That is a very good test of gospel preaching. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.”

Deepest Acts of Mercy

Paralleling the highest standards of morality, we find the deepest acts of mercy. The genius of the cross is that God has found a way to stamp on us both guilty and forgiven at the same time. The challenge of the fall was how could God remain just—declare the sinner guilty—and yet still pardon the sinner. The death of a sinless Savior provided the solution. “The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Num 14:18). Through the cross, God proved to “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26).

Tyner (1996:15) states, “The Bible often makes things plain to us through the use of a literary pattern known as contrasting parallelism, in which the second line of a verse says exactly the opposite of the first line.” Tyner’s example is, Rom 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” 1 John 2:1 is another example, demonstrating that while standards cannot be compromised, grace cannot be marginalized: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

The church’s task is to declare unflinchingly that divorce is wrong. Divorce is a destruction of the oneness of humankind and a distortion of the image of God, often with devastating consequences for parents and children. The prophet reports, “For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one’s garment with violence,” says the Lord of

hosts” (Mal 2:16, NKJV). Foster (1987:13) comments, “Yes, God hates divorce, but not divorced people. He works in broken relationships to heal and forgive.” The church must proclaim with hymn writer Frederick William Faber:

THERE’S A WIDENESS IN GOD’S MERCY
LIKE THE WIDENESS OF THE SEA;
THERE’S A KINDNESS IN HIS JUSTICE,
WHICH IS MORE THAN LIBERTY.
THERE IS WELCOME FOR THE SINNER,
AND MORE GRACES FOR THE GOOD;
THERE IS MERCY WITH THE SAVIOR;
THERE IS HEALING IN HIS BLOOD.
FOR THE LOVE OF GOD IS BROADER
THAN THE MEASURE OF MAN’S MIND;
AND THE HEART OF THE ETERNAL IS
MOST WONDERFULLY KIND.

Scripture declares, “All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isa 53:6), yet it is not the sheep that are slaughtered for straying. “*He* is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” “And the Lord hath laid on *him* the iniquity of us all” (Isa 53:7, 6). White (1970:25) comments, “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With His stripes we are healed.’” White (1969:234) further states, “He delights to take apparently hopeless material, those through whom Satan has worked, and make them the subjects of His grace.”

A Radical Difference

Two statements of Scripture lay the foundation for what Christian marriage ought and ought not to be: “it shall not be so among you” (Matt 20:26) and “as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The point of these statements in their context was that there is to be a radical difference between Christian relationships and those of the world, and that difference is unique to Christianity because Christ’s sacrifice is without comparison. Garland and Garland (1986:36) state:

IT WAS CERTAINLY NOTHING NEW TO TELL THE HUSBANDS TO LOVE THEIR WIVES, BUT THIS LOVE WAS GIVEN A NEW DIMENSION WHEN THE STANDARD IS CHRIST'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE. . . . CHRIST LOVED THROUGH HIS SACRIFICE; HE WAS WILLING TO PAY THE SUPREME COST AND CHERISH THE BELOVED EVEN WHEN SHE WAS UNWORTHY OF THAT LOVE (ROM 5:8). HE LOVED WITHOUT CONDITIONS. HE EXPERIENCED THE FAILINGS OF THE BELOVED AND YET GAVE OF HIMSELF TO OVERCOME THEM. THIS IS THE LOVE THAT THE HUSBAND IS EXPECTED TO HAVE FOR HIS WIFE, AND IT IS AN AWESOME DEMAND WITHOUT PARALLEL IN THE ANCIENT WORLD.

The Christian has Christ as the model for marriage and without this model marriage cannot fulfill its true potential. Ellen White (1952:64) says: "It is only in Christ that the marriage alliance can be safely formed. . . . Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection."

The Christian believes in "soul mates" but gives new meaning to the term. Soul mates are not found, they are formed; they are not discovered, they are developed. White (1952:105) states: "However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the afteryears."

For the Christian, marriage is not about feelings, it's about faith. It's not about the heart; it's about the head. It's not about passion; it's about principle. It's not about emotion; it's about devotion. It's not about happiness; it's about holiness. It's not about Hollywood; it's about the Holy Word. It's not about contentment; it's about commitment. Powell (1974:53) states:

THE COMMITMENT OF LOVE, AT WHATEVER LEVEL, HAS TO BE A PERMANENT THING, A LIFE-WAGER. IF I SAY THAT I AM YOUR FRIEND, I WILL

ALWAYS BE YOUR FRIEND, NOT AS LONG AS OR UNTIL ANYTHING. I WILL ALWAYS BE THERE FOR YOU. EFFECTIVE LOVE IS NOT LIKE THE RETRACTABLE POINT ON A BALLPOINT PEN. . . . I NEED TO KNOW THAT THE LOVE YOU OFFER ME IS A PERMANENT OFFER. . . . I CANNOT COME OUT TO A TEMPORARY, TENTATIVE LOVE, TO AN OFFER WHICH HAS ALL THAT FINE PRINT AND MANY FOOTNOTES IN THE CONTRACT.

Christian marriage is unconditional, something for nothing, and self-sacrificing. It is built upon words such as regardless, however, and nevertheless. "Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband" (Eph 5:33). Achtemeier (1976:125) states:

THE CHRISTIAN FAITH OFTEN OPERATES WITH A LACK OF EVIDENCE THAT SEEMS RIDICULOUS TO THE REST OF THE WORLD. IT OFTEN SEEMS TO CONTRADICT THE PLAIN FACTS WITH A FOOLHARDY 'NEVERTHELESS.' SUCH FOOLHARDINESS IS BUILT INTO OUR FAITH, BECAUSE WE PROCEED ON THE IRRATIONAL ASSUMPTION THAT GOD THE SON HAS BECOME A MAN AMONG US, AND WE STAKE OUR LIVES ON NOTHING BUT THE STORY OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF THAT SON. . . . WE ENTERTAIN THE SEEMINGLY RIDICULOUS NOTIONS THAT NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD, THAT HE IS WORKING OUT A GOOD PURPOSE FOR US EVEN WHEN WE ARE SUFFERING OR IN PAIN. . . . FOOLISH? YES INDEED IT IS FOOLISH, BUT NEVERTHELESS TRUE.

The New has Come

So what's "new" got to do with it? There is a new ordering of relationships. The leader is now the servant. The greatest is now the least. The last is now the first. There is no more Jew or Gentile, male or female, single or married. The distinctions are still present, but their

significance is subjected to the mission of the church. Choice bows to the call, preference submits to priority, and emotion succumbs to devotion. There is an unmistakable tension between our freedom in Christ and our addiction to His cause (1 Cor 7:31). We now judge our actions, make our decisions, and evaluate our intentions in light of how they affect the body. We are no longer our own; we have been bought with a price.

There is a new mutuality in relationships. Children must still obey their parents, but in turn parents must respect their children (Eph 6:1). Wives must still submit to their husbands, but in turn husbands must love their wives as Christ loved the church (Eph 5:25). There is no more divorce merely for convenience or preference. Indeed, there must be a mutual submission if there is to be an authentic relationship (Eph 5:21).

There is a new designation of family. Sibling relations are no longer defined by faithfulness to family or connection to kin, but by commitment to Christ (Matt 12:50; John 19:26). The oneness of the marital relationship becomes but a representation of the oneness of the body of Christ. The concepts of the bride in marriage and the one flesh of marriage now point to the church. It is staggering, it is new, and it is overwhelming. Paul declares, “This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32).

There is a new definition of love. It is a “having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end” love (John 13:1). It is a radical love that “knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen” (1 Cor 13:4, *Phillips*). It is a lifelong, sacrificial, and unconditional commitment, built on the model of Jesus Christ.

There is a new onslaught of grace. Believers are not held accountable for past actions. In times of ignorance God winks at, but in Christ we are a new creation. Old things have passed away. All things are become new. We now walk

as children of light. We have crucified the flesh and put away the works of darkness. There is no turning back. We are not Jews when it comes to legalism, or Gentiles when it comes to liberalism. We keep the commandments, indeed, and we are free in Christ, assuredly, but our deportment is based neither on code of conduct nor on flight of fancy; rather it is in response to the lavish and unmerited grace of Christ.

Love and Discipline

We grieve at our fornication, adultery, and divorce before we met Christ. We doubly grieve at those activities conducted since meeting Christ. However, our recourse is the same. “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6). We come in abject repentance for the shame we have brought to ourselves, the hurt we have brought to our family, the pain we have brought to Christ, and the reproach we have brought to His church. We are not capricious. We are not flippant. We do not continue in sin that grace may abound. We recognize all too clearly that while salvation is free, grace was not cheap. It cost the life of the Son of God. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. The body of Christ grieves also. When one member suffers, all suffer together. There is grief and there is discipline.

We recognize that if there is to be love, there must be discipline (Rev 3:19). Indeed, if there is no discipline we are no longer sons and daughters of God (Heb 12:8). The presence of grace does not diminish the practice of discipline. Rather, it defines it. It is now discipline infused with love. White (1970:353) states: “[Jesus] did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes.” Thus, “Christian love is slow to censure, quick to discern penitence, ready to forgive, to encourage, to set the wanderer in the path of holiness, and to stay his feet therein” (White 1970:461, 462).

We suffer the consequences of our actions, the removal of our privileges, and the curtailment of our liberties. We submit to

the body, as unto Christ. Our reconciliation with our spouse may now have been placed in jeopardy. Our eligibility for church membership may now have been affected. Our freedom to remarry may now have been taken away. With a cry of anguish we declare, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me.” With an eye of faith we submit, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

We commit ourselves to unprecedented heights of holiness, purity, and obedience. It is a high standard of commitment. It supersedes the old. It is a better covenant. It is built on better promises (Heb 8:6). It is a more excellent way (1 Cor 12:31).

Law and grace

They were playing for a place in the 2010 World Cup Finals in South Africa. Egypt, six-time African champions, was playing the Minnows of Algeria who were looking to book their first trip to the World Cup in twenty-four years. Incredibly, the group stages of the competition left the pair inseparable at the top of their group with the same number of points, the same goal difference, the same number of goals scored, and the same head-to-head record. The two were forced into a one-off play-off in Khartoum. What happens when there is an impasse?

What is the outcome when sin has reached its worst and salvation has achieved its best? In other words, what takes place when there is a tie? In God’s economy, there is no need for a play-off. The showdown has already taken place. Two thousand years ago, on a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross. Law and grace met face to face, and the result was amazing. Instead of competing, they embraced. White (1973:10) states: “God’s grace and the law of His kingdom are in perfect harmony; they walk hand in hand.” The psalmist was even more intimate: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Ps 85:10). There are no winners or losers; it is a win-win outcome. That is the outcome we must seek to emulate.

Jesus’ life and teaching defied predictability. Some rejoiced at Jesus’ stringent standards: “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt 5:27, 28). Yet when a woman was caught in adultery, they did not expect to hear Him say, “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Conservatives wanted law; liberals wanted grace. Jesus practiced both. He elevated law to an unparalleled height, and He extended grace to an unequalled breadth. The church must do the same. “Lamb power can forgive broken promises, broken dreams, broken hearts, a mistake, a fault, a slip of the memory, a slip in the behavior—yes, even an affair” (Brown 2001:169, 170).

The Scriptures demand the highest standards of duty and display the deepest levels of mercy. They delineate the most exacting principles of obedience and demonstrate the most awesome acts of forgiveness. They preach the strictest code of law and practice the widest form of grace. If you worked the whole day you got one salary, and if you worked just the last hour of the day Jesus paid you the same (Matt 20:12). It didn’t seem fair or right. No wonder people were upset.

Nelson (1998:100) says it is outrageous; but “so outrageous His grace, so relentless His love.” Spurgeon (1976:27, 28) believes it is incredulous: “Fiction could not have devised it. God himself ordained it; it is not a matter which could have been imagined.” Lucado (1986:91) calls it stunning: “One can’t help but be a bit stunned by the inconceivability of it all. Why does Jesus stand on life’s most barren hill and await me with outstretched, nail-pierced hands? A ‘crazy, holy grace’ it has been called. A type of grace that doesn’t hold up to logic. But then I guess grace doesn’t have to be logical. If it did, it wouldn’t be grace.”

Hope and Love

We do not know all the circumstances behind a marital breakup. Ellen White (1888:296) wrote to a gentleman contemplating divorce:

IN REGARD TO DIVORCE, I AM NOT PREPARED TO SAY... YOU ASKED ME IF I THOUGHT, IF YOUR WIFE LEFT YOU, THAT YOU SHOULD MARRY AGAIN... I AM NOT FULLY PREPARED TO GIVE ANY JUDGMENT... MY MIND IS SO FULLY OCCUPIED THAT IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR ME TO CONSIDER THIS VEXED QUESTION OF MARRIAGE AND DIVORCES [sic]. I WISH I COULD HELP YOU, BUT THAT, I FEAR, IS NOT POSSIBLE.

Whether I have all knowledge or not, what is most important is that I have love (1 Cor 13:2). Sahlin and Sahlin (1997:142) state: “To be a faithful witness to God’s mercy and justice does not require that we have a final or perfect answer to issues of theology or social ethics.” It does require, though, that we “become a community of healing and hope for those who experience brokenness in their marriages.” While we may agonize over guilt, we do not apologize over grace. It governs our motives, propels our actions, and creates communities of acceptancy despite circumstances of uncertainty.

Whether the path of singleness or the path of marriage is taken, God calls for single-minded focus, fervent discipleship, and wholehearted commitment. Whether single or married, our message is one of strictest standards and greatest grace; highest holiness and foremost forgiveness; perfect purity and marvelous mercy. It’s radical; it’s awesome; and it’s new.

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The Blessing of Disciple-making

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

The Texts

MATTHEW 5:1-11

Quite a sermon it was indeed! The narrow beach by the Sea of Galilee was not enough to accommodate all those who had gathered to hear Jesus. Besides the usual crowds from the Galilean towns, there were also people from Judea and even Jerusalem itself, and others from Southern and Western Israel. Because there was not even standing room to accommodate the vast throng, Jesus led His hearers up the mountainside which overlooks this beloved body of water. Reaching a level place where everyone could gather, He sat down, and so did the disciples and the multitude.

Jesus' sermon was intended to teach those gathered the basics of how to be a disciple in His kingdom. The Beatitudes are Christ's instructional manual for building a disciple. The Beatitudes will teach you the most important skills for facing your most challenging spiritual problem—yourself! They are the ground rules for those who want to follow Christ. And in Jesus' mind the first step toward becoming a disciple is found in the first Beatitude:

1. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 5:3)

Defeat is not a language most of us want to speak fluently. Only people who are crawling out of alcoholism or drug addiction or sexual slavery or eating disorders seem able to speak this language comfortably. Go to any support group for recovering addicts and you'll hear the jargon of defeat crop up frequently in their testimonials and confessions. If you spend time around Alcoholics Anonymous, Christians in Recovery, or any of the other related twelve-step program, you will hear people owning up to failure. That admission is usually the first step required in any twelve-step recovery process and usually goes something like this: "We admit we are powerless—that our lives have become unmanageable."

In the Beatitudes, Jesus doesn't outline twelve steps—He only has eight—and the Beatitudes aren't directed at alcoholics or drug addicts; they are directed to those who want to be His disciples. That said, Jesus begins at the same place where man recovery programs begin. He asks us to recognize that we are powerless to change our lives by our own efforts. Jesus says you begin with poverty of spirit. What does that mean? Jesus begins not with what we think about God or what we think about religion. Jesus wants us to begin with what we think about ourselves.

Claudio Consuegra, DMin, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Pamela Consuegra, PhD, is Associate Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Jesus begins His instructions for discipleship by pronouncing a blessing on those who have discovered destitution of the soul. “Open your eyes,” says Jesus. “See yourself as you are. See yourself from a God’s eye view. Know that you’re a pauper, a beggar, a spiritual have-not in the kingdom.” Discipleship begins only when we reach the end of ourselves.

Now we can come to the second step toward discipleship.

2. Blessed are they who mourn (Matthew 5:4)

What in the world was Jesus thinking when He said that the second characteristic of a true disciple is the capacity to mourn? Jesus has already said that disciples need to be “poor in spirit.” But now it sounds like disciples must be depressed as well as destitute. Jesus insists that those who experience a deep and painful sense of loss, such as those who have known death that must be mourned, can become His true disciples.

The kind of mourning Jesus blesses in the second Beatitude is rooted in the poverty of spirit He blesses in the first. Only those who have reached the end of themselves really know what to cry about. Having seen who we are before God, we are called to mourn what we see. It is not enough to recognize ourselves as sinners—we must grieve over that condition.

What is mourning anyway? It is the realization that failure and sin and guilt can only be addressed by treating them with the seriousness they deserve. This Beatitude insists that discipleship is demonstrated when we are disturbed about our own sin!

But, wait a minute, there is some good news in this Beatitude too. The Beatitude says, “Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted.”

“The mourning here brought to view is true heart sorrow for sin. Jesus says, “I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men

unto Me,” (John 12:32). As one is drawn to behold Jesus uplifted on the cross, he discerns the sinfulness of humanity. He sees that it is sin which scourged and crucified the Lord of glory. He sees that, while he has been loved with unspeakable tenderness, his life has been a continual scene of ingratitude and rebellion. He has forsaken his best Friend and abused heaven’s most precious gift. He has crucified to himself the Son of God afresh and pierced anew that bleeding and stricken heart. He is separated from God by a gulf of sin that is broad and black and deep, and he mourns in brokenness of heart. Such mourning “shall be comforted.” God reveals to us our guilt that we may flee to Christ, and through Him be set free from the bondage of sin, and rejoice in the liberty of the sons of God. In true contrition we may come to the foot of the cross, and there leave our burdens.”¹

“Whatever may have been your past experience, however discouraging your present circumstances, if you will come to Jesus just as you are, weak, helpless, and despairing, our compassionate Saviour will meet you a great way off, and will throw about you His arms of love and His robe of righteousness. He presents us to the Father clothed in the white raiment of His own character. He pleads before God in our behalf, saying: I have taken the sinner’s place. Look not upon this wayward child, but look on Me. Does Satan plead loudly against our souls, accusing of sin, and claiming us as his prey, the blood of Christ pleads with greater power.”²

3. Blessed are the Meek (Matthew 5:5)

In the Bible meekness has little to do with how we relate to others and much with how we relate to God. Primarily, meekness is a posture we adopt in the presence of God. Meekness is surrender, abdication, and yielded obedience—but not the kind given by the weak to people who are stronger and more powerful. Meekness is bowing the knee to God. It’s the surrender of self-will to God’s will. It’s the abdication of self-rule to God’s rule. It’s the commitment

of spiritual paupers and the brokenhearted to yield control to God.

4. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6)

The fourth step toward discipleship reads: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

Once in a while we come across people who are genuinely “mad” about their walk with God. They yearn for His presence. They are deeply, obviously “in love” with Him. They reserve the best of themselves for their relationship with their Lord. But such meetings are always disorienting for us. We stumble across a believer who has a fire in the belly and it makes us nervous. We bump into a Christian who has a constant sense of suppressed zeal—a fervor that spills out in worship or witness or some extravagant deed—and we feel oddly threatened. We find this person’s ardor attractive, yet suspicious. We want to ask, “Why are you so passionate for God?” But we are afraid that—in asking the question—we may tell more about ourselves than we care to reveal.

Do you remember the words from Psalm 42:1-2: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God?” What is David talking about here? I know about God. I even try to be obedient to God. But I have to confess, rarely do I breathe heavily in anticipation of meeting with Him. Seldom do I feel parched without His presence.

We look at David’s experience and find his yearning, his longing for God, bewildering and profoundly convicting. We want a little fire ourselves. You and I could use a healthy dose of passion for the things of God. Welcome to the fourth Beatitude.

When you think of it, the Beatitudes are structured like a mountain. The first half of discipleship involves an ascent—turning our

backs on the pit of self and making the long, hard climb up the mountain to the pinnacle of God. Now, at last, we arrive at the pinnacle of the Beatitudes. Blessed are the people who yearn for the things of God.

5. Have Mercy (Matthew 5:5)

The first four Beatitudes constitute a long, arduous climb away from ourselves and toward God. Step after laborious step—from poverty to mourning to meekness to hungering and thirsting—we climb “Discipleship Mountain” into the presence of our Lord. With each stage, we leave self a little farther behind and step that much closer into the realm of the Spirit. Finally, with hungering and thirsting, we arrive at the pinnacle of spiritual experience. We stand on the mountaintop, panting for God, in love with the things He loves.

No sooner do those words spill out of us, however, than Jesus points us back down the slope to the plain of ordinary existence. He refuses to let His disciples build shelters up in the clouds. “Your journey is only half done,” Jesus seems to say to us.

Right in the middle of these instructions about discipleship, Jesus changes direction. Any mountain climber will tell you that the most dangerous part of the climb is descent. More mountaineers make fatal mistakes on the way down than on the way up. The same is true of discipleship. So be careful. We’re about to make our way back down. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7).

What is the mercy of which Jesus speaks? Mercy is compassion. It is a vulnerability of heart to the needs of others. It is a willingness to pause from our own busy agendas and self-involved pursuits to hear the cries of people, be moved by those cries, and act in compassion. Mercy is a willingness to identify with the suffering of others, to step into the shoes of hurting people and associate with their plight.

Mercy is a verb, and it was best pronounced by the Good Samaritan. Jesus told this story

because a religious expert, who was smart enough to know that “loving your neighbor” is central to the Law, didn’t understand what those words meant. Jesus wanted to make the point that loving your neighbor means being merciful to anyone who is in need. We need to note several aspects of mercy in this story.

- A. *Mercy requires eyes that see.* All saw the man in the ditch. The priest saw (v. 31). The Levite saw (v. 32) The Samaritan saw (v. 33). But while the priest and the Levite saw an inconvenience, the Samaritan saw himself in that man’s place, hurting and in need of help.
- B. *Mercy requires a heart that pities.* All three were “moved” by what they saw. The priest and the Levite were “moved” to the other side of the road. They were repulsed by the sight of this bloody, beaten mess. The Samaritan was moved with “pity” (v.33). Open eyes must be connected to a heart that feels compassion.
- C. *Mercy requires hands that act.* The priest and the Levite had feet that acted. They quickened their pace and hurried past this bloodied stranger. But only the Samaritan was willing to dirty his hands in order to show mercy. His hands bandaged the wounded man, poured wine and oil on his injuries, and steadied him on the donkey. Samaritan hands carried this victim into a rented room, fed him broth, and placed cool cloths on his brow. Samaritan hands reached into a purse for money and sealed a deal with the innkeeper. To eyes that notice and a heart that pities must be added hands that act, if mercy is to happen.

6. The Real Thing (Matthew 5:8)

As soon as we learn to be merciful, and before we can move on to the practice of peace, Jesus insists we spend some time thinking about purity. “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8).

In the Bible we find at least three kinds of purity. One is ceremonial purity. Another kind of purity is moral purity. David spoke about it

when he pleaded with God: “Create in me a pure heart” (Psalm 51:10). But there’s a third meaning for purity found in the Bible—one that is not as common or obvious as ceremonial and moral cleanliness, but more helpful as we try to understand the sixth Beatitude. It has to do with purity of motive and builds on the notion of integrity.

In fact, that is the way Ellen White mentions it in *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing* where she wrote that this purity is, “true in the hidden purposes and motives of the soul, free from pride and self-seeking, humble, unselfish, childlike” (p. 25).

I think we love our masks too much to throw them away in favor of purity. But I wonder how many of us are different people on the inside than we pretend to be on the outside. I wonder how much of a discrepancy there is between who we are behind the closed doors of our homes and who we are in the foyer and the pew. I wonder how many of us have our public masks so firmly in place that no one suspects the private demons raging within.

7. Give Peace a Chance (Matthew 5:9)

What does Jesus mean when He says, “Blessed are the peacemakers?” Some people will tell you that Jesus wants disciples who are the kind of easygoing, good-natured folks who get along with everyone. Is Jesus suggesting that disciples never get upset or angry? Are peacemakers people who will have peace at any cost, who will swallow any indignity, who will go to any length to avoid conflict?

This much is clear: Jesus is calling us to take peace seriously, but to think carefully about when and where we commit peace. It’s not peace within ourselves or even peace with God that concerns Jesus here, but peace with the people around us. Those who demonstrate compassion (mercy) and integrity (purity) in their relationships with other people are now called upon to make and keep the peace in those relationships.

Jesus isn't asking us to get along with everyone. But He is telling us that we must protect and preserve some relationships. Although we may always have enemies (Matthew 5:43-47), there are certain kinds of relationships in which Christ's followers must not only want peace, but make it.

Peacemaking is not a matter of refusing to take up arms against people you don't even know. It doesn't mean that you run from conflict whenever it rears its ugly head. Peacemaking takes place in the context of our most intimate relationships. It's a characteristic we demonstrate when relationships are broken, when alienation threatens, when we must choose either to reject or reconcile with someone we love.

The truth of the matter is that even Christian relationships are a messy business. Like Jesus and His disciples, there are times when we don't understand the ones we care about. There are times when disappointments and frustrations threaten to overwhelm affectionate feelings. There are times when we're deeply hurt by the very ones we deeply love. Into every relationship, a little conflict must fall. And certain conflicts will bring relationships to a fork in the road where choices must be made. Will we elect to forgive or resent? Will we choose to apologize or rationalize? Will we take steps to reconcile or reject?

8. Blessed are you when they persecute you (Matthew 5:10-12)

We come to the end of Jesus' manual for disciples. You would think that at this point Jesus would promise a great reward for those who've come this far. Instead, we're pretty much promised persecution. This must be a big deal, because Jesus spends more words on the subject of persecution than on any other attribute in the Beatitudes. In fact, where one verse suffices to cover such topics as righteousness and mercy, Jesus takes three verses to talk about persecution.

We may repeat the children's chant: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will

never harm me." But verse 11 makes it clear that words can harm, and that persecution often takes verbal forms.

Now, it's time to examine who persecutes the disciple. Persecution can and does come from unbelievers. But the bad news I must break to you here is that persecution is more frequently an inside job. While there were certainly times through history when secular enemies have persecuted believers, those times have been rare. Most often, the persecutions suffered by God's people originate a little closer to home.

Notice the beatitude: "In the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Who are the "they"? Who persecuted the prophets? Jesus answered that very question later in the book of Matthew: "You [the Pharisees and religious leaders] build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets" (Matthew 23:29-31).

It wasn't the Babylonians or the Ninevites or the Egyptians or the Philistines who persecuted the prophets. It wasn't strangers or the high priests of pagan religions who ridiculed, slandered, imprisoned, and sometimes killed God's spokesmen. It was the prophets' own compatriots, their neighbors, members of their families, people who bowed down to the same God and worshiped at the same temple.

As hard as it is to accept, the persecution disciples are called to endure will be at the hands of people we know, people we worship with, people who also claim to be religious. The person behind the tormenter's mask may well be someone we thought was a friend. It's not strangers hell-bent on destroying the faith whom we should fear most. It's those people we break bread with. They're the ones most likely to break our hearts.

Now, this isn't an invitation to paranoia. I'm not encouraging you to keep a suspicious eye

on your fellow church member nor warning you against intimate relationships because they may wound you later. What I am saying is that serious commitment to Christ cuts not just between believers and unbelievers—the church and the world—but between those who hunger to be like Christ and those who see casual Christianity as good enough.

Had Jesus come today, it wouldn't have been the Pharisees who crucified Him. It would have been us! We would have found Jesus and His hard words just as threatening, just as frightening, as did the religious leaders of His own day. Remember the words of Paul, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

So how do we respond to that persecution? We can "rejoice and be glad" when we're persecuted. Suffering is one way God can stamp His approval on our lives. When the enemy of God persecutes me, I know it's because I look a little more like Jesus, smell a little more like Jesus, act a little more like Jesus, am a little more like Jesus. Now that's cause for celebration!

To watch those you love turn against you, and to keep loving them. To hear people you trust slander and malign you and respond with graciousness. To see your credibility undermined and your witness ridiculed, yet refuse revenge, trusting God instead of yourself. When you can respond to persecution in these ways, you embody the character Jesus wants to build in His disciples. And you can rejoice and be glad, because you are in good company. Many a godly man and woman have suffered for the cause of righteousness. And many have found in the crucible of pain the courage to demonstrate a Christlike character. If you're one of their number, count yourself blessed. The kingdom of heaven belongs to people like you.

Notes

- ¹ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 9-10
- ² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p.9

Chosen to Serve

TRAFFORD FISCHER

The Text

1 PETER 2:9,10

Larry was a truck driver, but his lifelong dream was to fly. When he graduated from high school, he joined the Air Force in hopes of becoming a pilot. Unfortunately, poor eyesight disqualified him. So he had to satisfy himself with watching others fly the fighter jets that crisscrossed the skies over his backyard. As he sat there in his lawn chair, he dreamed about the magic of flying.

Then one day, Larry got an idea. He went down to the local army-navy surplus store and bought a tank of helium and forty-five weather balloons. These were not your brightly coloured party balloons, these were heavy-duty spheres measuring 2.4 meters across when fully inflated.

Back in his yard, Larry used straps to attach the balloons to his lawn chair. He then anchored the chair to the bumper of his jeep and inflated the balloons with helium. Then he packed some sandwiches, some drinks, a camera, a CB Radio, a parachute, and a pellet gun, figuring he could pop a few of the balloons when it was time to return to earth.

His preparations complete, Larry sat in his chair and his friends cut the anchoring cord. It was July 2, 1982. His plan was that after he enjoyed some flying time to lazily float back down to earth. But things didn't quite work out that way.

When Larry cut the cord, he didn't float lazily up; he shot up as if fired from a cannon! Nor did he go up a couple hundred feet. He climbed and climbed until he finally leveled off at sixteen thousand feet! At that height, he could hardly risk deflating any of the balloons, lest he unbalance the load and really experience flying! He slowly drifted over Long Beach and crossed the primary approach corridor of Long Beach Airport. After 45 minutes in the sky, he shot several balloons, and then accidentally dropped his pellet gun overboard. He descended slowly, until the balloons' dangling cables got caught in a power line, causing a 20-minute electricity blackout in a Long Beach neighbourhood. Larry was finally able to climb to the ground.

As soon as he hit the ground, he was arrested. But as he was being led away in handcuffs, a television reporter called out, "Mr. Walters, why'd you do it?" Larry replied nonchalantly, "It was something I had to do. I had this dream for twenty years, and if I hadn't done it, I think I would have ended up in the funny farm."

Trafford Fischer, DMin, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Sydney, NSW, Australia.

For what will you be remembered?

Larry is remembered as the Lawn Chair Pilot! For what will you be remembered?

A Christian comedian was quoted as saying, "When Jesus comes back again, I want to be found doing something, even if it's making mistakes!"

For what sort of 'something' will you be remembered?

Cain is remembered for bringing the wrong gift to God and being the first murderer, Abraham is remembered as the great father, Noah is remembered for the ark, Moses for a burning bush and a torturous journey to Canaan, Elijah for miracles, Daniel for the lion's den, Esther is the faithful queen, Jezebel for being just plain horrible, David is a warrior, and Solomon is all wise. John is remembered as the baptiser and forerunner to Jesus, Peter as the boisterous disciple, Judas is so crooked he can see around corners, Barnabas as a loyal friend, Paul as the great preacher of the Gospel, John as the Revelator . . .

For what will you be remembered?

There are a number of versions to the story of Telemachus, a fourth-century monk who lived in a monastery but felt the call of God to go to Rome. Putting his possessions in a little satchel, he threw the bag over his shoulder and started out over the dusty roads to Rome.

When he arrived in Rome, people were running about the city in great confusion. He had arrived on a day when the gladiators were going to fight both other gladiators and animals in the amphitheater. Everyone was heading to the amphitheater to watch the entertainment.

Telemachus thought this must be why God had called him to Rome. He walked into the amphitheater. He sat down among 80,000 people who cheered as the gladiators came out proclaiming, "Hail Caesar! We die to the glory of Caesar."

The historian, Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, in Syria, tells us what happened:

WHEN THE ABOMINABLE SPECTACLE WAS BEING EXHIBITED, HE WENT HIMSELF INTO THE STADIUM, AND STEPPING DOWN INTO THE ARENA, ENDEAVOURED TO STOP THE MEN WHO WERE WIELDING THEIR WEAPONS AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.

THE SPECTATORS OF THE SLAUGHTER WERE INDIGNANT, AND INSPIRED BY THE TRIAD FURY OF THE DEMON WHO DELIGHTS IN THOSE BLOODY DEEDS, STONED THE PEACEMAKER TO DEATH.

Thanks to Saint Telemachus, Honorius, the Christian Emperor, impressed by the monk's martyrdom, put a ban on further gladiator fights. The last known gladiator fight in Rome was on January 1, 404 AD.

Telemachus has never been forgotten. For what will you be remembered?

The apostle Peter was steeped in the Old Testament. The OT was his scripture, and the words he uses in our key text were first used of the Nation of Israel. They can be found in Isaiah 43 and Exodus 19.

Exod 19:5,5 -- God declares: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my possession among all people: for all the earth is mine: and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

The great promises God made to the people of Israel are now being applied by Peter to Christians -- those who believe in Jesus Christ and become His disciples.

Christians are a CHOSEN people. God has chosen them as His special people. The nation of Israel failed to hold onto the covenant relationship God provided them -- they walked away! The NT writers saw in Jesus' followers the new 'Chosen of God.' 'Outsiders' -- non-Jews, were now "in." There was no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, -- they were all IN, in Christ Jesus. Jesus followers were now His special possession.

Peter says of Christians, “You are a royal priesthood.” An OT priest was one who had access to God, especially the high priest. And priests were the go-betweens - the bridges - between God and His people.

As Jesus-people, you and I have direct access to God. God is readily available to us and welcomes us into His Presence. We don't have to go through anybody at all to share our thoughts with God. We have a direct line to His throne room! You can't beat that!

And we are also priests of God, chosen to convey His love to others. We don't go into the temple, discover God, and come out clinging to Him and keeping Him exclusively to ourselves. That would never do!

As Christian priests we take Jesus, Who is the bread of life, and pass it to the hungry, We take the Water of Life and pass it to the thirsty; we take the Light and give it to those in the dark; we take them to the Door and compel them to walk in; we show them the Shepherd who loves sheep, even when they're lost; we take them to the Way and invite them to walk in His direction; we tell them He is the Life who can provide life to the lifeless; we let them know He is the Truth and they can live in Him instead of half-truths or straight out lies.

Peter then adds, “Christians are a people for God especially to possess.”

Something considered valuable usually gains its value from the fact that it belongs, or belonged, to someone famous. You can go to a museum and see a chair, a dress, a pair of shoes, a photo -- they may not be much in themselves, but they are on display because they were worn, sat on, or they portray some heroine, some movie star, some famous political or social figure. It's the person that provides the value.

The Christian believer might feel they're ordinary, -- nothing special, an every-day, common species of humanity -- Not so in Jesus! You belong to God! You can't beat that!

We are chosen to love, chosen to live, and chosen to serve!

It only takes a short excursion into the Gospels to notice that as soon as Jesus chose His disciples, they were up and off into the dirt and dust of the streets of Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. Jesus didn't choose His disciples and head for the Qumran Caves to live separate from the crowds. He didn't choose the disciples and get into their boats and float around the lake singing Gospel songs. He didn't choose His disciples and head for Bethany and permanently stay with His best friends.

Jesus chose His disciples and walked among some of the places and people considered the worst! Outcasts, street-people, lepers, tax collectors -- they were His friends, His people!

God invites us to join Him in healing the broken hearted, setting the captives free, and declaring the year of the Lord's favour!

The story is told of a city that was bombed during the Second World War, and a large statue of Jesus Christ was severely damaged. When the townspeople found the statue among the rubble, they mourned because it had been a beloved symbol of faith and of God's presence in their lives. Experts were able to repair most of the statue but its hands had been damaged so severely they could not be restored. Some suggested that they hire a sculptor to make new hands but others wanted to leave it as it was -- a permanent reminder of the tragedy of war. Ultimately, the statue remained without hands. However, the people of the city added on the base of the statue of Jesus a sign with these words, “You are my hands.”

It is God Himself Who has made us what we are and given us new lives from Christ Jesus; and long ago He planned that we should spend these lives in helping others. Eph 2:10 LB

You can tell what they are by what they do
Matt 7:16 CEV

THE WORLD DEFINES GREATNESS IN TERMS OF POWER, POSSESSIONS, PRESTIGE AND POSITION. IF YOU CAN DEMAND SERVICE FROM OTHERS YOU HAVE ARRIVED. IN OUR

SELF-SERVING CULTURE WITH ITS 'ME-FIRST' MENTALITY, ACTING LIKE A SERVANT IS NOT A POPULAR CONCEPT. RICK WARREN – THE PURPOSE DRIVEN LIFE

ONLY A LIFE LIVED FOR OTHERS IS A LIFE WORTHWHILE. ALBERT EINSTEIN

TO ME, SUCCESS IS NOT SOMETHING TO BE MEASURED IN POWER OR FORTUNE OR FAME. I BELIEVE A LIFE OF SERVICE TO OTHERS IS A SUCCESSFUL LIFE. GERALD FORD

HOW WONDERFUL IT IS THAT NOBODY NEED WAIT A SINGLE MOMENT BEFORE STARTING TO IMPROVE THE WORLD. ANNE FRANK

NOBODY MADE A GREATER MISTAKE THAN HE WHO DID NOTHING BECAUSE HE COULD DO ONLY A LITTLE. EDMUND BURKE

EVERYBODY CAN BE GREAT... BECAUSE ANYBODY CAN SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO HAVE A COLLEGE DEGREE TO SERVE. YOU DON'T HAVE TO MAKE YOUR SUBJECT AND VERB AGREE TO SERVE. YOU ONLY NEED A HEART FULL OF GRACE. A SOUL GENERATED BY LOVE. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Our new neighbours, a retired couple, moved into our area to live a quieter life. Back in 2000, she beat breast cancer. In 2014, she beat another bout of the same. She has just been informed that now there is cancer in her spine, her lungs and in her brain. Can my wife and I find some way to be bearers of good tidings when all the news is so bad? Is there some way we might point our neighbours to some light that might soften the darkness that surrounds them? Might we be remembered in some small way as being carers in a time of crisis, serving in love?

“DO ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN, BY ALL THE MEANS YOU CAN, IN ALL THE WAYS YOU CAN, IN ALL THE PLACES YOU CAN, AT ALL THE TIMES YOU CAN, TO ALL THE PEOPLE YOU CAN, AS LONG AS YOU EVER CAN.” JOHN WESLEY

IF YOU THINK YOU ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO HELP SOMEONE IN NEED, YOU ARE ONLY FOOLING YOURSELF. YOU ARE REALLY A NOBODY. GAL 6:3 NLT

Research in the social sciences has demonstrated that when we serve others, we win! It's a genuine “Give, and it shall be given unto you” reality.

1. For instance, studies have shown that kinder people live longer, healthier lives, and people who volunteer in helping others tend to experience fewer aches and pains.
2. Giving help to others protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease.
3. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44 percent lower likelihood of dying—and that's after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status, and many more. This is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church; it means that volunteering is nearly as beneficial to our health as quitting smoking!
4. About half of participants in one study report that they feel stronger and more energetic after helping others; many also reported feeling calmer and less depressed, with increased feelings of self-worth.
5. Volunteer work substantially reduces symptoms of depression; both helping others and receiving help is associated with lowered anxiety and depression.
6. Adolescents who identify their primary motive as helping others are three times happier than those who lack such altruistic motivation. Similarly, teens who are giving are also happier and more active, involved, excited, and engaged than their less engaged counterparts.
7. Generous behavior reduces adolescent depression and suicide risk, and several studies have shown that teenagers who volunteer

are less likely to fail a subject in school, get pregnant, or abuse substances. Teens who volunteer also tend to be more socially competent and have higher self-esteem.

8. Experiments have actually demonstrated again and again that kindness toward others actually causes us to be happier, improves our health, and lengthens our lives. (2010 *Christine Carter, Ph.D.*)

Could we not be remembered for being genuine servants of God? Would it not be a good thing to be remembered for reaching out to others? We're chosen for that!

If we feel somewhat inadequate, we might just be in the right place to start!

Rachel Remen is the author of the inspirational best sellers, "Kitchen Table Wisdom" and "My Grandfather's Blessings." Born in New York and daughter of a Jewish couple who had left the faith, she was very close to her grandfather who was an Orthodox rabbi and scholar. He died when she was seven but his patient lessons and the influence of his unconditional acceptance of her as his treasured granddaughter never left her. She struggled to feel 'good enough' in her successful medical family but he taught her that blessing one another is what fills our emptiness. It heals our loneliness and connects us more deeply to life. He saw life as a web of connections and believed that everyone belonged to him and he to everyone.

Rachel did become a doctor and now specialises in ministering to cancer patients. However, she is also herself a patient as she has suffered from Crohn's disease for over forty years and at times has been severely affected by it. These two perspectives enable her to serve others at a deep point of connection.

"Many times," Rachel Remen says, in talking about her work with cancer patients, "My limitations have become the source of my compassion, my wounds have made me gentle

with the wounds of others. My loneliness has made me able to recognise loneliness in others."

She goes on, "Wounding and healing are not opposites. They're part of the same thing. It is our wounds that enable us to be compassionate with the wounds of others. It is our limitations that make us kind to the limitations of other people. It is our loneliness that helps us to find other people or to even know they're alone (with an illness). I think I have served people perfectly with parts of myself I used to be ashamed of."

Rachel introduces us to the idea that service is not the same as helping!

True service, she asserts, is not a relationship between an expert and a problem. "Many times when we help we do not really serve."

Serving is different from 'helping'. 'Helping' is not a relationship between equals. "The danger in helping is that we may inadvertently take away from people more than we could ever give them; we may diminish their self-esteem, their sense of worth, integrity or even wholeness."

When we "help" others we may be tempted to see the person we are helping as weaker than ourselves, someone needier. When we help we become aware of our strength because we are using it. Others become aware of our strength too and may feel diminished by it. It potentially positions them in a place of weakness while we appear to be strong. There is a sense of inequality. Unwittingly, our actions may be seen by the other person to be condescending or even arrogant.

Remen further suggests that serving is also different from 'fixing'. When we 'fix', we see life as broken. Seeing ourselves as fixers may cause us to see brokenness everywhere, to sit in judgement on others and on life itself. When we fix others we may not see their hidden wholeness or trust the integrity of life in them. As fixers we trust our own expertise. But relating to others in this way denies and diminishes in some profound and subtle way the power of life in the ones we are 'fixing'.

When we serve, however, we see life as whole. "When we serve we don't serve with our strength; we serve with ourselves, and we draw from all our experiences. Service is a relationship between equals. When we serve we become more aware of our wholeness and more accepting of it. Our limitations serve; our wounds serve; even our darkness can serve." ... Sometimes the deepest healing comes from the natural fit between two wounded people's lives."

Western culture finds it difficult to easily respect the sick or the old or the vulnerable. It goes against what we strive for and honour - independence, competence and mastery. It makes it easy for us to become intolerant of human weakness, contemptuous of anything in ourselves and in others that has needs or is capable of suffering. Self-reliance, self-determination and self-sufficiency are deeply admired and when we see someone who is dependent on others or, alternatively, we need someone ourselves, we may see it as a personal failing. Rachel invites us to consider that the denial of a common vulnerability is the ultimate barrier to compassion . . . and therefore to serving.

True serving connects us to one another and to the world around us. Then, when we experience connectedness, serving others becomes the natural and joyful thing to do. Over the long run, helping and fixing are draining but serving is renewing. It's out of our weakness that we serve... not out of our strength.

Sometimes a single act of kindness may come from an unexpected source and have a long trajectory, and touch those that we will never meet or see. Something that we casually offer may move through a web of connections far beyond ourselves to have effects that we may never have imagined.

We're chosen to serve! Not help, or fix! We're not asked by God to be hammers, searching for anything that looks like a nail. God hasn't asked us to walk around with our rolling pins ready to roll out anything that looks like dough!

He took Peter, a boisterous, uneducated fishermen, and said "feed my lambs." He called James and John, the "sons of Thunder," and asked them to keep fishing, but in a different pond. He took Matthew, a tax-collector, and said go and give, not take.

In 1921, Lewis Lawes became the warden at Sing Sing Prison. No prison was tougher than Sing Sing during that time. But when Warden Lawes retired some 20 years later, that prison had become a humanitarian institution. Those who studied the system said credit for the change belonged to Lawes. But when he was asked about the transformation, here's what he said: "I owe it all to my wonderful wife, Catherine, who is buried outside the prison walls."

Catherine Lawes was a young mother with three small children when her husband became the warden. Everybody warned her from the beginning that she should never set foot inside the prison walls, but that didn't stop Catherine! When the first prison basketball game was held, she went...walking into the gym with her three beautiful kids and she sat in the stands with the inmates.

Her attitude was: "My husband and I are going to take care of these men and I believe they will take care of me! I don't have to worry!"

She insisted on getting acquainted with them and their records. She discovered one convicted murderer was blind so she paid him a visit. Holding his hand in hers she said, "Do you read Braille?" "What's Braille?" he asked. Then she taught him how to read. Years later he would weep in deep respect for her.

Later, Catherine found a deaf-mute in prison. She went to school to learn how to use sign language. Many said that Catherine Lawes was the body of Jesus that came alive again in Sing Sing from 1921 to 1937.

Then, sadly, she was killed in a car accident. The next morning Lewis Lawes didn't come to work, so the acting warden took his place. It seemed almost instantly that the prisoners knew something was wrong.

The following day, her body was resting in a casket in her home, one kilometer from the prison. As the acting warden took his early morning walk he was shocked to see a large crowd of the toughest, hardest-looking prisoners gathered like a herd of animals at the main gate. He came closer and noted tears of grief and sadness. He knew how much they loved Catherine. He turned and faced the men, "All right, men, you can go. Just be sure and check in tonight!" Then he opened the gate and a parade of criminals walked, without a guard, the one kilometer to stand in line to pay their final respects to Catherine Lawes, a woman who made a difference. And every one of them checked back in. Every one!

Remembered for service. Chosen to serve.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOUR DESTINY
WILL BE, BUT ONE THING I DO KNOW:
THE ONLY ONES AMONG YOU WHO WILL
BE REALLY HAPPY ARE THOSE WHO HAVE
SOUGHT AND FOUND HOW TO SERVE.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

May God help us to Serve in His Love, in every way, every day.

CHILDREN'S STORIES

The Fire-Proof Bible

ORATHAI CHURESON-SAW

Biblical Principle

“HEAVEN AND EARTH WILL PASS AWAY,
BUT MY WORDS WILL BY NO MEANS PASS
AWAY” (MATTHEW 24:35).

Rindu was a 7-year old boy who lived with his family in a district of Surabaya Province in Indonesia. The family had settled in an area where most of the people living there were Muslims. His father was a devout Muslim and had a good reputation in the Islamic community. He was highly respected because he was one of the local Islamic community leaders in the entire district. He was also a successful businessman, well known for his business skills.

While Rindu's father was a Muslim, his mother was not. She was a Christian and a housewife, but she was very fearful and timid. She cared for the home and took care of Rindu and his two other siblings. Due to differing beliefs between Rindu's parents, his mother would often be pressured by his father to leave her church and discontinue Christian practices such as Bible reading.

“There is no such thing as a Christian God!” his father would say, his eyes staring directly at Rindu's mother across the dining table. “Jesus was only one of the human prophets and he

would never be happy if he knew that he was being worshipped as God,” he continued. Rindu's father grew especially upset when he found out that his wife was sharing her faith with the boys. “I do not want them to be misguided!” he yelled, and the mother grew uneasy.

“The true God could only be Allah, the Almighty, that is found in the Koran!” He firmly instructed the children to believe in what he said and disregard their mother's stand on her Christian faith.

“The revelation of God through Jesus Christ was a miracle that many people could not understand,” Rindu's mother retorted. “If God could create the heaven and the earth, and you and me, why couldn't He do such a little thing as to be born in human form?” Mother reasoned. The two went back and forth as they had many times before and the conversation ended as it always had with no conclusion and no decision made as to who was right.

Rindu's mother to have argumentative discussions with her husband. During most encounters shew would usually sit quietly, submissively allowing her husband to vent. Nevertheless, Rindu knew that his mother's believes were deeply held and very near and dear to her heart. Although facing religious bias and prejudice continually at home and outside in the community, Rindu's mother stood firm for her faith and kept up her Bible reading and prayer.

Once one of Rindu's older brothers asked her bluntly, "Why did you two marry each other when you do not have the same religion?"

His mother immediately looked stunned. She paused for a moment and simply replied, "It was God's will."

To his little mind it was hard to understand why God's will was to bring so many problems into his family and troubles into his parents' marriage. Besides straining their relationship, it also caused confusion among the children.

"I do not want anything to do with the Koran and the Bible," an elder brother said, shrugging his shoulder.

"Me too," another older sibling reacted. "I am tired of listening to our father and mother. Their arguments drain me each time I listen to them!"

Because of conflicting ideas and beliefs, Rindu's two older brothers abandoned religion altogether as they grew older. Rindu, however, was different. As the youngest child, he was always very close to his mother.

Besides reading the Bible to him, Rindu's mother often talked about her faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. "Jesus came down to show us what God's love is like, in a way that is easier for humans to understand," mother explained. "Through His life on this earth, Jesus showed people how to live a good life that does not cause conflicts and problems."

"Then why did he have to die, Mother?" Rindu asked curiously.

"It was because He alone could make it possible for sinners to be free from the consequences of sin which is death. Through His sacrifice we are now free from it. We do not need to die because of our own sin, and best of all," she said, "it is now possible for us to go to heaven if we obey God's command!" Right then a hopeful smile broke out on her face.

To Rindu, Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was an act of love that no ordinary person could

offer to another except God Himself. What he appreciated most was that the Christian God considered all the people as His children, regardless of what religion they believed in.

"We must be humble and thankful for all these merits Jesus has done for us," Mother said. She also taught Rindu how to pray. These were things that his mother religiously shared in his father's absence.

Seeing his mother regularly reading the Bible and praying had made Rindu inquisitive about the Bible and the God that she worshipped, although his father often told him that the Bible was just a compilation of stories in the past, containing flaws and wrong information. Thus, people who read the Bible were misinformed.

Trying to reason with his father, Rindu asked, "But Father, the stories of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and many others are also found in both the Koran and the Bible. Aren't they the same?"

"The truth could only be found in the Koran where God inspired the entire book!" his father replied, "The truth in the Koran is unchanging because it is written in only one language. It has been passed down from generation to generation. Contrasted to the Bible, there are many translations and people who wrote their ideas and stories along with some facts. These human ideas and stories are not God's word!"

Regardless of what his father said, Rindu still liked to ask his mother to tell him stories from the Bible. He loved listening to the stories of Noah, Moses, Joseph, Abraham, Jacob, King David, Jesus of Nazareth, and many more. To him, these stories were interesting, inspiring, and sounded very truthful.

One day his father came home looking stressed and upset. He became frustrated and more upset when he found his wife reading the Bible that evening.

"Stop reading that nonsense book!" his father snapped at her. "Your reading and prayer cannot help in my business!"

Rindu's mother sat speechless, looking a bit puzzled by her husband's statement. As a housewife, she had never even been invited to help her husband's business in any way.

"You do not care and do not want to help me with anything! We will soon have nothing to eat!" his father said angrily, as he stomped toward his wife and snatched the Bible away from her.

"I am going to burn this book because I have had enough of it in my house!" He then carried the Bible to the kitchen and tossed it on the burning gas stove. He stood there for a few seconds as it began to burn before he left.

Rindu's mother sat there looking confused for a moment before she realized where the Bible was a moment later. She quickly ran towards the kitchen and took the Bible out of the fire. She dusted off the flakes of the burnt part on the cover and carefully placed it in the box where she had kept it for years. Rindu was hiding behind a door. He saw everything.

After that incident, his mother was more careful about reading the Bible. She became more selective of when and where she read it. Nevertheless, his father's mood continued to swing from one extreme to the next as his business continued to fail. He was almost to the point of losing the entire family business and this had taken a toll on the entire family.

"Why did you buy all this food in the fridge and allow it to spoil?" his father exclaimed while opening the refrigerator one evening. "Don't you know that all of this costs a lot of money?"

"I only buy what is necessary for us," Mother replied, "I do not waste money on anything. Please do not bring your problem home and put the blame on us!" His mother argued back bitterly.

As time passed by, Rindu's parents continued to argue. With the financial difficulty, his parents' relationship was fast deteriorating. One day Rindu's mother took the Bible out to read. His father had left the house an hour earlier. Trying to be cheerful as much as possible she

told Rindu as she told him the story of Moses. She talked about God's love and how he led the Israelites through the wilderness. In the time of their suffering and difficulty, God had not forgotten their prayer for deliverance.

As Rindu and his mother read the Bible, they heard footsteps coming. They belonged to his father who was just returning home unexpectedly. He walked into the living room and found them reading the Bible. His face twisted and became very red with anger. Without saying a word, he moved towards them and grabbed the Bible from his wife's hands. Rindu was so afraid of his father's appearance that he instinctively moved behind his mother.

"I will burn it for good this time!" he growled. "I have had enough of this nonsense. I will make sure that this time it is not going to exist any further in my house!" Rindu's father walked straight to the kitchen, turned on the gas stove and placed it on the burning fire. This time he stayed watching the Bible burn to be sure that it would be destroyed completely.

Rindu's mother began to sob uncontrollably. Feeling very sorry for her, Rindu reached out and embraced her tightly from the back. He pressed his face into her back as he hugged her tightly. Then he whispered, "You can buy another Bible later, Mama."

A moment later Rindu noticed that there was no sound of his father coming from the kitchen. He wanted to know what was going on so he walked quickly toward the kitchen.

He found his father standing motionless. Rindu also noticed that mother's Bible was still on top of the burning gas stove. It sat there as the intense heat failed to burn it.

Suddenly, his father reached towards the gas cylinder to stop the gas supply to the burning stove. Although it was still very hot, he quickly grabbed the Bible and dropped it down on the dining table with a confused look on his face. He searched for a piece of dried cloth and used it to wipe the leather cover of the same Bible that he had tried to destroy by fire before.

“It’s unbelievable! The Bible did not burn!” Rindu’s father exclaimed in disbelief as he flipped the pages frantically. He turned around to look at Rindu, his eyes wide open like saucers.

It was hard for anyone to believe that after two attempts to burn the same Bible, it was still there. His father then grabbed the Bible, turned around, and walked past Rindu quickly toward his mother. He sat down slowly in front of her. Feeling shattered, he placed the Bible carefully on the table and covered his face with his two hands and began to cry.

Rindu’s Father became a changed person after that incident. God had transformed him completely. He made a sincere apology to his wife and bought her a new Bible for daily reading. He treasured the Bible that he had tried to burn so much that he kept it in a glass case. He would share with everyone who came to the house how God protected the Christian Bible and kept it safe from fire.

“God protected this Bible. It is indeed the Word of God that my wife had been reading!” The father was fully convinced this time that the Bible was the actual Word of God. It was proven because He protected it from being destroyed by fire, not once but twice!

Soon after that incident, Rindu’s father decided to follow the Christian God. He discussed it with his mother and they together decided to bring the entire family to a Seventh-Day Adventist Church in the community. He believed Seventh-day Adventist Church held fast to the Christian faith and keeping God’s law, much like he did as a Muslim when he followed the Koran.

Over time, through many prayers and God’s leading, the family business improved and became stable. Rindu, now much older, is a responsible young man. To fulfill his father’s wish for his youngest son, Rindu went to a Seventh-day Adventist Seminary and is now a minister of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the same community where he grew up.

God had intervened in the crisis in Rindu’s family because of his mother’s faithfulness. She lived out her faith through her consistent Bible reading and prayer. God can do the same for any family who seeks His help in restoring family relationships. He can intervene in a marriage crisis. We should keep reading His word, pray earnestly, and remain faithful to Him.

God's Costumes!

AKSENIYA LIBERANSKAYA

45

Biblical Principle

BEHOLD WHAT MANNER OF LOVE THE
FATHER HAS BESTOWED ON US THAT WE
SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD!
THEREFORE THE WORLD DOES NOT KNOW
US, BECAUSE IT DID NOT KNOW HIM
(1 JOHN 3:1).

Props:

Police uniform, judge's robe, Santa Claus costume, fireman uniform, pajamas, royal clothing, Dad costume.

Instructions:

In this story, aspects of God's character will be illustrated by different costumes to help children better understand who God is and what He is like. The story will be more effective if you can assemble the costumes listed above in the props. Most of these clothes can be borrowed or bought for a minimal cost. A black ministerial robe, for instance, may be substituted for a judge's robe. Feel free to be creative.

Ask older children to help with the presentation. These children can call out a person wearing a costume and then ask the children assembled to guess who they are and what aspect of God's character they represent. You may also invite young children to try on

some of the outfits, or just have them hold up the outfits as the story is told. Be tactful with those kids who may not wish to sit and listen rather than take part up front.

This idea can also be developed for use during a children's church sermon presentation, or for the sermon during a regular church service. It will engage all generations of the church. If you decide to use only a few costumes, use those that have a special meaning in your culture, illustrate an important aspect of God's character, and those which will be easily understood by the kids.

Police Uniform. Some people believe that God is like a policeman who hides around the corner, waiting and watching to catch us doing something wrong. But that is not how God is. God is like the policeman who is watching out for us, always ready to protect us and show us the way if we get lost.

Long Robe. Some people think that God looks like a severe judge who is just waiting to declare us guilty and punish us for our sins. But in fact, He is like supreme judge who paid for our crime to save us from punishment so that we could be free.

Santa Claus Costume. Sometimes people think that God is like Santa Claus. He brings them gifts if they behave very good. But God gives us His gifts every day. He loves us and cares

Akseniya Liberanskaya is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Euro-Asia Division in Moscow, Russian Federation.

about every person, even if they do not love him in return. Some people also treat God like Santa Claus. They only remember him once or twice a year and that usually during holidays. We know that God is with us not only during Christmas or New Year's celebrations; God is with us every day of our lives!

Fireman Costume. Some people think they need God only in case of emergency, when they need someone to come immediately and help them through their problems or save them from something that may hurt them. But is much more than one who puts out the fires in our lives. God is always watching us and looking after us so that we can have everything necessary for life. He does not lose sight of the little things that make us happy, sad, worried, or scared. He never misses an emergency!

Pajamas. Some people are sure that if God exists, He must be asleep because there are a lot of problems in the world and He seems to be doing nothing to solve them. Is this true? The fact is, God is always awake and watching, acting and saving, patiently holding the world together until the day when He will banish sin and suffering and make all things new. We can trust His vigilant care for us at all times.

Royal clothes. We know that our Lord is the King, but some earthly kings are ambitious and cruel. They are constantly struggling for the right to own the best of everything. But our Lord is a peaceful King who reigns with love. And the only battle He will enter into is the battle with Satan to secure our salvation.

Building contractor. Our God is like a building contractor, but He doesn't build houses or buildings that will be ruined later by the passage of time, or destroyed to make way for something else. God is building amazing houses in heaven for us, houses that will stand forever!

Dad Costume. Do you recognize this clothing? Who wears these kinds of clothes. Dads do, don't they? This is perhaps the best costume of all the ones you saw today. I love it most of all!! Many of us have wonderful fathers. But sometimes fathers can disappoint us.

Sometimes they may have to go on a business trip during your birthday, or fail to keep their promises, make mistakes, or even offend you with a careless word or reaction. Earthly fathers may sometimes fail, but we also have a heavenly Father and He is an amazing Father! Just imagine the best father that you can and he will not even come close to how special our Heavenly Father is. Jesus called His Father "Abba." During the time of Christ, this was the word children used for their fathers.

God is a Father who is:

- always close to you
- finding new ways to show you how much he loves you
- loves and accepts you even if you made a mistake
- protects and helps you when you feel lost and lonely
- making an amazing plan for your future.

Every time you see someone in one of these costumes, remember what our God actually like. He is our Father and He loves us more than any of us can imagine!

Pray About It

AMAL FAWZY

Bible Principles

“PRAY WITHOUT CEASING”.

(1 THESSALONIANS 5:17)

The parents and their two children, a 6-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl, moved to another country after receiving a call to leave their homeland and serve the Adventist church elsewhere.

The new country was remarkably beautiful and luscious green foliage covered its mountainous terrain. However, without a car, it was quite difficult to move around conveniently. It was also too expensive for the financially limited family to use taxis for their various daily trips.

What helped though was the fact that the Kids' school, an Adventist school, was relatively close to their home. The parents could both walk the children to school, and if kids wanted a ride, the parents could pick them up along with their bags and carry them to school. The school was that close to their home.

However, when it rained it really rained “cats and dogs,” as some people say. That means it rained very, very hard. Though the four of them loved it when it rained, they definitely

couldn't stand the rain if they were on their way to school or back.

The children and parents worried sometimes about the rain coming while they were working to and from school. They decided to pray about it. As a family they would pray to the Lord asking Him to hold back the rain when the four of them were walking back and forth to school.

You will not believe what happened after they began to pray. The rain began to cooperate with God on their behalf. Ninety five percent of the time, it wouldn't rain very heavily until they made it to school or to their home after the school day was over, but this did not happen all of the time.

One day the family got stuck on the road when the rain started pouring. They took shelter under the entrance of a building and silently prayed about it. Before they finished praying, a friend pulled up to the entrance of the building where they had taken shelter. When she beckoned them to hop in the car, they knew their prayers had been answer. When they got into the car, their friend said she felt moved to change her regular route and come find them. They assured her that they prayed about it and that she was the answer to their prayers.

A year later the family miraculously managed to save just enough money to buy the cheapest

Amal Fawzy, BA, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Middle East and North Africa Union Mission in Beirut, Lebanon.

used car possible. While they were, buying a used car was quite a risk because if the car turned out to be no good, they could spend lots of money fixing and maintaining it. Once again, they asked God to help them. The next day, another friend of theirs shared with them a phone number that was posted on a car that was for sale. The friend told them that when she saw the car, she felt that it was perfect for them.

The car didn't look very attractive from the outside, but the mechanic who examined it said that it had a really strong engine.

The car was true to its promise and it served the family faithfully for more than four years. It became like a member of the family. The four of them used to lovingly “talk to her” and diligently care for her.

Ironically, back then the father of the family did not know how to drive. The father back then didn't know how to drive. So, he applied for some driving lessons, took the driving test, passed it, and got his license. The rest of the family members traveled with him on most of trip and they all just enjoyed and adored their car.

One night they were driving somewhere and became lost on their way home. The roads were dark and scary, and this made the children very afraid. “Why don't we pray?” they asked their parents. “That's a good idea,” said the mother.

After a while, the parents decided to do what they have always done when facing difficult situations—they prayed. They pulled the car to side of the scary road and began to pray. When they opened their eyes, they saw another car stop and its driver began walking toward them. The man who stopped asked if they were okay?

“Do you need some help?” he questioned.

“Yes,” the father responded. “We are lost and need some help finding our way home.” The man then directed them how to get back to the town where they lived, and they thanked him very much as they drove off. They told him that he was the answer to their prayers. revealed to him that he had been the answer to their prayers.

A few months later, the father lost his way on the road once again, but this time he was by himself. Guess what he did? He remembered his two kids when they recommended that they pray when lost. The father repeated what they had done that night when they were lost. He stopped the car and prayed to God that He would send someone to show him the right way home.

Shortly after he prayed, a car stopped nearby and the driver got out and pointed the father in the right direction. The father thanked the stranger and conveyed to him that his assistance was truly the answer to a prayer that he lifted up a while ago.

Today the father believes that the man who stopped to help them the night when they were lost, and on the day when he was lost, is the same person. The father did not know for sure, but whether he was the same guide or not, one thing is sure: When we pray, God hears our prayers and He is working to care for our needs. It is a blessing that the family had enjoyed experiencing several times before. Whenever they were faced with challenges, they prayed about them. Today, they still pray unceasingly to God over their lives.

Are you facing a problem today? Why don't you pray about it!

Oh, I forgot to tell you. I'm one of the four family members whose children strongly believe that God would definitely do something when we earnestly and seriously “pray about it”.

SEMINARS

Go and Make Disciples: The Biblical Method

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

Introduction

Pastors and church members are intricately related to disciple-making and disciple-growing. We have the common goal of working together until we all reach the stature of the fullness of Christ at His return. Paul writes to the Corinthians: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18 NKJV). But before we consider the role of the church in helping new believers become mature disciples, it is important to understand what the Bible says about discipleship in general.

Discipleship in the Bible

While the use of the word *discipleship* has come to be closely associated with Jesus and the New Testament, the concept is certainly not foreign to other parts of the Bible.

1. Discipleship in the Old Testament

In the English King James version of the Bible, the word disciple is only found once in the Old Testament: “Bind up the testimony, seal the law

among my disciples” (Isaiah 8:16). However, the concept of discipleship is found much earlier in the Scriptures.

GROUP EXERCISE

1. Read the following verses of Scriptures and state what discipleship relationships you find in each:
 - Num. 13; 14:6-9; 34:16-19; Josh 14:6-11
 - 1 Sam. 3
 - 1 Sam. 9-15
 - 1 Sam. 16; 19:18-24
 - 1 Kgs. 19:16-21; 2 Kgs 2:1-16; 3:11
2. Can you think of who might have been Moses’ mentor(s)?
3. Did Moses mentor anyone?

One of the most striking examples of discipleship in the Old Testament is found in the person of Moses, the prophet and leader of Israel. When God described Moses as the “man whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10) He exemplified the highest type of intimacy a disciple can have with his Master. It is because of this high level of intimacy, which anticipates the relationship Jesus’ disciples had with Him (cf. John 15:15), that Moses should be a forerunner of discipleship, as truly as disciple as the twelve whom Jesus called would later be.

Claudio Consuegra, DMin, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Pamela Consuegra, PhD, is Associate Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Even though Moses received much training in Egypt, some from the priests and some from the military commanders,¹ and “his ability as a military leader made him a favorite with the armies of Egypt,”² he still needed to learn how to be a leader of the Israelites as they left Egypt and traversed the desert toward the Promised Land. When Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, came from Midian to meet Moses and Israel, he noticed that his son-in-law would spend all day advising and solving the problems and complaints the people brought to him. Jethro told Moses that following this practice was not good for him or for the people. Instead, he advised Moses to devote more of his time to teaching them God’s statutes, laws, and the work they must do (vv. 20-21). Jethro also instructed Moses to organize the people into groups of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands and to appoint leaders over each group to whom the people would come for help and guidance (Ex. 18:13-24, NKJV).

This is one of the most striking examples of disciple-making found in the Old Testament as this older, experienced leader passed down valuable training instructions to the leader whom God had chosen for His people. Jethro thus became the conduit to help Moses become a more productive disciple of God. It is important to note that Moses, who wrote the book of Exodus, was a faithful recorder of the experience of being mentored. A true follower of God acknowledges his/her growth and credits those who helped shape his/her life.

Moses as Disciple-maker. Moses, in his role as God’s chosen leader of His people, was not only a prophet—God’s spokesman—but also the people’s teacher and trainer so that they in turn would become God’s disciples.

While Moses taught others, such as Caleb (Num. 13; 14:6-9; 34:16-19; Josh. 14:6-11), the clearest example of Moses’ disciple-making relationship is that which he held with Joshua. In the book of Exodus, we find Moses training and entrusting Joshua with leadership in military campaigns (Ex. 17:9-10). Later Joshua served as Moses’ assistant (Ex. 24:13), and accompanied Moses up the mountain of God. Moses taught Joshua to discern the differences in the people’s actions and behavior. Joshua is again spoken of as

Moses’ servant who, while Moses was on the mountain speaking with God, would spend time in the tabernacle (Ex. 33:11).

At the end of Moses’ life, God transferred the leadership of Israel from Moses to Joshua (Num. 27:18-21), and Moses introduced Joshua as Israel’s leader and challenged the people to heed his leadership (Deut. 1:38). The disciple had now become the leader, the disciple-maker. Even as Moses’ life waned he spoke of how Joshua was chosen to replace him (Deut. 3:28), and he continued to encourage Joshua as he began his leadership role (Deut. 31:7-8).

GROUP DISCUSSION

Can you think of other discipleship relationships in the Old Testament? (Examples: Elijah-Elisha, Samuel-David, David-Solomon).

2. Discipleship in the New Testament

When we talk about disciples, the first person that comes to mind is probably Jesus. The accounts we read in the four gospels is not just about Jesus interacting with people—healing, preaching, and teaching the multitudes that followed him—but how He spent the three-and-a-half years of ministry making disciples. Therefore, in order to learn about biblical discipleship, we need to go to the Source, Jesus.

Jesus and Discipleship. As Jesus began His Messianic ministry, He surrounded Himself with a group of men whom He would train to be His disciples. The first sermon delivered to the multitude gathered on the slope of a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee was to offer initial instructions for those who wished to follow Him. While in modern times a teacher might stand to deliver his instructions, Jewish teachers would sit to expound the Scriptures, often with disciples sitting at their feet. Many have seen in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus’ manual for beginner or rookie disciples. While describing the scene, Ellen White writes that

THE TIME HAD COME FOR THE DISCIPLES
WHO HAD BEEN MOST CLOSELY
ASSOCIATED WITH CHRIST TO UNITE

MORE DIRECTLY IN HIS WORK, THAT THESE VAST THROGS MIGHT NOT BE LEFT UNCARED FOR, AS SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD. . . A GREAT WORK WAS YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED FOR THESE DISCIPLES BEFORE THEY WOULD BE PREPARED FOR THE SACRED TRUST THAT WOULD BE THEIRS WHEN JESUS SHOULD ASCEND TO HEAVEN. . . JESUS SAW IN THEM THOSE WHOM HE COULD TRAIN AND DISCIPLINE FOR HIS GREAT WORK.³

GROUP DISCUSSION

As you read the following verses, notice the steps Jesus took to disciple His followers. (We have provided suggested answers in parentheses, which the teacher can share with the group after they share their responses).

1. Matt. 10:1; Luke 10:1

(Jesus gathered the disciples around Him)

2. Matt. 10:5, 21:2

(Jesus spent time with them) Ellen White points out that this time together was no coincidence but very much part of Jesus' training program for His disciples.⁴

3. Matt. 13, 17:14-21, 18; Luke 9:46, 22:24

(Jesus taught and trained them)

4. Luke 10:1

(Jesus paired them with a mentor) Ellen White writes that usually an older, more experienced man was paired with a younger man, and while they did not live together as a rabbi and his disciples might, they met often for prayer and counsel. The result was that both were strengthened in the faith.⁵ In the book *Evangelism*, Ellen White shows how Jesus practiced the mentoring method among his own disciples by pairing Peter, whose temperament was impulsive and zealous with John, the beloved disciple, who was milder in character (Luke 22:8; John 20:1-6; Acts 3:1, 4:13, 8:14). The result was that the shortcomings of one were partially covered by the strengths and virtues of the other.⁶

5. Matt. 28:18-20

(He sent them to work for others) Ellen White explains that Jesus, when He sent the Twelve and later the seventy, was training them for the individual labor which would multiply in numbers and reach to the far corners of the earth. It was crucial for them thus to learn they "held in trust for the world the glad tidings of salvation."⁷

6. Luke 12:12; John 14:26; Acts 1:8

(He left them with the assurance that after He was gone, He would send them the Holy Spirit)

The result of Jesus' training of His disciples was that they were not the same uneducated, uncultured men He first called. Through His association with them they had been changed to reflect Jesus in mind and character, and the result was that people noticed this drastic change⁸ (Acts 4:13). This is ultimately the goal of discipleship; that Jesus' disciples may be like Him.

Discipleship in the New Testament Church

Probably the best description of the early Christian church is that found in Luke's writings (Acts 2:42-47).

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read Acts 2:42-47 and list what the early church believers did which helped disciple new believers as they joined their ranks:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(teaching, fellowship, breaking bread)

Author Albert Winseman comments that this was a "growing community of followers of Christ who were passionate about the message and mission of the new movement, who practiced hospitality, and who were so emotionally engaged with the movement that they were willing to risk everything to see it succeed."⁹

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read the following texts and list other discipleship relationships found in the New Testament:

1. Acts 9:10-19
2. Acts 9:26-27; 11:25-26; 13:2-3, 43
3. Acts 11:22-24
4. Acts 12:25; 15:36
5. Acts 15:40
6. Gal. 2:1
7. 1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 2:1-4

The Role of Family Relationships in Discipleship

God established the family as the place where discipling begins. The early childhood education which takes places at home plants the seeds of discipleship that will eventually bear fruit as the children grow.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What do the following texts teach about how disciple-making within the context of the family?

1. Deut. 6:1-7
2. Prov. 22:6
3. Prov. 27:17
4. Prov. 13:20

These passages emphasize the critical importance of the teaching and training parents provide their children during their spiritual development. This responsibility should not and cannot be left to anyone else. White underscores this fact when she writes, “We need to make the education of our children a business, for their salvation depends largely upon the education given them in childhood.”¹⁰

Parenting small children is not simply about teaching them rules and regulations. The role of a parent is to nurture children by loving them and relating closely with them, helping them to love others (cf. John 13:35) so they will grow up to be mature, healthy disciples. Paul refers to the role of

parents in the spiritual growth of the child when he challenges them to “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

The marital relationship also provides an opportunity for discipleship, even when one is married to an unbeliever. Paul counsels a church member whose spouse is not a believer to remain married to them, if they so consent, because it provides the church member with an opportunity to witness to their spouse and hopefully to help them be ready for the second coming of Jesus (1 Cor. 7:12-14, 16).

The Role of the Church in Discipleship

It is clear in the New Testament that God intended for the church to be a center for discipleship.

GROUP DISCUSSION

According to the following verses of Scripture, what is the role of the church in the process of making disciples?

1. 1 Cor. 1:9
2. Eph. 4:16
3. Phil. 2:2-4

The leaders of the early Christian church were concerned about the growth in maturity of the early disciples and wanted to ensure that this growth would continue as the church’s message spread and more people joined its ranks.

Yet another reason for developing good, healthy, strong personal relationships among church members is that these relationships demonstrate what it means to live a life worthy of the calling God has extended to us as His children and disciples of Jesus. That is the reason Paul urged the Ephesians to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3 NKJV). Again, using the analogy of

the human body to illustrate how each member of the church is vital to its health, growth, and survival, Paul explained to the Corinthians that all parts of the body should have concern for one another, “that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Cor. 12:25-26 NKJV).

Probably one of the strongest evidences from the New Testament about relational aspects of discipleship is found in the abundance of “one another” Scriptures, most of which come from Paul’s letters to the churches he helped establish. These new disciples he urged to “love one another” (1 Thess. 3:12); “accept one another” (Rom 15:7), “have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 11:33), “bear one another in love” (Eph. 5:21), “forgive one another” (Eph. 4:32), “teach and admonish one another in all wisdom” (Col. 3:16), and many more. Other New Testament writers also instructed the believers to, “confess your sins to one another” and “pray for one another” (James 5:16); “offer hospitality to one another” (1 Pet. 4:9); “do not speak evil of one another” (James 4:11); and “do not murmur against one another” (James 5:9).

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Maturity—the Goal of Discipleship

One question to ask is how do Christians become mature? Colossians 1:28 provides us with an answer: “we proclaim [Christ] . . . so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col. 1:28 NRSV) Three texts in the New Testament show that discipling is not a one-time event but a process that is God’s plan for His children.

1. Rom. 8:29. When Adam fell, much of the divine image in which he was created was lost; but in Christ, it became possible for that image to be restored to humanity. To be like Christ, then, means to be conformed to His image, and that is the predestined purpose of God.
2. 2 Cor. 3:18. There is a change in perspective from the past, when God predestined that His

creatures would be Christlike, to the present when those who are in Christ are being transformed by the Holy Spirit.

3. 1 John 3:2. The growth into Christlikeness was not only predestined and promised, it is also taking place now by the Holy Spirit, and it will be finished when Jesus returns for His people at which time we will be like Him, “for we shall see Him as He is.”

God’s plan was that His children would be conformed to the image of His Son. He planned that even now His children would be transformed to that image, and they have yet to see all that they will one day be. This is to say, His plan was conceived in the past, it is taking place right now, and will continue to take place until His children bear His image, as He first intended at the creation of the world.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Several passages from the New Testament speak about the growth process. In a few words, describe how the passage illustrates this process:

1. Eph.2:19-22
2. 1 Pet. 2:5
3. Romans 12:2

Paul explains (Eph. 4:11-16) that the risen Christ left the church endowed with spiritual gifts, such as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, whose ministry and responsibility were to equip the saints for the work of ministry and to build up or edify the members of the church until they reflect the image of Christ. He further illustrates that this edifying is much like the growth a child experiences until he reaches maturity. Paul makes it clear that this growth to maturity does not happen independently of each other but rather in conjunction with others. Each person’s growth affects others and vice-versa. Paul writes, “The whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Eph. 4:16). The present

participles of the word joined in this verse denotes present, continuous progress. The two participles, *joined* and *knit*, represent respectively the ideas of harmony or adaptation and compactness or solidity.¹¹ Kenneth Wuest explains that “the joints of supply are the bonds that bind the members of the Body together, and are the channels through which the source of supply of life from the Head, Jesus Christ, is brought to the various members, this divine energy joining closely together the members and causing them to grow into an organic union.”¹² White adds that “one of the divine plans for growth is impartation. The Christian is to gain strength by strengthening others.” This is all to say that the process of growth, for all who are disciples of Jesus, is dependent on their connection with Christ as well as mutual dependence on each other. This interdependence will continue until the day of Christ’s return when they “shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52-54).

For the new believer, growth involves spiritual as well as emotional maturity (vv. 13-14). The *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* explains that the word *perfecting*, found in Ephesians 4:12 is *katartismos* in the original Greek. Though it has been translated as *equipping*, or *perfecting*, the point is that the gifts were for the purpose of *mending* the saints and uniting them.¹⁴ Mending is a very appropriate word to use in the work of discipling new members, as well as equipping them or perfecting them alongside those who have been members of the church. Because everyone has sinned, everyone is like torn garments that need to be re-made.

The author of Hebrews reminds his readers that growth for a disciple is an ongoing process. He expresses disappointment that they had not grown to the place where they would be disciple-makers: “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food” (Heb. 5:12 NKJV). Ron Bennet explains that the author of Hebrews felt uncomfortable that even though much time had passed for the readers of this letter to have become spiritual parents, instead they seemed to be returning to elementary instruction when they should have been “moving on to a more advanced growth phase of discipleship.”¹⁵

Nurturing in the Process of Growth

Growth in discipleship is not haphazard nor should it be left to chance. The New testament describes two methods to help disciples in this process. The first method for discipleship growth is *nurturing*. Nurture can be defined as the activity of caring for others and nourishing them in the life of faith. This is necessary not only for children in the home but also for new or weak believers in the church.¹⁶ It is important to understand that growth in Christlikeness is not automatic and it does not happen on its own. For a new believer, nurture must take place in the context of the church as the human instrument to facilitate and encourage this transformation and growth. While addressing the members of the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul used the analogy of a child to explain to them that while he gave them milk when they were infants, even now they are still not ready for solid food (1 Cor. 3:1-3).

The early Christian church is a clear model of the nurture that should take place in today’s church. The first century church learned what it meant to be reconciled with God through devoting “themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). But the early church did not just learn about God’s truth; they submitted themselves to the authority of the teaching of the Scriptures. Through their devotion to the inspired words they received the spiritual food needed for healthy Christian growth, growth into the likeness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).

The equivalent of the apostles’ teaching for today’s church is the Bible. Like the early church, a growing disciple is nurtured by the study of the Bible. Disciples grow as they hunger to study God’s Word and are willing to submit to its authority, which leads to worship of God and obedience to what He commands. Nurture involves growth in both mind and spirit (Rom 12:2). While Christian literature, films, lectures, sharing, and many other sources can help in the process of nurture, for most people the primary source for nurture is studying the Bible in a small group setting (a Sabbath School class, a small home Bible study, etc.). All Christians need the empowering words of God flowing into them if they are to maintain spiritual vitality and grow in their fruitfulness.¹⁷

There is yet another passage where Paul addresses the issue of maturity with the members of the church at Colossae: “It is he [Christ] whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil and struggle with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me” (Col. 1:28-29 NRSV). The word translated as *mature*, *teleios* in the original Greek, occurs nineteen times in the New Testament, and it is at times translated as *mature* and other times as *perfect*, depending on its context. It rarely, if ever, means “perfect” in the absolute meaning of the word, but rather it contrasts the child or infant (e.g., 1 Cor. 14:20) with mature adults.

So how does nurture that leads to growth of a new believer take place? Notice the parallels between parenting and disciple-making:

- **Just as at home children are nurtured by parental instruction and example** (*Deut 4:9-10; 6:4-9; 11:18-21; Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4; Col 3:21; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15*)
- **and their parent’s care for them** (*Prov 1:8-10; 2:1-5; 3:1-2; 4:1-4; 5:1-2; 6:1-3, 20-24*)
- **so also new believers must be nurtured by the caring attitude of the church leaders** (*1 Thess 2:7-12; John 21:15-17; Acts 20:18-20; 1 Cor 4:14-15; 1 Thess 3:10; Titus 1:9; 1 Pet 5:1-3*)
- **by the leader’s pattern of life** (*Titus 2:6-7; Acts 20:33-35; 1 Cor 4:16-17; 11:1; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 1:5-6*)
- **by the caring attitude of fellow believers** (*1 Thess 5:14-15; Rom 14:1; 1 Cor 8:9-13; Gal 6:1-2; 1 Thess 5:11; Titus 2:3-5*)
- **by appropriate teaching** (*1 Pet 2:2; 1 Cor 3:2; 14:20; Heb 5:11-14*)
- **and by their leaders encouraging their spiritual growth** (*2 Pet 3:18; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:15; 2 Thess 1:3*).

Mentoring in the Process for Growth

A second method of discipleship growth is *mentoring*. Mentoring is usually a formal or informal relationship between two people—a senior mentor, usually older and more

experienced who helps and guides a junior protégé’s growth and development. That was likely one of the intents Jesus had in sending the seventy by twos (Luke 10). Howard and William Hendricks suggest that mentoring “happens to be the pattern by which children have been brought to adulthood in nearly all societies throughout history—except our own.”¹⁹

In the gospels we see how Jesus spent His ministry with a small group of men, mentoring them since they were to become the pillars of the church (Eph. 2:20). As the disciples spent the three-and-a-half-year ministry of Jesus with Him, not only were they verbally instructed by Him (Matt. 5-7), but they also saw Him in action healing those who were sick (Luke 6:17-18), bringing back to life those who were dead (Luke 8:53), casting out demons (Luke 11:15), and cleansing the temple from those who were selling their animals and wares (Mark 11:16). At the same time, Jesus paired the disciples in such a way that the older, more experienced ones could mentor the younger ones.²⁰ For instance, Alexander Bruce suggests that Jesus united such opposites as Simon the Zealot and Matthew the publican, the tax-hater and the tax-gatherer, the patriot and the unpatriotic Jew.²¹ This union was not accidental but, though marked diversities of disposition and character frequently exist: “it is in the order of God that persons of varied temperament should associate together”²² so that each person can grow in forbearance and learn to harmonize with others.

The rest of the NT also portrays other mentoring relationships, that is, how the apostles took under their wings others who would become leaders in the young Christian church. Acts 9:26-28 relates how Barnabas brought Paul to the disciples and became the agent of reconciliation and a mentor for Paul as he began his walk in the Christian Way (see also Acts 4:36, 37; 11:22-30). Shortly after his conversion, Paul visited Jerusalem and tried to join the disciples but they were afraid of him given his reputation as a persecutor of the church. It was the intervention of Barnabas, whose name aptly means “Son of Encouragement,” who provided Paul with the recommendation he needed for the disciples to accept his call and his ministry as genuine (Acts 9:26-28 NKJV).

GROUP DISCUSSION

What other mentoring relationships do the following New Testament Scriptures describe:

1. Acts 15:36-39; 2 Tim 4:11
2. Acts 18:1-3; 24-28
3. Acts 16:1-3; Phil 2:19-23; 1 and 2 Tim
4. 2 Cor. 7:6; 13-15; 8:17; Titus

The New Testament also provides directions for mentoring (2 Tim. 2:2), and the qualities of a mentor (Titus 2:3-5). Interestingly, Paul also urged women to disciple other women (1 Titus 2:3), a practice that was unheard of in Judaism.

The examples above are but a small sample of the many instances related in the Bible which show challenges among God's people, in His church, among families, and how much care God displays as well as the efforts He makes directly or through His people to guide them toward maturity in Christ.

GROUP DISCUSSION

From what we have learned, what specific steps can we as a church take to disciple members? And more specifically, what should the church do to disciple children, youth, and new members of the church? Make a list of action steps and what is needed to accomplish each objective:

Step #1. _____

How it will be accomplished: _____

Step #2. _____

How it will be accomplished: _____

Step #3. _____

How it will be accomplished: _____

Step #4. _____

How it will be accomplished: _____

Step #5. _____

How it will be accomplished: _____

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Longings and Losses: Working with Grieving Families

DAVID AND BEVERLY SEDLACEK

Goals and Objectives: Session One

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. Define grief
2. Describe God's original intent for humanity
3. Identify five losses in the life of Jesus
4. Name three losses and longings individuals may experience
5. Identify normal grief process and Kübler-Ross stages of grief
6. Describe unexpected family grief such as trauma, adoption, loss of addiction
7. Identify 2 problems that may compound the grief process
8. Describe symptoms of complicated grief

Grief and Suffering

It was never God's desire or intent that His human children should suffer. He created us as perfect, whole beings who would live eternally with himself. Suffering is an unfortunate but natural consequence of sin. Not only suffering, but death came as a consequence of sin. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Whenever human beings experience

David Sedlacek, PhD, LMSW, CFLE is a Professor of Family Ministry and Discipleship Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

Beverly Sedlacek, DNP, MSN, PMHCNS-BC, RN, is a Therapist in Private Practice and Clinical Director of Into His Rest Ministries in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

loss, suffering, or death, it is normal to also experience grief.

A Definition of Grief

Grief is keen mental suffering or distress over a loss or affliction—a sharp sorrow—a painful regret. At the very heart of the grief definition is intense sorrow. Grief is a deep emotional response to a great loss.

Loss in the Life of Jesus

Jesus himself suffered many losses during the course of His life here on earth, but it is also important to understand the profound losses that he experienced in heaven with the other members of the Godhead. They experienced the loss of Lucifer and a third of the angels. They suffered when Adam and Eve chose sin and instead inherited suffering and death. Are there ways that we can comfort God as he grieves the loss of so many of his children today?

When Jesus was on earth, He experienced the loss of his cousin, John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). He experienced rejection at Nazareth, His home town (Matthew 13:53-58) and wept over Jerusalem. Abuse of any kind is accompanied by significant losses, such as a loss of innocence, capacity to trust, and safety, just to name a few. Jesus experienced physical, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse. On the cross He experienced what it was like to be forsaken and to lose connection with

His Father. Jesus experienced misunderstanding of his mission by His family and His own disciples. He was abandoned, denied, and betrayed by His disciples. Ultimately, He lost His very life. Jesus went through these experiences so that we might know that we have a Savior who was touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15).

Grief and Loss in the Human Experience

It is important that we allow ourselves the human experience of grief in response to real losses such as the death of a loved one, divorce or separation, breakup with a significant other, loss of anything that has been significant to a person, or other significant losses in adulthood or childhood such as: loss of innocence or virginity, safety, possessions, friends when making a move, post-abortion syndrome, miscarriage, a job, children growing up and moving on, friends and teachers, control, or losses related to retirement.

EXERCISE

Journal about grief that you have experienced in your life. As you do, identify specific losses that you have experienced. Write down feelings that you have had connected to these losses. If you have not been allowed to have feelings connected to real losses, are you willing to begin giving yourself permission to feel? Ask God for the gift of your feelings.

It is also important to realize that when our normal human longings are not met, we grieve their loss. Some typical human longings are listed below:

- Intimacy and Affection
- Connection
- Disappointment related to God
- Disappointment related to the Church Organization
- Time and Attention
- Affirmation

EXERCISE

As you look through this list of normal human longings, can you identify yours from this list or perhaps other longings, those that you have had that have not been met. God gives you every desire and longing so that you may in turn bring it to him to see how he wants to fulfill it. Write about these longings in your journal.

Unexpected Grief in Families

We normally think of grief related to the death of a loved one or other significant losses as mentioned above. It is important to realize that there are other losses that occur in families that may produce grief. For example, foster parents must be aware of the need for their foster children to grieve the loss of their biological parents and siblings. When a new child is born into the family, other children may grieve the loss of their favored position. When trauma occurs, a person may need to grieve losses such as safety and security, innocence, trust, etc. When a person overcomes an addiction, there may be a grief response to the loss of the substance, behavior, person, etc. that he/she has been addicted to because addicts develop significant relationships with the objects of their addiction.

Normal Grief

Grieving a significant loss takes time. Depending on the circumstances of a person's loss, grieving can take from weeks to years. Grieving helps a person gradually adjust to a new chapter of their life. Full awareness of a major loss can happen suddenly or over a few days or weeks. While an expected loss (such as a death after a long illness) can take a shorter time to absorb because it is anticipated, a sudden or tragic loss can take more time. Similarly, it can take time to grasp the reality of a loss that doesn't affect one's daily routine, such as a death in a distant city. During this time, a person may feel numb and seem distracted. They may obsess or yearn for the lost loved one. Funerals

and other rituals and events during this time may help one accept the reality of one's loss.

A person's way of feeling and expressing grief is unique to them and the nature of their loss. Some may feel irritable and restless, while others are quieter than usual, or need to be distant from or close to others. Some feel as if they aren't the same person they were before the loss. Don't be surprised by conflicting feelings while grieving. For example, it's normal to feel despair about a death or a job loss, yet also feel relief.

The grieving process does not happen in a step-by-step or orderly fashion. Grieving tends to be unpredictable, with sad thoughts and feelings coming and going, like a roller-coaster ride. After the early days of grieving, one may sense a lifting of numbness and sadness and experience a few days without tears. Then, for no apparent reason, the intense grief may strike again.

While grieving may make one want to isolate themselves from others and hold it all in, it's important that they find some way of expressing their grief. Some modes of expression include talking, writing, creating art or music, or being physically active. All of these are helpful ways of dealing with grief.

The Grief Process

Several years ago Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, Swiss-American psychiatrist, described grief in stages. While we have come to learn more recently that grief does not always occur in easily definable stages, it is helpful to know the typical process that most people experience when they grieve.

1) **Denial, numbness, and shock:** This stage serves to protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss. It may be useful when the grieving person must take action (for example, making funeral arrangements). Numbness is a normal reaction to an immediate loss and should not be confused with "lack of caring." As the individual slowly acknowledges the

impact of the loss, denial and disbelief will diminish.

- 2) **Bargaining:** This stage may involve persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the loss. People can become preoccupied about ways that things could have been better. If this stage is not properly resolved, intense feelings of remorse or guilt may interfere with the healing process.
- 3) **Depression:** This stage of grief occurs in some people after they realize the true extent of the loss. Signs of depression may include sleep and appetite disturbances, a lack of energy and concentration, and crying spells. A person may feel loneliness, emptiness, isolation, and self-pity.
- 4) **Anger:** This reaction usually occurs when an individual feels helpless and powerless. Anger can stem from a feeling of abandonment through a loved one's death. An individual may be angry at the person who died, at God, or toward life in general.
- 5) **Acceptance:** In time, an individual may be able to come to terms with various feelings and accept the fact that the loss has occurred. Healing can begin once the loss becomes integrated into the individual's set of life experiences.

Different people follow different paths through the grieving experience. The order and timing of these phases may vary from person to person: accepting the reality of their loss, allowing themselves to experience the pain of their loss, adjusting to a new reality in which the deceased is no longer present, and enjoying other relationships.

EXERCISE

Since there are many ways of grieving, try to identify ways that you express grief. Share your grief process with a close friend or in a small group.

Complicated Grief

In this complex and busy world, it can be hard to fully grieve a loss. It is possible to have

unresolved grief or complications associated with grieving, particularly if a person had several major losses in a short period of time; lost someone very important in their life; the person may feel that they will never get over the loss of someone special; experienced the unexpected or violent death of a loved one, such as the death of a child or a death caused by an accident, homicide, or suicide; have special life circumstances that act as obstacles to grieving, such as having to return to work too soon after a death; or have a history of depression or anxiety. If these symptoms of grief persist more than a year, it may be a sign of complicated grief.

For some people, feelings of loss are debilitating and don't improve even after time passes. This is known as complicated grief, sometimes called persistent complex bereavement disorder. In complicated grief, painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that a person has trouble recovering from the loss and resuming their own life.

During the first few months after a loss, many signs and symptoms of normal grief are the same as those of complicated grief. However, while normal grief symptoms gradually start to fade over time, those of complicated grief linger or get worse. Complicated grief is like being in an ongoing, heightened state of mourning that keeps a person from healing.

The following may be symptoms or indicators of complicated grief:

- Intense sorrow, pain, and rumination over the loss of your loved one
- Focus on little else but your loved one's death
- Extreme focus on reminders of the loved one or excessive avoidance of reminders
- Intense and persistent longing or pining for the deceased
- Problems accepting the death
- Numbness or detachment
- Bitterness about one's loss
- Feeling that life holds no meaning or purpose
- Lack of trust in others
- An inability to enjoy life or think back on positive experiences with one's loved one

Complicated grief also may be indicated if a person continues to have trouble carrying out normal daily routines, isolates from others and withdraws from social activities, experiences depression, deep sadness, guilt or self-blame related to the loss, believes that they did something wrong or could have prevented the death, feels that life isn't worth living without their loved one, or wishes that they had died along with their loved one.

When there are symptoms of complicated grief present, it is important to make a referral to a mental health professional who will be able to assess the severity of the grief response and make appropriate interventions to help resolve the grief. Interventions can include talk therapy, behavioral interventions, or perhaps medication.

EXERCISE

Would you know where to refer someone who is experiencing Complicated Grief? Explore the phone book, the internet, or community information services to find mental health professionals who have been trained to help during times of grief.

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Goals and Objectives Session Two

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

1. List five statements that are not to be said to grieving individuals
2. Three skills necessary to be a "compassionate consoler" for others
3. Identify 3 areas in which the church can show support for the grieving individual over time
4. Describe the use of scripture in experiencing the comfort of God
5. Identify 3 ways the role of the pastor and chaplain are important in the grief process

Helping others in the Grief Process: How to be a Compassionate Comforter

Spirituality often is part of the grieving process. A person often finds themselves looking

for or questioning the higher purpose of a loss. They ask “why” questions. Many find comfort in their religious or spiritual beliefs, while others may doubt their beliefs in the face of traumatic or senseless loss. When this happens, show your support to the grieving person. This includes emotional support but also practical support in the form of meals, phone calls, cards and so forth. It is often helpful to grieve with family members, if possible, to share memories and experiences whether the loss was a death in the family or another form of loss.

What Not to Say to a Grieving Person

Most people do not intend to be insensitive to a person experiencing grief. Many are out of touch with their own feelings and, therefore, find it difficult to connect meaningfully to a grieving person. When you don’t know what to say, it is better to say nothing at all. Just your presence is saying that you care.

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Sometimes, well-meaning people can wound a grieving person by saying the following things: “Don’t feel that way.” “God just needed another angel.” “You are young. You can have another child.” “God doesn’t give you more than you can handle.” “We may not understand it, but it was God’s will.” “At least she lived a long life; many people die young.” “He is in a better place.” “She brought this on herself.” “There is a reason for everything.” “Aren’t you over him yet, he has been dead for a while now.” “She was such a good person that God wanted her to be with him.” “I know how you feel.” “She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go.” “Be strong.”

Helpful Things to do

It is important to allow a person to have their grief process and to not try to “fix” them. Often, the most helpful thing to do is simply to listen empathically, that is, with all of your attention and focus as if that person were the only person in the world at this moment. The “ministry of presence” can be helpful – just

being there with them helps to soothe feelings of loss and loneliness. Attempt to assess what the person may need at the time. Not everyone grieves in the same way. Try not to let your feelings get in the way. Address your own discomfort with the pain of seeing yourself or others grieving, and get out of your comfort zone to meet the needs of the other person.

Be attentive to providing support after the immediate loss, as it will continue to be needed. Assist your church community to establish rituals that would show respect and honor to the deceased (in the case of death). Examples might include: tying a black ribbon where the person may have routinely sat in church or “FIRSTs”. Firsts refer to significant first holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries related to the loss. Anniversaries can be times full of painful memories. Remembering and being sensitive to a person’s need for comfort during these times, especially anniversaries can be an important ministry to a grieving person.

GROUP EXERCISE

From the information above, identify things that you have said or done that have been helpful or unhelpful. Have you addressed your own feelings during times of grief? Write about what you have learned that has been especially helpful.

A Special Note to Pastors and Chaplains

You will often be called upon to conduct a funeral or memorial service. The service may or may not be for a person who is a Christian. It is important to spend time getting to know the family. They may or may not know how to grieve or celebrate the life of their loved one. Inquire about their desire for the setting and structure of the service. They may look to you for suggestions about how to structure a funeral or memorial service. Remember that it is for them and not for you. Evaluate carefully whether integrating Adventist doctrine into the service would be in the family’s best interest.

The better you know the person, the more effectively you will be able to speak words of comfort. You will know what they need and be able to surround them to the kind of help that they truly need.

Experiencing the Comfort of God

Scripture is filled with words of instruction and comfort for those traveling the journey of grief. Some example of Scriptures that are used to comfort others include the classic Psalms 23. Other Scriptures include:

- “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope in you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort” (2 Cor 1:3-11).
- “The Lord builds up Jerusalem; he gathers the exiles (outcasts) of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps 147:2-3).
- “A merry (cheerful) heart is good medicine, but a broken (crushed) spirit dries the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).
- “The human spirit can endure in sickness, but a crushed spirit who can bear?” (Proverbs 18:14).
- “A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken” (Proverbs 15:13).

There is power in the living Word of God as it is spoken into the heart of a hurting, grieving human person. Many will never have experienced the power of God in real ways in their lives. Others, during times of grief, lose hold of their trust and confidence in God. Below are some reminders to anchor persons in God during times

of grief. Hebrews 4:12 says, “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intents of the heart.” A living connection between the Comforter and the Spirit of God is essential to effective prayer ministry of comfort. Many people have never experienced comfort in their own lives as humans. They’ve not been permitted to have normal human feelings, and therefore have little or no framework in which to put comfort from God.

It is important to recall that Jesus Himself was touched with the feelings of our infirmities when He was born to an unwed mother, had no earthly father, was a refugee, struggled to surrender His will to His Father in Gethsemane, was betrayed by a kiss, sold for the price of a slave, stripped naked, physically, verbally, and mentally, and violated by the religious leaders. Jesus was shamed, humiliated, and embarrassed by men in power over him who should have been protecting Him and supporting Him. He was tempted to numb His pain when His situation seemed to be hopeless and useless. He cried out “My God, My God, Why have You forsaken Me?” in the midst of being unfairly treated, unjustly accused, rejected, arrested, convicted, and murdered as He was suffering and dying for our sin, shame, and guilt.

Jesus was tempted to relinquish His identity from the beginning to the end of His life. At the beginning of his public ministry, Satan tempted him in the wilderness to doubt His identity by declaring “If you are the Son of God.” At the end of his ministry, He was taunted on the cross by the Jewish leaders, by the Roman soldiers and by the thief on the cross with the same words.

During times of grief, people must face difficult questions such as “Why, God?” “Why did you not stop the abuse?” “Why did you give me these broken parents?” “Why did you let my child die?” “Why did you allow this miscarriage to happen?” Rather than discourage them from having these feelings, even feelings of anger at God, they need to be supported in expressing these feelings.

Both Job (Job 15) and David (Psalm 22 and more) engaged in healthy biblical lament. They freely expressed their feelings to God. If we truly believe in a compassionate God, we will not fear God's wrath when we lament during times of loss and grief. God is big enough to handle our feelings. Rather than fearing Jesus, invite Him into the places of pain and grief in our experience. Pray Scriptures such as the following into our hearts and those of others: "The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of

singing" (Isaiah 51:3). "In all your sufferings, he also suffered. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years" (Isaiah 63:9).

GROUP EXERCISE

Write about times in your life when you have experienced Jesus as being particularly close to you. How about far away? How have you been comforted by God? Do you experience God's comfort through internalizing his word? Share your thoughts and experiences with others in a small group.

Intimacy Training: Steps to Deepen the Level of Intimacy in Your Marriage

GÁBOR MIHALEC

Do you know the Rubik's Cube? I must admit that I have a very conflicted relationship with this toy. On one hand I admire it because it is a very smart and creative toy. (By the way it is a Hungarian invention. Ernő Rubik is a Hungarian architect, who invented this toy in 1974.) On the other hand I am really angry about this little invention, because I could never solve it. No matter how hard I tried, I could not get all the colors to match on each side. I have a cousin who is living proof that it is possible to solve the Rubik's Cube. She can do it in less than 30 seconds.

The same thing is true for marriage. There are people who tried it and found that it didn't work, at least not for them. They came to the conclusion to throw the cube away because it seems impossible to solve. On the other side there are people who are the living evidence that it is possible to live happily and faithfully for decades—with the same spouse.

These people know what the Bible means when it says: "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love" (Proverbs 5:18-19).

After listening to nearly 100 different stories about infidelity, after looking in the eyes of those

Gábor Mihalec, PhD, LFT, MTh, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Hungarian Union Conference in Pecel, Hungary.

who have experienced it in their marriages—both men and women—I discovered that there is a pattern. There are different stages that most couples go through who end up in infidelity. It is a phenomena that is explainable and even predictable. And if something is explainable and predictable, that means it is also preventable. Here are some practical steps that can help you to deepen your level of intimacy, thereby preventing infidelity from even becoming a consideration in the mind of either spouse.

1. Define your relationship

Who are you to each other? What are your expectations of each other?

A couple in their fifties sits in the therapist's office. Their surnames are different, and when they introduce themselves they do not specify the nature of their relationship. As they talk, it becomes clear that they love each other, but in some respects they act as if they are not committed to each other, while at other times they talk as if their relationship functions according to well-defined rules. After listening to them for a while, the therapist asks, "Can you tell me who you are to each other?"

The question unsettles the couple. Suddenly they become tense, look at each other, and then they look at the therapist again. The wife nods at her husband, encouraging him to speak first.

The man, obviously embarrassed, searches for the right words to say before suddenly blurting out a perfect answer: "We are actually living in an undefined relationship."

At every stage of the marriage relationship it is good to define who you are to each other and what you can expect from each other. If you are dating, you can say: "We consider ourselves a dating couple and our goal is to get to know each other more in order to decide how to continue our relationship."

If you are engaged you might say: "We are an engaged couple who have made a decision that we want to continue life together, even if we cannot fully implement our decision at this point in time."

If you are married then say: "We are a married couple, and we have committed ourselves to a long-term, monogamous relationship where we open up all areas of our lives to each other; we will show trust and loyalty to each other and continuously work together on a shared life journey." Marriage can be described in many ways. I like the following definition: "Marriage is the voluntary, monogamous, life-sharing union of one man and one woman, based on equality, mutual love and commitment, protected by law, and made with the intention of lifelong commitment."

EXERCISE

Discuss as a couple how the different elements of the marriage definition describe your relationship.

2. Mark and protect the boundaries of your relationship

In a marriage two individuals create a new form of life, a new companionship—a WE, if you will. Everything that belongs inside the boundaries of We that we take out to somebody who is not part of the We can be considered infidelity.

It is useful to know where we are at different stages of the relationship, what we can expect from our mates. When we start looking for mates

our radars are calibrated to view a wide spectrum. We recognize everybody who could be of interest to us and we are likely to consider several potential partners. After narrowing the field, we start to concentrate on a single person. If we decide to consider a long-term relationship and we both develop the intention to get to know each other on a deeper level, then we put the others aside and start to focus on each other.

This does not mean that we delete the memory of others, but it does mean that we will not initiate contact, simply because there is now someone in whom we have started to invest our time. This is critical, because if we maintain several relationships parallel to each other then we reduce the chances of getting to know one person on a deeper level. This stage requires that we treat the other person as if she or he will ultimately be the only special person in our lives with whom we will be romantically involved. Otherwise, he or she will never become the only one.

Then, as we become more and more convinced that we want to share the rest of our lives with the person we are coming to love, we then make an explicit move—we must make our intentions public. In a traditional setting this move is called engagement. This is not a finite decision, but it is a public declaration of intentions. In we say to the world, "We are serious about our relationship and we want this relationship to move towards mutual commitment and exclusivity." If the time spent together before this moment did not give enough assurance that the person is the one with who you want to spend the rest of your life with, then you should move on and reactivate all the names you still have stored in your memory. Of course, it might happen that someone not on your list might enter the picture. Anyway, the process restarts, and if there is mutual interest and a growing commitment, all others are put aside again and there is a mutual, exclusive focus to know each other better. When we find the person we would like to be with, we are faced with a very definite decision. A joint journey starts, one that we want to walk together and only with each other. This is called marriage. Once we arrive at this stage, we delete other possible partners for good from our memory. Leaving the search phase behind, we now step into the "I've found it" phase.

The tragic reality is that there are many married men and women whose radars are still calibrated on a wide spectrum. In their behavior they are more seekers than finders.

What does border protection mean? Let me share with you what it means for me as a pastor and therapist?

- I intentionally avoid being alone with a woman in the building. If there is someone else around, their presence injects restraint into the situation and also gives my client a sense of security.

- I avoid situations where I would need to travel alone with a woman in my car.

- When I meet or greet a woman I avoid physical contact, and will not hug or kiss even if I see that she intends to. I stretch out my hand and offer a handshake from an appropriate distance. This way I regulate the spatial relationship. Naturally, if there is an older woman, with whom I have a kind of mother/son or grandmother/grandson relationship, then I do not mind having them get physically closer. It is the same with women who are close friends with both Dora and me.

- Avoiding physical contact is also important in situations where I have to comfort someone. When I console a man it is natural that at the appropriate moment I place my hand on his shoulders. However, when I am in the same situation with a woman I will avoid touching her at all. I will rely solely on verbal communication to express comfort.

- It is also important for me to make it clear to everyone that I live in a happy marriage with Dora. In my local church we hold hands and express our love for each other in appropriate ways. This transmits the message, more than anything else, that there is no place for a third person in our relationship.

EXERCISE

What does border protection mean in your life, in your profession?

3. Let's make it 100%

Which accomplishments in your life make you most proud? Your career? Your studies? Something in sports? Did that success come without some amount of effort and discipline? No! You needed to make decisions, take actions, put all your efforts in order to achieve it.

Do you know any bank where you can deposit \$60 and withdraw \$100? So why do you think that this would work with your marriage? In order to achieve good results in your marriage, you need to work on it intentionally. You need to learn about the dynamics of marriage; you need to know your spouse; you need to talk to them regularly and spend time together frequently.

In my own research I was able to prove that within a short period of 6 months the marital satisfaction of couples who don't work on their relationship drops by up to 13%. Imagine what happens in 10, 15, or 20 years. On the other hand marital satisfaction can increase by up to 7% in 6 months if the couple works on their marriage by taking part in marriage retreats, reading good books, making time for each other. Imagine what might happen if they kept this up for 10, 15, or 20 years!

My message here is this: You cannot halfheartedly approach something you expect to be one of the most important aspects of your life. You can't kick a goal from the bench. You need to be on the field, to take the risk to be injured, you need to sweat, to cooperate. You need to kick the ball in a way so that all the energy in your whole body is concentrated on the square centimeter that touches the ball. You can't be a spectator in your own life, and certainly not in your marriage!

The magic word to focus on in this stage of marriage is intention! For a long time I was convinced that this was something obvious, something that everybody understood, but I came to realize that this is not the case. I was invited to lecture, and in the invitation letter I was asked to provide a few sentences that the organizers could use in their advertisement. In those sentences I used the word intentional twice. However, I was very surprised when the organizer sent back the text for revision because I thought that it was

well worded. The message stated that I should rewrite the advertisement and that I should avoid the word intentional. Her explanation was that the word affected her very negatively in an advertisement about emotional relationships, because it referred strongly to the mind and the will. I had to admit that she was right to some extent. We are encouraged not to think in order to make us good consumers. It sounds scary if someone encourages the opposite: for us to use logic, careful decision-making and consciousness, even in relationships. However, we cannot get the best out of our marriage unless we are intentional.

EXERCISE

What are the things you can intentionally invest in for the growth of your relationship? List at least 10 ideas.

4. Foster the atmosphere of trust in your marriage

It always makes my heart beat faster when I read the creation story. There we find the perfect description of trust: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25). They were naked and felt no shame. They had nothing to hide, in both the literal and figurative sense. They lived together with the greatest openness and trust that people can ever experience. This idyll now seems far away and unreachable, even if everybody desires to experience the same state of soul and body. Yet we are afraid to drop our defenses and look into the eyes of our partners, and to open up to each other and make ourselves transparent and vulnerable.

What do we need in order to learn to trust someone? According to trust experts, there are several factors that build up trust: competence (an experiential conviction that the person knows what they are doing and is able to get things done); consistency (the person has repeatedly, and over a long period, proved their trustworthiness and predictability); care (the person has empathy and acts in the interest of others, and we can rest assured that they are on our side); honesty (being sincere and open, the person is able to discuss both negative and positive issues without being

unkind, and is able to consider the pros and cons, the person will say and do whatever they really think and feel). Trust is not a constant entity within us that either exists or doesn't exist. It is dynamic and will change constantly in the relationship. Therefore, we have to work intentionally to develop it, and it is possible to make it grow.

Cultivate a culture of respect and admiration. The more positive things we say about our partner; the more intentionally we search for things we can be proud of in them; the more lovely characteristics we find, the more we will be drawn to them. This will also make us more attentive, and we will see things that are important for our spouse.

Don't live together with "scrappy" things. It is hard to trust someone in a relationship who harbors unresolved issues. These are the issues that create that feeling of "OK! OK! But . . . there's another side to that!" If we have caused any grievances in the past then we should deal with them. Let go of the past, forgive, and ask for forgiveness.

Resolve the conflicts that can be resolved. This is very similar to the previous point. The difference is that these are not only shadows from the past that influence our relationship, but conflicts that feed on the present situation. Conflicts cannot be avoided, but they must be resolved with the prospect of coming closer in the relationship. Active resolve conflicts.

Develop a glass pocket and glass heart. If we trust someone we have nothing to hide. Hiding finances is not an option. Lies cannot be part of the relationship, even if they are "only" withholding information. They will undermine trust, and how can we trust someone in whom we are unwilling to confide the truth? Would it bother you if you were to receive the same treatment from my spouse? There is no place in a marriage for misinformation. Just as politicians are expected to have glass pockets, married couples are expected to have glass hearts!

Exercise positive fidelity. Howard Clinebell distinguishes between positive and negative faithfulness.¹ Negative faithfulness is motivated

by outside factors and it is based on fear of consequences. Positive faithfulness is motivated by internal factors and is based on mutual love and respect. The person does not cheat on the partner because they love them, and the relationship is of much greater value than a few hours of fleeting excitement.

Do things together just for the sake of being together. If I think about the persons in my life whom I can really trust (thank God there are a few) then I see one thing they all have in common. I have spent a lot of time with them in one or another phase of my life, and our friendship and trust is the natural byproduct of this time spent together. This is true of marriage as well. If we spend a lot of time together then we get to know the person and we get to trust them. Marriage is in need of leisure time spent together—time when we are not together to do something, but only to be together with our friend.

5. Talk! Talk! Talk!

If a couple are to communicate on the deeper levels of their relationship, they have to find a way to communicate intimately. Many speak without giving attention to what the other person is telling them or what the other person needs. Like children playing in the same sandbox, one is pushing his little car, the other is playing with his toy soldiers, and neither of them is paying attention to each other. Jean Piaget, the great Swiss child psychologist, called this phenomenon a “collective monologue.” On many occasions adults, and even intimate partners, conduct such monologues as a poor substitute for real dialogue. An intimate discussion is an entry ticket into the inner world of our partner. A simple conversation that assures our spouse that we are listening, that we are really interested, so much so that we have turned towards him or her with warmth and acceptance can help open up his or her heart.

Noted marriage researcher Dr. John Gottman gives us a four-step guide on how to achieve this.

Step 1. Articulate your feelings

It is very surprising to see how difficult people find it to articulate their feelings:

especially men, who are usually used to arguing and finding solutions. Irrespective of gender differences, we tend to start sentences with “You,” which communicates feelings not directly but indirectly. For example, when the wife says to her husband, “You have once again left the plates on the table!” she actually means, “I feel that my work is considered less important and less valuable compared to yours, and you do not value what I do for our family!” This second sentence is an “I” statement, and it is about the feelings that the person is experiencing. If we were to communicate this way in our everyday conversations we would experience the benefits, even if it may sound a bit artificial at first. The first step is to understand what our feelings are and then share them with our spouse.

Step 2. Ask open-ended questions

Much is dependent on the use of questions in a conversation, so a good conversation partner will know how to ask questions. They will know the difference between yes/no questions and open-ended questions and how to use them the right way. It is easy to distinguish between the two types of questions if you think of the answer. A yes/no question can be answered with a very short answer, usually a yes or no. Open-ended questions require a longer answer with more explanation. Both have advantages and disadvantages, which need to be considered when you choose your questions. Open-ended questions tend to calm the situation, and make the conversation deeper and more interesting with longer answers. The disadvantage is that in some situations they will produce long, shallow clichés.

For example, if the question is “How was your day?” the husband might feel too tired to talk about all of his day and may answer, “Nothing interesting!” So the question requiring a shorter answer would have been more useful if it was, “How was the mood in the office?” Yes/no questions have the advantage that they elicit exact answers with specific information. The disadvantage is that if there are too many of them they will make the conversation boring with lots of pauses. And that might make one feel like he or she is being interrogated.

Step 3. Deepen your partner's expressions

We can do a lot to make conversation deeper if we reflect the words of our partner. Your partner will feel that you are paying attention to what he or she is saying, and this will help them open up even more, thereby sharing more emotions. Here is an example:

Wife: "Today I looked at our wedding pictures again. How young and how much in love we were!"

Husband: "So, you had some nostalgic moments about that time when our lives had fewer responsibilities and we had more time for each other?"

Step 4. Express your sympathy

The conversation may come to an end if one party does not pay attention or show sympathy, but rejects the speaker or offers solutions. In an intimate conversation the point is not to solve the speaker's problem, but to make them feel how important they are, and that we take them and their emotions seriously. The person does not need to be afraid of anything because there will be no rejection. A lot depends on the kind of short comments we make in these situations. We can use very brief comments to enhance the conversation, or we can shut the person up completely, putting them on the defensive. Once people feel they need to defend themselves, that signals the end of intimacy. The following will help to keep a conversation flowing and make it deeper:

- I can see that this is really hurting you
- It hurts me too to hear what you are saying
- No wonder you became angry
- If someone said this to me, I would be hurt too
- Oh, my dear, this must have been really bad for you
- This situation would have tried my patience as well
- I believe I know what you mean. Did you want to say something like this...?

Conclusion

We went through five important steps that helps to deepen the level of your intimacy in marriage and make marriage affair-proof. How about if we end this seminar with a loyalty resolution? If you agree, would you please read the following sentences aloud with me?

"I am married, which means that I have narrowed my perception of intimacy to accept only the signals and responses of one person. I want to be a good spouse for that person, and that person only. I have intentionally chosen her/him and don't want to spend the rest of my life looking for closeness and intimacy in the company of others. I have no desire or intention to squander the gift of my sexuality on anyone else. I will resolutely protect our relationship against all intruders, taking special care to guard its boundaries in all circumstances. I will take responsibility for my words and actions. I will avoid ambiguous language that may encourage flirtation of any kind, and will make it clear to all that I love my spouse, and that I am not available for a relationship with anyone else.

"I intend to use every possible tool, and all the sound advice that is available, to improve our relationship and help our marriage achieve its fullest potential. To this end, I will consider every penny and every minute spent on improving our marriage to be a prime investment in the most important venture of my life."

Book Recommendation

You can find more steps with lots of practical information and exercises on this topic in Gabor Mihalec's latest book: *No More Games: How to build a faithful and satisfying relationship* (Autumn House, 2018)

Notes

¹ Howard J. Clinebell, *Growth Counseling for Marriage Enrichment*, p. 23.

² John Gottman and Nan Silver, *What Makes Love Last?* pp. 93-99.

³ Michele Weiner Davis, *The Sex-Starved Marriage*, p. 187.

Everyday Evangelism: How to Be Bright and Salty Sheep!

KAREN HOLFORD

Introduction

This is an interactive seminar for families and church members. The goal is to help them discover that sharing God's love with others is something that everyone can do, even children. Jesus' metaphors of light, salt and sheep are explored to help participants understand how they can simply and joyfully share His love in today's world.

The outline of this seminar is flexible so that you can choose the most suitable activities for your context. Read through the seminar, identify the activities that you will use, gather your materials, and invite others to help you where appropriate.

Learning objectives

Participants will:

- Know that they can share God's love visibly (being light), experientially (being salt), and through acts of kindness (being sheep).
- Feel encouraged because many of them are already sharing God's love in these simple ways.
- Choose to be intentional about living as salt, light and sheep in their community, and discover fresh and simple ways that they can be 'everyday evangelists'

Karen Holford, MSc, MA is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in St Albans, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

Materials required

- Copy paper
- Pens, pencils and coloring materials
- Optional – flipchart and pens

Light section

- A variety of light sources (torch, candle, miner's headlamp, glow-sticks, a picture of traffic lights, twinkly light chain, child's toy ambulance or other emergency service vehicle, picture of car headlights in the dark, picture of floodlight/search light, etc.)
- Optional – tea-lights with small white stickers adhered to the tin shells.

Salt section

- Salt in a packet or in a salt-shaker – you may even be able to find a salt shaker in the shape of a person

Kindness/Sheep section

- Copies of the 'Discovering your Mission' worksheet – one for each person or family
- Optional – leaflets from various Christian charities in your area
- Optional – a wide variety of craft materials

Bright lights!

**'YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.
A TOWN BUILT ON A HILL CANNOT BE
HIDDEN. NEITHER DO PEOPLE LIGHT A
LAMP AND PUT IT UNDER A BOWL. INSTEAD**

THEY PUT IT ON ITS STAND, AND IT GIVES LIGHT TO EVERYONE IN THE HOUSE. IN THE SAME WAY, LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE OTHERS, THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN.' MATTHEW 5:14-16, NIV¹.

The source of all our light is Jesus Himself, shining into and through our lives.

'THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST ARE TO GO FORTH ON THEIR MISSION, DIFFUSING THE LIGHT OF HEAVEN UPON THOSE WHO ARE IN THE DARKNESS OF ERROR AND SIN...THE LIFE OF CHRIST IN THE SOUL, HIS LOVE REVEALED IN THE CHARACTER, WOULD MAKE THEM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.' THOUGHTS FROM THE MOUNT OF BLESSING, P. 39².

Invite the group to suggest different kinds of lights and then explain how these lights can help us to understand more about being God's lights in the world.

Lights help us to:

- Keep safe from harm (traffic lights and road crossing lights)
- See where to go (street lights)
- Know whether the power is 'on' or 'off'
- Notice when something needs fixing
- Celebrate together (birthday candles)
- Feel hopeful (when we see the 'light at the end of the tunnel')

Being **light** is about helping people to **see** God's loving character and His values. We do that by letting people **see** how we live out our values in our everyday lives as Christians in our homes, schools, communities and workplaces.

Exploring God's character

In order for our lives to shed light on God's character we need to learn more about Him, and we need to take time to reflect on His amazing character.

- Ask people to work in families or small groups.
- Give each group a sheet of copy paper and a pen.
- Ask them to write the letters of the alphabet down the left-hand side of the sheet of paper.

- Then ask them to write at least one characteristic of God for every letter of the alphabet, and preferably more than one! There are even characteristics beginning with Q – questioning and quieting, and words like eXcellent can be used for X.
- Allow about 5-7 minutes for this task, and encourage some groups to work backwards through the alphabet.
- After giving the small groups time to gather some characteristics of God, invite the groups to take it in turns to call out one characteristic at a time, in alphabetical order. The first group will offer a characteristic beginning with A, the second group will suggest one beginning with B, and so on.
- This activity can become like a joyful prayer of praise for the many different characteristics of God.
- If you wish, someone can help you to create a whole group alphabet, by writing down the groups' suggestions on a large sheet of flip-chart paper at the front of the room.

Reflecting as individuals and families

Ask pairs, families or groups to consider

- Which of God's characteristics do our lives and relationships reveal to the people around us?
- How do we shed light on the loving character of God without attracting attention to ourselves?
- What are the characteristics of God that our friends, colleagues and neighbors have seen in our lives?
- Which of God's character traits do I/we most want those around us to see in action, and what can we do as individuals and families to reveal them in the most effective ways?

Allow time for a short discussion and feedback. Then share the following inspirational quote with the group.

'THE GREATEST EVIDENCE OF THE POWER OF CHRISTIANITY THAT CAN BE PRESENTED TO THE WORLD IS A WELL-ORDERED, WELL-DISCIPLINED FAMILY. THIS WILL RECOMMEND THE TRUTH AS NOTHING ELSE CAN, FOR IT IS A LIVING WITNESS OF ITS PRACTICAL POWER UPON THE HEART.' ADVENTIST HOME P. 32³.

Think about it:

- How can we be lights of hope, joy, guidance and safety in a dark world?
- How can we help other people to see the many colors of God's loving character through our interaction as families, and our interaction with them?
- Choose three practical ways that you or your family can be light in your neighborhood, community or workplace.
- Take a sheet of paper, draw the shape of a lightbulb on it, and write your ideas inside the bulb. Radiating out from the bulb write down some of the character traits of God that you hope people might see when you do these activities.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR SECTION ON LIGHT:

Tea-light reminders: Give each person or family a tea-light (small candle in a thin metal container) with a small sticker on the tin. Ask them to write 'You are the light of the world' on the sticker.

God's character lantern wraps: Provide each person with a strip of vellum or tracing paper that is slightly wider than the height of small jar or glass votive holder, and long enough to wrap loosely around it, with a narrow overlap for sticking the short ends together. Each person will also need a fine-pointed marker pen. Ask participants to write some of the character traits of God on the vellum/tracing paper strips. These strips can then be wrapped around a jar or glass votive holder. When a candle is lit in the jar or glass, the characteristics of God will be lit up.

Video clip: 'The Florist' (Igniter Media www.ignitermedia.com) is a clip about a young woman who wishes she could be a missionary and do something great for God. She is a florist, and she wonders what she can do to share God's love. But the video shows the amazing difference her flowers make to the people who receive them. The clip can be purchased for a few dollars and shown to enhance the program.

Salty people!

'YOU ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH. BUT IF THE SALT LOSES ITS SALTINESS, HOW CAN IT BE MADE SALTY AGAIN? IT IS NO LONGER GOOD FOR ANYTHING, EXCEPT TO BE THROWN OUT AND TRAMPLED UNDERFOOT.' MATTHEW 5:13, NIV⁴.

'TASTE AND SEE THAT THE LORD IS GOOD.' PSALM 34:8, NIV⁵.

Being **salt** is about mingling with people so they can **experience** (taste) God's character through the loving, positive and value-filled way that we interact with them. This is a stage deeper than being light. The people in our families, workplaces, communities and churches need our friendship, smiles, comforting, affection, encouragement, respect, help, and gratitude, to help them experience God's love.

Thinking about salt:

- Show a large packet of salt, or a salt shaker in the shape of a person.
- Invite the group to describe some of the uses and qualities of salt.
- Write them down on a sheet of flipchart paper if you wish.
- How do these different ways to use salt help us to understand how God wants us to be 'salty' people?

Thoughts about being salty people

- You can't tell salt is in something until you taste it. We need to interact with people if we are going to help them experience God's loving character.
- It takes sensitivity to add just the right amount of salt. When we are sensitive and respectful in our interactions with others it helps people to taste God. If we overdo the salt we can be distasteful.
- Salt changes whatever it is mixed with. We can help to change communities, families and people by mingling with them.

'Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them,

“Follow Me”. There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen.

‘The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counselled We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.’ *Ministry of Healing*, pp. 143-144.⁶

Think about it

Invite people to work in small groups to discuss:

- How can we be salt in the world and help to bring out the God-flavors in our families and communities?
- How can we be preservatives, antiseptics, flavour-enhancers, ice-melters, and cleansers in today's society?
- How can we do more mingling with our neighbours, parents at school, colleagues and friends so that we can help people to taste and experience more of the loving and positive God-flavors in the world?
- Invite people to draw a salt shaker and to write their ideas for mingling on the shaker. Around the shaker they can write how they hope people will taste and experience God through their activities.

Sheepish people

Read Matthew 25:31-45, or invite children or young people to act out the parable together. Give them advance warning and practice with them.

Invite the group to share some of their reflections on the parable of the sheep and the goats.

Ask people to consider:

- What do you like best about this parable?
- What is the most important message in this parable for you?
- Where are you in the parable?
- How does this parable show God's love?

Some lessons from the sheep

- People listened to Jesus because they heard, saw and experienced how much He cared for people.
- We make the biggest difference in our communities when we know the Shepherd, listen to His voice, experience His loving care for ourselves, and go where He leads.
- Sheep people are those who care so naturally for others that they don't even notice how often they care.
- Sheep people care by noticing what other people need and by meeting those needs in the best way possible, whenever they can.

Caring for people (being sheep) in the street where you live:

- Pray for your neighbors.
- Find opportunities to talk to them and help them.
- Discover their needs and do what you can to meet those needs. Keep alert to signs of those needs. Check in on people. Ask how you can help.
- It may be helpful to take your children with you when you visit your neighbors, because children help to break down barriers and open up doors. Tell them you are teaching your children the importance of being kind in their neighborhood, and that you want to do something, however small, to help them. Always stay with your children and do the task together.
- Make regular/seasonal ‘neighbor visits’ so that they come to expect you and look forward to seeing you.
- Invite people into your home.
- Make your home a safe place for people to come and explore, ask questions, grow and find friends.
- Maybe you could start a small group in your home, or a story and craft time for local children – explore Bible stories together and do fun games and crafts related to the story (like a mini messy church...)
- Invite friends to church for social events that have no spiritual content.
- The more often they walk through the church door for a social event, and the more friends they make in the church community, the easier it will be for them to come through the door to seek God and worship.

Some outreach ministries

Here are some ideas that you could share with your group – or invite local people who are already involved in simple outreach activities to share their ideas.

Welcome basket:

Visit newcomers to the community.

- Take a basket filled with helpful leaflets, local discount vouchers, information about local churches and church events, a home-made loaf of bread or a cake.
- Leave the bread or cake in a tin and say you'll come back to collect it in a week's time. When you return for the tin invite them to your home, or to a local café, for a drink or a snack.
- If possible, get to know a little about the person or family so you can help them to settle in and find out what they need.
- Begin to build a friendship with the new people. People who have just moved into a new area are more likely to be open to new relationships and changes in their life.
- Make sure your church is always a welcoming and comfortable place for newcomers.

The Kindness Church

The village church in Congresbury, England, celebrated its 800th anniversary by collecting the reports of 800 acts of kindness performed in the village.

- The church printed cards asking people to describe each kindness they experienced, and to say when and where it happened.
- The cards were collected in a cardboard mailbox in the church.
- This project was so successful in increasing the kindness and happiness in the village that many non-churchgoers were also inspired to participate. Since then other villages and towns have set up similar initiatives.

Kindness birthdays

Celebrate family birthdays by planning and performing acts of kindness.

- Children can be inspired to plan and carry out one act of kindness for every year of their life, as a gratitude to God. Involve them in choosing kind things to do in their community, and in helping their parents to do acts of kindness on their birthdays.

- If you have lots of years to celebrate, simplify the process by donating ten items to a charity shop, giving out ten roses to older people in your town or in a care home, picking up ten items of rubbish in the street, sticking ten coins or notes on items in a store, and putting ten encouraging messages in different books in the public library.

'Discovering your Mission' worksheet

Distribute copies of the worksheet included with this seminar.

- Encourage each person or family to find one simple outreach activity they could do on a regular basis, that works well with the current needs and resources of their family, and involves their children where possible.
- Allow 10 minutes for individuals and families to start working on their worksheets. They can continue at home.
- Alternatively, provide a longer time for people to complete the worksheets more thoroughly, and to use any spare time once they have completed the sheet, to discuss some possible and simple ministries they could do.

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Work together and encourage each other

- Set goals together for making intentional and positive contact with others, e.g. 'We will mingle socially with 5 unchurched families each month' 'Between us we will plan and do 10 acts of kindness each month.'
- Pray together for the people you will influence, and for the Holy Spirit's guidance in what you will do and say.
- Work together towards your group goals. Encourage each other and support each other's kindness projects.
- Involve your children, and ask them for their ideas.
- Celebrate together when you reach your goals. Invite others to join you and experience more of your salt and light.
- Set new kindness goals for the next month or quarter, and plan another celebration.
- Keep praying for people and opportunities.

Discuss

In groups and/or families discuss practical ways you can be 'sheep' in your community by:

- Researching some of the needs in your community
- Discovering simple ways that you and your family and friends can help meet some of the local needs (ask local charities and agencies)
- Feeding those who are hungry or lonely (donate to food bank each time you shop, prepare vegetables or soup for homeless shelter, give grocery vouchers to people living on the street, etc.)
- Giving clothes to people who need them (give warm socks to homeless shelter, donate outgrown clothes to clothing banks and goodwill stores)
- Visiting people who are sick
- Supporting people who are struggling
- Befriending lonely people
- Giving dignity to people who feel shamed

Other possible activities:

Kindness reminder

- Lay out a range of craft materials in an attractive way.
- Provide plenty of space for people to work.
- Invite every person or family to make something that will remind them to be 'sheep' and to do kind things for the people in their community that are struggling.

Kindness cards

- Provide materials for people to write thank you cards or other caring cards to give to someone that they know.
- They can write on purchased cards that you have provided, or you can provide the materials for them to create their own cards.
- Encourage people to mail their cards or deliver them by hand.

In conclusion:

- We are light when we help people to see God's character through the way we live out our values.
- We are salt when we help them experience God's love through our friendship and care.

- We are also sheep when we follow the footsteps of Jesus and show His love to a hurting world through acts of kindness.

Ask

From what you have learned and discussed today how will you and your families plan to be light, salt and sheep in your community? Invite people to share some of their ideas and plans.

Blessing

Close with prayer to bless the plans that have been made. Pray that each person will be inspired to be bright lights, tasty salt and caring sheep in their everyday lives.

Notes

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*.

⁴ NIV as above.

⁵ NIV as above.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing*.

Worksheet: Discovering Your Mission

God has given every person and family a unique mission especially suited to their resources, skills, gifts, and passions. Use this worksheet to explore what you can do for God.

What are your personal/family resources?

What are the gifts that God has given you and your family to share His love with a hurting world?

- **Skills** – What professional skills and training do you have, and how could you use these in your community?
- **Time** – How much time do you have?
- **Finances** – How much money do you have available for your ministry? Do you need to choose no-cost and low-cost ministries?
- **Family** – What are the ages of your children, and what are their skills and interests? How can you involve them and make it fun for them to serve, too?
- **Home** – How can you use your home as a place to welcome people and share your care and hospitality?
- **Excess goods** – Are there things in your home that you no longer need or use that others might need more than you do?

List your resources:

What practical skills do you or your family have?

Make a list of all of your practical skills. How could you use these skills in your family’s mission project?

- Cooking
- Hospitality
- Gardening
- Computer/internet skills
- Mechanical, electrical, plumbing, decorating, etc.
- Sewing, crafts
- Music, singing
- Etc.

List your skills:

What are your family’s spiritual gifts?

Identify the spiritual gifts in your family and ask God how these might be used to share His love with others:

- **Romans 12:** Encouragement, Generosity, Leadership, Mercy, Service, Teaching, followed by guidelines for healthy relationships and hospitality.
- **1 Corinthians 12:** Administration, Discernment, Helps, Faith, Healing, Knowledge, Wisdom, followed by a description of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

HANDOUT

List your spiritual gifts:

What social issues are your family most concerned about?

- What injustices and areas of social concern do you feel most passionate about? Who is God calling you to care for?
- Homelessness, children, families, older people, families where one person is in prison, refugees, literacy, healthy lifestyles, human trafficking, people who have been abused, environment, nature, etc.

List your concerns:

Choosing a ministry

Now look at all the lists you have written and pray about them. Ask God to show you the best outreach ministry that you and your family can do at your current life-stage. Try to find a ministry that involves as many of your family members as possible. Do it regularly, even once a month can make a difference.

Write your plans below:

- Pray for your ministry, dedicating yourselves and your service to God.
- Ask God to help you find people who are looking for Him, or people He wants you to meet.
- Look for all the places God is at work in your lives.

First Mission Outpost: The Family

ALINA BALTAZAR AND
SILVIA CANALE BACCHIOCCHI

“OUR WORK FOR CHRIST IS TO BEGIN
WITH THE FAMILY, IN THE HOME....
THERE IS NO MISSIONARY FIELD MORE
IMPORTANT THAN THIS.”
THE ADVENTIST HOME, 35

The Family: Origin, Creation, and Redemption

Before anything existed—on earth or even in the universe—there was God. And this Being existed as the harmonious unity of three Persons. In a way, we could say that the concept of family was established before the foundation of the earth, being present in God’s very nature: the beautiful harmony of three in one. At creation, God extended His relational love to His children, made in His image. His desire was that they would return His love through their faithful actions and thereby grow closer to Him daily. Tragically, both Adam and Eve chose to exercise faith in Satan’s lie instead of God’s explicit word, and their disobedience resulted in the rupture of earth’s first family, comprised of God and the human pair. But God, in His tender mercy, provided a way of escape through Christ—the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). In this first

succinct covenant promise the entire plan of salvation was presented, and it was presented to the father and mother of the human race. Their divinely-ordained mission to their family was, in essence, their mission to the world. And it is the same for us today. Our mission to the world begins at home: bringing the gospel message of redemption to bear fruit for eternity in the lives of each member of our families. Then, from the mission outposts of our homes, our children will be equipped to reach out in love and ministry to the wider world.

Ellen White’s Role as Family Counselor

The Seventh-day Adventist church has been uniquely blessed with the prophetic voice of Ellen White—faithful wife, loving mother, and fervent missionary. In *The Adventist Home* she has left tender encouragement and practical counsel to families living in earth’s probationary period (begun in October, 1844). Although the family has always been integral in educating young minds for God’s mission field (Deut. 6:6–8, cf. 4:6), the devotion of parents in training their children is even more critical today as we live in the time of God’s investigative judgement. The devil knows his time is short, and his intensified deceptions and temptations require that we arm ourselves with a deeper knowledge of Scripture and the counsels of Ellen White. Adventist families today often

Alina Baltazar, PhD, MSW, LMSW, CFLE, is Associate Professor and MSW Program Director of the Social Work Department at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

Silvia Canale Bacchiocchi, MA, is a freelance editor and translator in Berrien Springs, MI, USA.

resort to various interventions, some of which may be helpful, tending to “go with the flow” of society at large. Though, there are times reaching out to Christian professionals is advisable; as in the case of medical problems, mental illness, or substance abuse. Yet the Creator of the family unit is the best qualified to resolve our problems. As such, our first response should be to go to Him in prayer, consulting both Scripture and what He has advised through His messenger, Ellen White. In this way God will frequently lead us to a solution that is simpler than first imagined, helping us to avoid costly and/or painful interventions. This will also strengthen our family’s faith and allow us to give God the glory. God has given us trained members of our community to provide care along the way. Because this article will only present a few basic guidelines pertaining to the missionary role of the family, we highly encourage all readers to purchase a copy of *The Adventist Home* and consult it regularly, as Ellen White’s counsel will prove an invaluable source of wisdom for meeting trials of many kinds—and emerging from them victorious.¹

Mrs. White assures us that “the Lord is served as much, yea, more, by faithful home work than by the one who teaches the word” (*AH*, 236).

If God designed the family unit as the first training ground to restore harmony between heaven and earth, this is our most important mission field, and our homes will be blessed only to the degree that we are faithful to this calling. In other words, our families will be truly happy only when we put God’s priorities first, educating our children to love Him and obey His written Word. And when we do this daily and painstakingly, our light will begin to shine far beyond our four walls: “The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. As the youth go out from such a home, the lessons they have learned are imparted. Nobler principles of life are introduced into other households, and an uplifting influence works in the community” (*AH*, 31).

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Where have you turned for help when struggling with parenting concerns? What has been the most helpful?

The Family as Mission Center

Although missionary zeal has waned since the great religious awakening that captured the popular imagination in the 1800s and 1900s, it must be revived today and this revival must begin in our homes. “Home religion is fearfully neglected. Men and women show much interest in foreign missions. They give liberally to them and thus seek to satisfy their conscience, thinking that giving to the cause of God will atone for their neglect to set a right example in the home. But the home is their special field, and no excuse is accepted by God for neglecting this field” (*AH*, 318). Many might think that the true man or woman of God is the evangelist who preaches God’s Word to hundreds and thousands, but

Love and Obedience

Faithfulness to our home ministry begins very early, even before our children are born. This is, ideally, when the future parents prepare their minds and bodies to pass on—in the infant’s very DNA—habits and principles that will strengthen their ability to fight on the side of right.² And while children need nutritious food to develop strong physical constitutions, they need the daily nourishment of their parents’ unconditional love and consistent discipline even more. Love, and the boundaries that love places, feeds every aspect of our little ones and forms the spiritual foundation that will encourage them in the ways of heaven. Unfortunately, a love relationship with our children does not come automatically. Notice what Ellen White says, “Parents should study the best and most successful manner of winning the love and confidence of their children, that they may lead them in the right path.” (*AH*, 190). Did you see that? We *must study the best and most successful way to win their love!* Love is the result of concentrated effort and diligent study

to know what will bind our children's hearts to us. In other words, love is a battle that we must fight every day to win! Satan is doing all he can to frustrate us in this struggle, but we must persevere since only by love is love awakened. Although each child's love language is different, the guidelines provided below—drawn from *The Adventist Home*—will prove invaluable in helping us win the love war with our children.³ Because when our children know that we love them and want to make them happy, they will open their hearts to us and be eager to do what pleases us—and, more importantly, what pleases God.

Connection Before Direction

A wise author advises parents that the key to binding their children's hearts is to “connect before they direct.”⁴ This is the same principle that Ellen White advocates: “Parents, let your children see that you love them and will do all in your power to make them happy. If you do so, your necessary restrictions will have far greater weight in their young minds” (*AH*, 193). Before we ask our children to do anything, they should first feel connected to us so that their hearts will be open to receiving direction. This can be easily done with a smile, hug, or warm words of gratitude or encouragement. Connection (love) before direction (discipline) shows our children that our relationship with them matters more to us than their actions. If we direct without love, we will likely need to resort to bribes or threats to achieve the desired behavior, and our children's compliance will be fleeting. But when our first priority is to woo our children into a loving relationship, they will more naturally want to comply with our direction and eventually make it part of their habitual character.

Smiles and Patient Tones

Connection and love bloom easiest when there is sunshine in the home, warm smiles, courteous ways and loving words. God intended that “home 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” (*AH*, 15). Often the tender attentions and encouragements of the early years disappear

by the time our little ones reach two or three years and start getting into mischief. As their curiosity and desire for independence grows, they may enter dangerous zones that elicit from us more words of prohibition than of acceptance and encouragement. After the “terrible twos” some parents may experience the relative lull of compliant childhood before the onslaught of the trying tween and teen years erupts. Yet the older our children are, the more they need our smiles and patient tones.

The foundation of home government begins with knitting hearts together. When our children hear love in our voices and it expressed on our faces they will be drawn to us, “The perception of children is quick, and they discern patient, loving tones from the impatient, passionate command, which dries up the moisture of love and affection in the hearts of children (*AH*, 242). Today more than ever, children are tempted at every turn; if parents are not available to engage them lovingly and encouragingly, their affections will lean on the ubiquitous presence of their peers, technology, or other influences (such as alcohol, drugs, and immorality) that will likely prove disastrous. The only solution is to “kindly instruct them and bind them to your hearts. It is a critical time for children. Influences will be thrown around them to wean them from you which you must counteract. Teach them to make you their confidant. Let them whisper in your ear their trials and joys” (*AH*, 191). And when they open their hearts to us, sharing their temptations and mourning their failures, let us be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to get angry (James 1:19). Instead of reproach, let us show Christ's compassion, loving encouragement and total forgiveness.

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POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What age was the most challenging to be loving with your children? How did you overcome those difficulties?

A United Front

Without a doubt, the most important element necessary for a solid foundation of

loving discipline in the home lies in the union of the parents. If parents want a loving home, it must start with them: “The atmosphere surrounding the souls of fathers and mothers fills the whole house, and is felt in every department of the home. To a large extent parents create the atmosphere of the home circle, and when there is disagreement between father and mother, the children partake of the same spirit. Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness. If you have become estranged and have failed to be Bible Christians, be converted.” (*AH*, 16). Wow! Could it be that the reason our children argue or complain is because they’ve seen it modeled in the home? Let us look soberly inside our own hearts and, with God’s help, make the necessary changes (conversion) in our personal lives and marriages.

Love, as they say, is in the details, in the little thoughtful actions that may at times seem superfluous. Yet here is where smiles and patient tones should begin: “A husband and wife should cultivate respect and affection for each other. They should guard the spirit, the words, and the actions so that nothing will be said or done to irritate or annoy. Each is to have a care for the other, doing all in their power to strengthen their mutual affection” (*AH*, 345). While parents might at times disagree with each other, “the father and mother should never in the presence of their children criticize each other’s plans and judgment” (*AH*, 314). If an issue needs to be addressed in front of the children (for example, if you’re in a car and need to make a quick decision), make sure that your children see you work it out with thoughtful consideration for your spouse. These are incredible teaching moments where your attitude as a couple says more to them than the most eloquent of sermons.

Structure and Discipline

Next, after demonstrating the principle of love and respect for each other, parents, as co-regents in the home, must present a united front before their children in relation to discipline. In other words, mom and dad need to agree about house rules and the consequences for breaking them. Imagine if God’s Word were filled with conflicting messages and instructions, one from the Father, another from Christ, and still

another from the Holy Spirit! Thankfully, the message from the Trinity is always consistent and has been neatly summarized in the Ten Commandments. It must be the same in our homes. Using God’s commandments as a guide, make your rules few and clear: “If parents are united in this work of discipline, the children will understand what is required of them. But if the father, by word or look, shows that he does not approve of the discipline the mother gives; if he feels that she is too strict and thinks that he must make up for the harshness by petting and indulgence, the child will be ruined.” (*AH*, 315). However, “if the father and mother in the love and fear of God unite their interests to have authority in the home, they will see the necessity of much prayer, much sober reflection. And as they seek God, their eyes will be opened to see heavenly messengers present to protect them in answer to the prayer of faith” (*AH*, 315). Isn’t it wonderful that simply being united in prayer will invite the presence of angels into our home to help us lovingly discipline our children?

Dealing with Disobedience

Although God’s ideal for the family is to live in perfect harmony, where each family member conveys, in look and tone, only kindness and respect for one other, the reality is that none of us are angels and we will often fall short of this ideal. Here is where we as parents must be careful not to pull the splinter from our child’s eye while a branch impales our own. For instance, reprimanding a child for not cleaning up his room while our own room or office looks like it was hit by a small tornado, won’t work. Children are extremely perceptive and will note this hypocrisy, which will bar our influence with them. Instead, we could say, “Looks like we both need to put a bit of time into cleaning our spaces, let’s see who can finish first!” Similarly, yelling at our teenager who has lost their patience and hit their sibling won’t work either. Instead, as soon as the Holy Spirit brings our faults before us, we should be quick to note our own shortcomings and confess them to our children. If we yell at our child, rather than excusing ourselves, it is much better to say: “I’m really disappointed in myself and sorry I hurt you. Will you forgive me?” If our children see our humility and contrition, they will more easily acknowledge

their own wrongdoings and candidly confess. In short, while the goal is to lead by a Christ-like example, when we fall from the mark, let's swallow our pride and give our children the example of humility and repentance—and ask for their forgiveness.

After we have attended to the horizontal dimension of confession and forgiveness with each other, it is time to bring our sacrifice of repentance to the Lord. This is one of the primary ways in which we help our families reconnect with our heavenly Father—seeking forgiveness, expressing gratitude and growing in the knowledge of God. All this occurs most effectively in the context of family worship.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

What are some mistakes you have made as a parent? What are ways we can make up to our children when we make mistakes?

Family Worship

The Example of Ancient Israel

A spirited and love-filled family worship is quite possibly the single most important tool in our arsenal to unleash the protection and blessings of God in our families and communities. Looking back at God's actions in history, we note that God's purpose in redeeming the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was that they might share a sanctuary home with Him, where they would learn to worship God correctly and thereby receive His bountiful blessings (Exod. 15: 17; 25:8). In other words, it was through this sanctuary system of worship that the gaping chasm caused by sin and rebellion was to be bridged, each sacrifice foreshadowing the one perfect Lamb who would take away the sin of the world (Isa. 53:7; John 1:29). In this way the earthly sanctuary was a place where the Israelites confessed their sins, praised God, and were taught by the priests to live lives that distinguished between right and wrong (Lev. 10:10). This holy lifestyle would then draw the nations to Israel and to worship the one true God (Deut. 4:5–6).

Morning and Evening Sacrifice

Just as the priest offered the burnt offering—symbolizing the atonement of Christ—once at morning and again at twilight (Exod. 29:39), “morning and evening the father, as priest of the household, should confess to God the sins committed by himself and his children through the day. Those sins which have come to his knowledge and also those which are secret, of which God's eye alone has taken cognizance, should be confessed. This rule of action, zealously carried out by the father when he is present or by the mother when he is absent, will result in blessings to the family” (*AH*, 212).

Here we note at least three elements of family worship: 1) it should be daily, both morning and evening, 2) parents—either the father or mother—must lead out *zealously* and 3) it will result in great blessings to our families. When we sacrifice what seems urgent for what is truly of eternal consequence, God will bless us beyond what we have experienced! These three elements also underscore another crucial point: Worship is non-negotiable.

Worship is Non-Negotiable

Just as the parents in ancient Israel educated their children to appreciate sanctuary worship (Deut. 6:6), we as parents in spiritual Israel must do likewise. Unfortunately, the flurry of activities that assaults families tempts many of us to put family worship on the backburner or engage in it only sporadically, when time permits. Yet notice what Ellen White says, “Family worship should not be governed by circumstances. You are not to pray occasionally and, when you have a large day's work to do, neglect it. In thus doing you lead your children to look upon prayer as of no special consequence.... Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God's altar. Ask for the guardianship of holy angels in your home. Remember that your dear ones are exposed to temptations” (*Child Guidance*, 520). Here we see that family worship doesn't just bring us closer to God, it literally brings the physical protection of angels to our families, shielding us not only from physical harm, but also from temptation! Neglecting family worship would be like heading out in the car for a family trip

without bothering to buckle our seatbelts, or going out in a boat without life preservers—unthinkable!

Make it Short and Sweet

A final word about family worship: shorter is often sweeter. “Let the seasons of family worship be short and spirited. Do not let your children or any member of your family dread them because of their tediousness or lack of interest. When a long chapter is read and explained and a long prayer offered, this precious service becomes wearisome, and it is a relief when it is over” (*CG*, 521). The goal is to direct the mind to God in praise, gratitude and prayers for forgiveness and blessings. Tailor the content and length of your worships to the age and attention span of your children. If your child has a hard time sitting still, let them color, draw or do a nature puzzle while listening to the reading. Regarding length, follow the lead of your child, some children love to have Bible stories read to them and ask for more, while others (especially during the tween and teen years) may be in a rush with homework or other tasks. While brevity is often key during the week, Sabbaths are a special time for worshipping God; as such, more time should be devoted to Bible readings and spiritual discussions. Family worship on Sabbath should be the sweetest not only because we have spiritual and physical refreshment during those hours, but because we can often worship in our homes with extended family members and friends. This is indeed a little foretaste of heaven!

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Share some family worship ideas.

Working for Eternal Rewards

We have seen that our mission as parents is to lead our children, day by day, to love and serve Christ. But that is much easier said than done. As a mother, Ellen White keenly sensed the responsibility of her divine appointment against the many shortcomings in her boys, of whom she had four.⁵ Most likely speaking from her own experience she advises parents to persevere

in prayer, looking in faith for the eternal reward, “Parents should labor with reference to the future harvest. While they sow in tears, amid many discouragements, it should be with earnest prayer. They may see the promise of but a late and scanty harvest, yet that should not prevent the sowing. They should sow beside all waters, embracing every opportunity both to improve themselves and to benefit their children. Such seed sowing will not be in vain. At the harvest time many faithful parents will return with joy, bringing their sheaves with them” (*AH*, 533).

On the flip side she warns, “Parents who have neglected their God-given responsibilities must meet that neglect in the judgment. The Lord will then inquire, “Where are the children that I gave you to train for Me? Why are they not at My right hand?” Many parents will then see that unwise love blinded their eyes to their children’s faults and left those children to develop deformed characters unfit for heaven. Others will see that they did not give their children time and attention, love and tenderness; their own neglect of duty made the children what they are.” (*CG*, 561).

Thankfully, while there is life there is hope! If we have been negligent as parents, let us acknowledge this candidly, confess it, and move on in faith. Today is the day of our salvation! As Ellen White stated, our prayers for wisdom to lead our children in the ways of heaven will elicit the help of angels! Let us live each day—and teach our children to live each day—with our eyes fixed on the prize of an eternity with Jesus. This earth is not our home, we are pilgrims here, but even though our time here is transitory it is of eternal value. Let us therefore make the most of each opportunity, making decisions that will honor God and bless our families.

Enjoying the Journey with our Heavenly Father

While the work of parents is a demanding, twenty-four seven job, we should never be discouraged because God has not left us alone to do the work! The assurance He gave Joshua, as leader of the family of Israel, is the same He gives

to parents of spiritual Israel today: “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). Let us always remember that our children belong first and foremost to the Lord, which means He is infinitely more concerned with their present and eternal wellbeing than the most devoted of parents among us. “The God of heaven marks your solicitude, your earnest work, your constant watchfulness. He hears your prayers. With patience and tenderness train your children for the Lord. *All heaven is interested in your work.... God will unite with you, crowning your efforts with success*” (AH, 205, emphasis supplied).

While we will certainly see some fruit of our efforts this side of heaven, we will never know the full extent of our success till we get to heaven. “The work of wise parents will never be appreciated by the world, but when the judgement shall sit and the books shall be opened, their work will appear as God views it and will be rewarded before men and angels. It will be seen that one child who has been brought up in a faithful way has been a light in the world. It cost tears and anxiety and sleepless nights to oversee the character building of this child, but the work was done wisely, and the parents hear the “Well done” of the Master” (AH, 536). What a wonderful encouragement! Let us remember to make this mission to our family—to bring up our children to love and obediently serve their Creator—our top priority. It won’t be easy, but with God on our side we can enjoy the journey, trusting that He is guiding us and blessing every effort, answering every prayer. Let us remember that “one well-ordered, well-disciplined family tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached” (AH, 32). If this is so, then let us preach to the world through our families. And perhaps, by God’s grace, when we get to heaven we may see that our faithful home lives have not only helped to redeem our own children, but also influenced the eternal destinies of countless others. With this goal in mind, let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our family’s faith.

POSSIBLE DISCUSSION QUESTION:

How can we support one another in our spiritual journey as parents? What can help us persevere?

Notes

- ¹ Two other books we highly recommend for families are *Child Guidance and Messages to Young People*. These and other Ellen White books are available for free through the EGW app (reading) and in audio version through ellenwhiteaudio.org.
- ² It has only been recently (the last decade) that health professionals have begun to counsel moms—and dads—to go through pre-pregnancy detoxes, which include both physical, mental and spiritual cleansing. If you google, “pregnancy detox” you will get nearly 6,000 results, if you google “mental and spiritual detox for pregnancy” the results are nearly 3,000,000! Even though science is only now proving how intricately the parent’s pre-pregnancy mindset and lifestyle affect the lifelong health of their baby, over 150 years ago Ellen White was already advising mothers to pay close attention to their physical and spiritual health before conceiving, as the law of heredity meant that their offspring would necessarily carry the results of these choices. See chapter 43, “Prenatal Influences,” in *The Adventist Home*.
- ³ Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell have noted five basic love languages in children: 1) physical affection, 2) words of affirmation, 3) quality time, 4) gifts and 5) acts of service. They also help parents to discover their child’s primary love language to more effectively reach their hearts. See *The 5 Love Languages of Children* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2012).
- ⁴ Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold On to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More Than Peers* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2005).
- ⁵ Sadly, only two of Ellen White’s sons lived to adulthood—James Edson and William Clarence (Willie). John Herbert died at three months and the Henry Nichols died when he was sixteen years old, of pneumonia.

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

Lives Filled with Possibilities: What Special Needs Ministries is Teaching Me About Myself and My Family

LARRY R EVANS

My hosts had arranged for me to visit a small vocational school near Maseru, Lesotho. I planned to walk around the campus and if possible have a short visit with the school's administrator. The campus was small, neat, clean, and the brick huts had been arranged to resemble an African village. I walked to the administrator's office.

I should not have been surprised but I was. Not because the administrator was a woman but because she was seated in a wheelchair. *Very fitting*, I thought, *for a school for the "disabled."* After meeting her she led me to the room where the students were gathered to hear me speak to them! This was unexpected. I had nothing planned. Since this was not a religious school I decided I would avoid mentioning God or anything religious. I tried to speak, but to my surprise I stuttered and stammered. Words that would normally flow rather easily did not. I gave up and started over.

"Hello, my name is Larry Evans. I am a Seventh-day Adventist minister and I have come to tell you that not only does God love you but that you are created in His image—even if you can't see, hear, or walk!" *There, I said it*, I thought to myself. A strange hush came

across that small group of students. A young boy who was deaf, about 14 years old, stood and in sign language spoke to me through his interpreter. "I went to church for the first time on Sunday," he proudly proclaimed. "How did it go?" I asked. His enthusiasm abated.

"They told me they had nothing for me."

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"I came back here," he motioned. This was not what I expected, not what I wanted to hear. Hoping there was more to the story, I asked, "So, you went to church to learn about Jesus, and they had nothing for you?" "Yes," he said and then sat down. I then realized why only two percent of the deaf in the world are Christians (Bob Ayres, *Deaf Diaspora: The Third Wave of Deaf Ministry*, p.45.)

To add insult to injury, an older teenager stood and spoke in perfect English, "I . . . I . . . I want to thank . . ." She could not finish. Sobbing almost uncontrollably she sat down and covered her head and cried. I walked to her and gently placed my hand on her shoulder, but she continued to weep. I could not understand what had just happened. What caused my loss of words, and then suddenly became fluent when I spoke about God's plan for each one of them, and then the hush that came over the room?

Larry R Evans, DMin, is Assistant to the President for Special Needs Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Springs, Maryland, USA.

Why was a boy who was deaf seeking Jesus turned away from church? And that beautiful teenage girl—what would cause her to break down and cry? Something had just taken place that baffled me! When the meeting was over I walked out with the administrator. She turned to me and said, “We almost didn’t let you come.” I asked what I had done! I wondered if I had had violated some cultural taboo. She explained, “The last religious group that came here believed that anyone who has a ‘disability’ has a demon.” They had come here, to the school, to cast out demons. I, on the other hand, had come to share a growing conviction that every child in that assembly room was created in the image of God even if they couldn’t see, hear, or walk! A simple request to visit with those with special needs in the area led me to that small school in southern Africa. The consequences have been far reaching. What I experienced that day troubled me then and it still does.

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I carry with me the strong belief that we are all broken in some way. Sometimes that brokenness is visible and sometimes it is not. I have come to see that regardless of the kind of brokenness we have, we all share much in common. From this realization a common bond is developed. We are equally indebted to God for having been created in His image. In that classroom, I experienced an important truth: “Our mission must be more focused on possibilities than disabilities!” It is a mission that can fill the most rejected and discouraged person with hope.

Working among those with special needs has reemphasized a universal principle—families can thrive again if possibilities are given more attention than what may be wrong. The deaf, the blind, the lame have a new lease on life when others see beyond a disability to their possibilities. The same can be true of families. By God’s grace families can be changed and their influence can make a marked difference in others who have no families. Brokenness surrounds all of us but together we can make a difference. Hope must not be abandoned. Indeed, Malachi reminds us that what once seemed impossible, becomes possible: “And

he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their father” (Mal. 4:5). No doubt, hindrances will arise to block or discredit hope. The Church, however, has been commissioned to remove whatever blocks access to this hope.

A Prophetic Mission

John the Baptist, and our generation as well, has inherited the message and ministry of Isaiah. Like Isaiah, John saw the necessity to “prepare the way for the Lord” (Isa. 40:3; Matt. 3:3). His calling, and ours, is to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of anyone receiving the Lord. Some paths need to be straightened and some mountains need to be leveled if those who feel like outcasts are ever to “hear or see” the goodness of God. Dare we tell anyone “we have nothing for you!” We have been called to remove barriers that hinder the possibilities God has provided for each person. We sometimes don’t realize what constitutes a mountain or an obstacle for those who have physical, mental or emotional challenges. Ellen White, however, was not shy about addressing our responsibility.

I HAVE BEEN SHOWN SOME THINGS IN REFERENCE TO OUR DUTY TO THE UNFORTUNATE WHICH I FEEL IT MY DUTY TO WRITE AT THIS TIME. I SAW THAT IT IS IN THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD THAT WIDOWS AND ORPHANS, THE BLIND, THE DEAF, THE LAME, AND PERSONS AFFLICTED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS, HAVE BEEN PLACED IN CLOSE CHRISTIAN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS CHURCH; IT IS TO PROVE HIS PEOPLE AND DEVELOP THEIR TRUE CHARACTER. ANGELS OF GOD ARE WATCHING TO SEE HOW WE TREAT THESE PERSONS [EMPHASIS MINE] WHO NEED OUR SYMPATHY, LOVE, AND DISINTERESTED BENEVOLENCE. THIS IS GOD’S TEST OF OUR CHARACTER [EMPHASIS MINE]. IF WE HAVE THE TRUE RELIGION OF THE BIBLE WE SHALL FEEL THAT A DEBT OF LOVE, KINDNESS, AND INTEREST IS DUE TO CHRIST IN BEHALF OF HIS BRETHREN; AND WE CAN DO NO LESS THAN TO SHOW OUR GRATITUDE

FOR HIS IMMEASURABLE LOVE TO US
WHILE WE WERE SINNERS UNWORTHY OF
HIS GRACE, BY HAVING A DEEP INTEREST
AND UNSELFISH LOVE FOR THOSE WHO
ARE OUR BRETHREN AND WHO ARE LESS
FORTUNATE THAN OURSELVES
ELLEN G. WHITE, *TESTIMONIES FOR THE
CHURCH*, VOL. 3, P. 511)

With these insights in mind, consider the conviction offered by psychiatrist Dr. Stephen Grcevich. Though he is speaking of mental health ministry, it applies to all those named above. “The work that God has placed before us has the potential to impact millions of individuals and families who have all too frequently been excluded from local churches. Together we can make a difference.”

After I left that classroom, the experience of the boy who was deaf stayed with me. The sound of weeping of the teenage girl has not been silenced. That night I wrestled with the thought, *How many more like him and her are facing obstacles at the very place where God wants to rebuild hope and assurance of His love?* Of course, what bothered me most was the question, what could I do about it?

Since then I have spoken with scores of parents whose children are autistic, blind individuals pleading to have a part in the mission of the church; and orphaned children who are eager to have a sense of belonging. It then hit me that if I, with all my faults, can feel for these children, parents, and hurting families, how much more Jesus must feel with them in their times of painful-disappointment. One thing is clear, He has not abandoned them. He desires us to live as He lived. It seemed that the words of Ernest Hemingway rang very true in my own heart, “The world breaks everyone and afterwards many are strong at the broken places” (Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, quoted in *Broken in the Right Place* by Alan E. Nelson, p. 9).

What Can Leaders Do?

Special Needs Ministry is not merely a call to sympathy, although it cares deeply for those

facing multiple challenges. It is a ministry that sees potential and possibilities in others. It is driven by the question: What can we do that will make a difference in the lives of those who are so often marginalized? Many who have lost a sense of meaning and personal identity can discover a new hope and a new life, but where do we start?

To begin, we suggest a simple “3-A Strategy” that focuses on Awareness, Acceptance and Action. Developing an awareness of the needs and opportunities changes the way we see others. Learning to recognize the mountains and valleys that those with special needs face every day is an important first step. Becoming aware how little unintentional words and gestures often lead some to feel excluded and rejected.

The concept behind *acceptance* is much more than having a name on a membership list. Those with special needs must be included in the various activities of the church and their often-suppressed talents are sought to help in carrying out its mission. True acceptance happens when a person feels like they belong—not just included! When it comes to developing action plans, Colleen Swindoll-Thompson says it well: “If you want to change the world, begin with those who are hurting, and watch God’s magnificent work begin to unfold in and around you.” (Colleen Swindoll-Thompson, Foreword to *Mental Health and the Church* by Stephen Grcevich, MD, p. 12.)

Be Willing to Be Remade

Ministry for those with special needs will change the leader from inside out. “Recognizing” in diseases like cerebral palsy that there is a real person inside a body that progressively loses its ability to respond changes the life of the leader. “Listening” to a person who is deaf speak with her eyes, her face, her hands without ever speaking an audible word opens the heart to a new kind of understanding. The independence of the blind as they navigate from place to place is profoundly humbling. Whatever encounter takes place, we stand in awe at what we once

thought we knew about others and ourselves. We grasp more fully our own limitations and shortcomings toward those we thought we had accepted. We have become learners at the feet of those who are so often looked down upon. I am reminded of the words of C.S. Lewis:

WHEN I INVITED JESUS INTO MY LIFE,
I THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO PUT UP
SOME WALLPAPER AND HANG A FEW
PICTURES. BUT HE STARTED KNOCKING
OUT THE WALLS AND ADDING ON
ROOMS. I SAID, 'I WAS EXPECTING A NICE
COTTAGE.' BUT HE SAID, 'I'M MAKING A
PLACE IN WHICH TO LIVE.'

C.S. LEWIS, QUOTED IN *BROKEN IN THE
RIGHT PLACE* BY ALAN E. NELSON, P. 19.

Much is being said today about the need for a true revival and reformation in God's church, as it should be. It can begin here with those so often ignored or, in some cases, shunned. Perhaps that is why we have been reminded that God has placed those with special needs within the reach of the church. They become a reminder that the Holy Spirit is an entity and not merely a quantity. We don't receive more of the Holy Spirit but as He lives in us, it becomes

evident that God has taken residence in us. In this ministry, it becomes clear that angels are not only watching, but are guiding, teaching, and changing "us." When that happens, we begin to see possibilities everywhere! It is no longer a "us and them."

We need each other. Together we are one. "Disabilities" become "possibilities" and gradually the perception of our world begins to change in them and in the leader. We see differently, hear differently, and even walk with a new kind of awareness. Life has a new meaning and expectant hope abounds.

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The Beauty of Marriage

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Bible opens and closes with marriage.¹ Genesis presents marriage as the first institution established by God at creation while the last chapters of Revelation use marriage as a metaphor to portray the relationship between Christ and His people. Significantly, marriage is uniquely positioned at the end of the creation week to underscore God's ideal for the human race.² After six days of calling into existence that which made earth a livable place, God punctuates His creative genius by forming Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve, from a rib of Adam's side, as a complement and partner for life. To be sure, marriage is the foundational human relationship God gifted humanity with as the locus for developing and keeping a meaningful connection with Him.³

The Beauty of Marriage

On August 26, 2014 we celebrated thirty years of marriage. *Celebrated* is an accurate and suitable description for the emotional, spiritual, physical, and intellectual pursuits we have engaged in with each other for three decades. Similar to most marriages, our marriage has not been all fun and games. We have endured our share of trials and challenges. However, in life every challenge presents an

opportunity for growth, and in marriage it is a call to deeper knowing and understanding of each other. As such, our lives together have been an extraordinary and satisfying experience we would do all over again if presented with the opportunity to do so. Our marriage has been a place where we have found the most emotional support, connection, and safety.

When we stood before the minister on our wedding day—on a bright and sunny Sunday afternoon at the Village Church in South Lancaster, Massachusetts—repeating vows to stay together “till death do us part,” we had no idea how difficult it would be to keep those vows. The words were easy to say, especially in the midst of a cascade of emotions, camera lights flashing, and the beaming faces of family and friends. At the same time, nothing we had experienced before could have prepared us for the amazingly rewarding life we have shared since as husband and wife.

Perhaps the best example of this almost contradiction is sailing. For our thirtieth anniversary, we escaped from our daily cares for a Caribbean getaway. As our vacation began, we decided to take advantage of the free sailing lesson offered at our hotel. Other than a brief, unpleasant experience of sailing at summer camp that I (Elaine) had, our favorite sailing ventures involved watching the sailboats gliding effortlessly across the Chesapeake Bay in Annapolis or in other seaports we've visited.

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, MA, LGPC, CFLE are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

However, as soon as our lesson began, we realized there was much more to sailing than what appeared on the surface.

It was at once both stressful and relaxing, challenging and rewarding. We quickly realized we would need to work as a team and be on the same side of the catamaran, if we were to experience the joy of gliding smoothly across the beautiful turquoise Caribbean waters. We learned the most important phrase in our sailing lesson: Turn toward the wind. In sailing, it is very important to know the direction of the wind. Knowing where the wind is blowing is critical because in order to depower the sails one has to turn toward the wind. At first, this instruction seemed counterproductive to our need to slow down the boat and turn it in another direction. For those who understand aerodynamics, it probably makes a lot of sense! And indeed, turning toward the wind worked every single time we needed to slow down and turn in another direction.

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Inevitably, storms will arise in marriage—some small, others large—but when they do, together, as a couple, we can and must choose to turn toward the wind if we are going to experience longevity and true joy. Turning toward the wind is like turning toward God when we are facing various challenges, and allowing Him to calm our fears and push us back on course.

In marriage, we have the opportunity to reflect God's image and glory as we relate to each other every day. Marriage requires sacrifice and commitment, much like our relationship with God. Without the struggles, nevertheless, couples will never experience the full splendor and beauty of marriage God intended in Eden and still wants us to have. It would be like saying we have faith in God but never having our faith tested or giving faith an opportunity to grow as a muscle that gets strengthened only when given the chance to be exerted.

Too many people today enter marriage with an individualistic notion of personal fulfillment rather than focusing on relationship fulfillment. While in healthy marriages couples need to

strike a balance between both, there must be a sustained and intentional consciousness of otherness as a part of our daily reality. There is no other way to survive and thrive in such a close and intimate relationship such as marriage, without adopting a perspective that includes the feelings and opinions of others, at the very least the feelings and opinions of the person we have chosen as our spouse. Perhaps looking at marriage as if one were a part of conjoined twins helps to illuminate this perspective. In some cases they share a heart, head, leg, and other vital organs. While each one has a distinct personality and identity, there has to be a negotiation and accommodation of the other to be able to survive and thrive each day.

We strongly urge couples to participate in a rigorous premarital education program with a qualified facilitator. In fact, we recommend doing this prior to an engagement because doing so afterwards makes it difficult to benefit from the process as wedding plans are established. Most couples are reticent to make changes once a wedding date is set. Premarital education or counseling allows people to gain a viewpoint that goes beyond personal needs and enter into the world of the other person; couples also learn skills that will enhance their future marriage. It is like taking driver's education before taking a driving test to become a licensed automobile operator; people planning to be married should do themselves and their future mate a favor by committing to pre-marital education in order to be better acquainted with the complex process of being united to another human being in holy matrimony.

For those who have married without the benefit of premarital education and couples in general, participating in a marriage enrichment retreat annually will boost their marital relationship. Marriage enrichment is like taking your car to a mechanic for service at regular intervals, rather than waiting until your car breaks down to get it to a mechanic. Wanting a car that is reliable and in good running shape when we need to get to work or to run errands is no different than wanting a marriage that

works at an optimum. For the real beauty of marriage to be experienced on a regular basis, married couples must be intentional about connecting with their spouse each day through the power of God, which is the only medium that can provide peace (John 14:27) and the assurance of success (Phil 4:13).

The declarations of God and Adam when God created Eve and united the couple illustrate the deep closeness marriage was intended to be. In Genesis 2:23 we sense the ethos and emotion in Adam's voice: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23). And in the following verse God makes abundantly clear what will transpire in the process of a man and a woman becoming married: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

God created marriage. As such, God implanted in each of us a deep desire for intimacy, first with Him, then with another human being (Gen 2:18). This form of intimacy transcends physical closeness, as many often think when defining its reality. Contemporary studies on the human condition concur that one of the greatest needs of human beings is knowing another deeply and being known deeply. As we see it, the only relationship that has that level of trust is found in marriage. Intimacy in marriage is deepened when we remain faithful to commitments made—beginning with our wedding vows—and requires significant compromises and sacrifices. It breeds a familiarity that is so profound; it requires consistent integration of our emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and our physical selves.

In our experience, there is no way to remain true and faithful in a spiritually directed venture like marriage, without relying on the power and grace of the same God who brought us together and joined us in holy matrimony for life. We decided from the very beginning of our marriage that divorce will not be an option for us. Because marriage is so incredibly challenging

and difficult, considering divorce as a viable option would lead almost every couple to take it as a way out of the misery often experienced when we fail to rely on the resources—patience, kindness, grace, forgiveness, power (1 Cor 13:4)—God offers us every day for our health and our good. The Bible is replete with relational directives (Jas 1:19; Rom 12:18; Eph 5:21; Prov 5:18; 1 Pet 3:7) that, if followed, will allow married couples to experience the joy and beauty of marriage and their marriage to serve as a blessing to others.

Even though God's grace and forgiveness are available to those who have gone through divorce (with or without biblical grounds), God makes it clear that He hates divorce (Mal 2:16). While God works with His people because of the hardness of their hearts (Deut 24:1–4; Matt 19:8), divorce had never been a part of His plan from the beginning when He instituted marriage. To be sure, marriage is to be a symbol (Eph 5:24–26) of the enduring love Christ has for the church.

Unfortunately, the permanence of marriage has been trampled on by the prevalent focus today's society places on self and prosperity. Invariably, people entering marriage today are more concerned with what they can get out of marriage rather than what they can contribute to their relationship. With divorce rates at about 50% for first-time marriages, there is a growing cynicism about whether it is possible for a couple to have a marriage that lasts a lifetime.

We declare categorically that marriage is for long-term investors, the kind willing to patiently wait to see growth in their accounts. Experienced long-term investors do not panic when there are sharp declines in the financial indicators; they do not gamble for a quick return. The long-term investor makes wise decisions that will yield strong positive returns over the long haul. When we employ patience and kindness as a consistent strategy in our relationship, we will reap positive returns. Like financial investors who are patient and make sound decisions, commitment and effort in marriage will reap

the benefits of a relationship where there is understanding, empathy, and love.

We can truly say that the return on our investment has far exceeded the expectations we had when we stood at the altar more than three decades ago, and it continues to grow and mature each day through the power and grace of Jesus Christ. We have experienced our share of ups and downs that are normative in every marriage relationship: the joy of celebrating anniversaries; the exhilarating miracle of giving birth to our two children; the pain of experiencing two miscarriages; the frustration of thinking *zig* when the other is thinking *zag*; the pride of watching our children perform at piano and violin recitals and graduate from grade school, academy, and university; the pain of losing a parent or grandparent; the joy of having the other to lean on during these difficult times; challenging work schedules; personal, physical, and emotional changes that are a natural result of the aging process; and the peace that we both believe and trust in the same God. Through it all, we have become *soulmates*—we are truly intimate allies.

Conclusion

On a recent trip to Corinth—a sixty-minute drive from Athens, Greece—we developed a greater understanding of the lifestyle of the ancient Corinthians with all their debauchery, decadence, and sexual immoralities. A principal reason why the Apostle Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians became much clearer to us. Paul wanted to share with the Corinthians—and future students of the New Testament—what true love is all about, in contrast to the detestable pseudo love rampant in the prostitution that took place in the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of the Corinthians.

What we now understand much better—and are still learning every day—is that the love that is needed for a lasting and satisfying marriage is *agapē* love. The unconditional love that Paul so eloquently expresses (1 Cor 13:4–7, MSG) and only God can give.

We like the idiomatic translation found in Eugene Peterson's *The Message*:

LOVE NEVER GIVES UP,
LOVE CARES MORE FOR OTHERS THAN
FOR SELF,
LOVE DOESN'T WANT WHAT IT DOESN'T
HAVE,
LOVE DOESN'T STRUT,
DOESN'T HAVE A SWELLED HEAD,
DOESN'T FORCE ITSELF ON OTHERS,
ISN'T ALWAYS "ME FIRST,"
DOESN'T FLY OFF THE HANDLE,
DOESN'T KEEP SCORE OF THE SINS OF
OTHERS,
DOESN'T REVEL WHEN OTHERS GROVEL,
TAKES PLEASURE IN THE FLOWERING
OF THE TRUTH,
PUTS UP WITH ANYTHING,
TRUSTS GOD ALWAYS,
ALWAYS LOOKS FOR THE BEST,
NEVER LOOKS BACK,
BUT KEEPS GOING TO THE END.⁴

To be sure, God is love (1 John 4:8). The love that flows from the essence of God is truth, grace, kindness, forgiveness, humility, compassion, understanding, and much more—and it is unconditional. This is the kind of love that God intended when He gave the gift of marriage to the human family.

Let's go back to the beginning: creation. After God created the man and the woman, He gave a critical instruction for sustaining a life-long marriage. "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall hold fast to his wife and they shall be one flesh." (Gen 2:24, ESV). In this instruction, there is first, a directive to leave behind our attachment to parents/family and form a new attachment to our spouse, which then forms a oneness. This new oneness is no longer "I" but "We," and it is so intimately tied, that to separate this union would deeply wound both individual parts.

This is the beauty of marriage: knowing and being known; loving and being loved; being happy when the other is happy; feeling sad when the other is sad; holding hands just because; sharing a tender kiss on the cheek;

getting excited that it could be more; feeling at peace if it is not; waking up tomorrow, and doing it all over again.

May these deliberations reignite in everyone God's original and blessed intent for marriage. Despite the brokenness of sin, which we have all experienced, with God's help we can make of our marriages a little heaven on earth. More than hope so, we pray so.

Maranatha!

Notes

¹ In the words of the Welsh Christian minister Selwyn Hughes, "[t]he Bible opens and closes with a wedding." Quoted in Mark Water, *The New Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations* (Alresford, Hampshire, England: John Hunt, 2000), 659.

² "Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian, a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse and should be entered into only between partners who share a common faith." *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... : A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press), 329.

³ "Instituted by God, marriage is a sacred ordinance and should never be entered upon in a spirit of selfishness. Those who contemplate this step should solemnly and prayerfully consider its importance and seek divine counsel that they may know whether they are pursuing a course in harmony with the will of God." Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 70.

⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 1 Cor 13:3–7.

In the Spirit and Power of Elijah

JOHN AND MILLIE YOUNGBERG

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

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

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

John Youngberg, PhD, and **Millie Youngberg†**, PhD retired Professors Emeriti of Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI, USA..

Like the prophecy of Matthew 24, the Elijah-message prophecy has a double application. The work of John in preparing the way for the first advent foreshadowed a larger work that will prepare people for the Second Advent.

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

"IN THIS TIME OF WELL-NIGH UNIVERSAL APOSTASY, GOD CALLS UPON HIS MESSENGERS TO PROCLAIM HIS LAW IN THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIAS. AS JOHN THE BAPTIST, IN PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR CHRIST'S FIRST ADVENT, CALLED THEIR ATTENTION TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, SO WE ARE TO GIVE, WITH NO UNCERTAIN SOUND, THE MESSAGE: 'FEAR GOD, AND GIVE GLORY TO HIM; FOR THE HOUR OF HIS JUDGMENT IS COME.' WITH THE EARNESTNESS THAT CHARACTERIZED ELIJAH THE PROPHET AND JOHN THE BAPTIST, WE ARE TO STRIVE TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR CHRIST'S SECOND ADVENT."—THE SDA BIBLE COMMENTARY, ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS, ON MAL. 4:5, 6, P. 1184.

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

The work of the church today

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Prayer and the last-day message

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

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

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

When announcing the birth of John the Baptist, Gabriel said: “Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children” (Luke 1:16,17).

Under the first angel’s message, shortly before 1844, “the hearts of parents were

turned to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents. The barriers of pride and reserve were swept away. Heartfelt confessions were made, and the members of the household labored for the salvation of those who were nearest and dearest.”—*The Story of Redemption*, p. 359.

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

Reuniting estranged hearts

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

John the Baptist’s message spelled out practical religion that met people’s needs. To the crowd he said, “The man who has two shirts must share with the man who has none, and the man who has food must do the same” (Luke 3:11, Phillips).

Children of today will be predisposed to accept their parents’ concern for them as

they perceive that their father and mother are meeting their basic physical and emotional needs.

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

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

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

There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. As God’s remnant people, let us join in a correct relationship with God and with our families and thus “prepare... the way of the Lord” (Isa. 40:3).

†Died April 7, 2018

Youngberg, J. and Youngberg, M. (1978). In the Spirit and Power of Elijah, *Adventist Review* (pp. 10-12). Silver Springs, MD: Pacific Press. (Adapted with permission from “In the Spirit and Power of Elijah”, 1987, *Adventist Magazine*, (pp. 10-12).

REPRINTED ARTICLES

How Your Marriage Can Be Transformed By An Attentive Ear

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: My wife is a difficult woman. We have been married for almost 15 years and instead of getting easier, our relationship is getting more challenging. By now I expected that my wife would have been more in tune with my likes and dislikes, and would have adjusted accordingly. However, every day feels like we are back to square one, and I am getting tired of this silly and very uninspiring routine. It is so much easier to stay at work later and later so I don't have to deal with her constant negative attitude. I am not sure how much more of this undesirable life I can endure. Please share your advice with me so I can help my wife change and start being a more positive person. I thought that marrying a Christian like me would have made my life easier. However, our marriage is not better than our neighbors who don't even go to church. Help!

A: We are very sorry to hear about your marriage predicament. Marriage was instituted by God to be a blessing, and to provide companionship and support to both men and women (Genesis 2:18,24). However, the opposite tends to occur in this fast-paced society of ours where husbands and wives pass each other every day like ships in the night.

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, MA, LGPC, CFLE are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

One of the most prominent concerns in every marriage is managing differences that are often overlooked prior to marriage, but become very obvious once a couple gets into the nuts and bolts of married life. What you have described about your marriage relationship is pretty consistent with what happens in most marriages. The key to turning things around, however, is based on the choices one makes in response to whatever one's spouse is doing or saying.

As a Christian man, you know that the Bible states the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This means that the husband should be the leader in the home. Being the leader means the husband carries the principal responsibility of the smooth running of the home. Based on what is happening in your marriage, we encourage you to ask yourself how this applies to you. What can you do to address the situation with your wife based on Christ's example with the church? Throughout Scripture, the patience, love, kindness, and forgiveness shown by Christ to a church that doesn't deserve such a response is inescapable, and husbands are commanded to do the same in their homes.

Ephesians 5:25,28 states: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." Romans

5:8 declares: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us (the church), in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. “These pronouncements give clear evidence that Christ’s response to us, as sinners, is forgiveness and love, even while we are still in our state of rebellion. And husbands are called to do the same with their wives.

We find it remarkable that social scientific research is in agreement with the Bible on what a husband can do in his relationship with his wife. John Gottman, currently one of the leading marriage researchers in the world, in one of his recent publications¹ suggests that women need to feel respected, heard, and connected to the men in their lives, and for this to take place, a man needs to be in tune with his wife, a concept Gottman refers to as attunement.

Essentially, Gottman suggests, a man’s relationship with his wife would completely change if he did the following:

- Give her his complete attention when she’s talking to him.

- Physically turn toward her when she is speaking to him.
- Show genuine interest in what she is saying by asking questions to make sure he understands what she is saying.
- Listens nondefensively even if he doesn’t agree with what she is saying
- Shows empathy and compassion for what she said.

By doing what the Bible and social science is suggesting above, we believe your relationship with your wife will be transformed into the marriage you desire. After all 1 John 4:18 says: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...” And Mark 10:27 says: “...for with God all things are possible.”

Ask God to help you love your wife like He loves the church, and trust Him to keep His promises. You will continue in our prayers

Notes

- ¹ Gottman, John, *The Man’s Guide to Women* (New York, NY: Rodale 2016)

Where Is the Love? Even Good Marriages Face Challenges, So It's Best to Give Your Spouse the Benefit of the Doubt

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: My husband and I have been married for almost 30 years and we have had, praise God, a pretty good relationship throughout our marriage. Now that we are in our mid-fifties, all of the sudden my husband seems uninterested in being sexually intimate with me. Sometimes an entire month goes by and he seems to be just fine without any action. During our 30's and 40's I could hardly keep up with him. In fact, sometimes his appetite was simply too much for me. Now that our children are mostly gone, and we have the house to ourselves, he is wimping out on me. Is this normal? Is he having an affair? Am I no longer attractive to him? What should I think and what should I do?

A: Married life has a way of being unpredictable. When you finally begin to think you have your spouse all figured out and are ready to ride into the sunset coasting all the way, an unexpected wrinkle appears in your relationship.

What we know about good marriage relationships all over the world is that almost every concern can be solved if you have learned how to communicate well as a couple. While we can try to guess what is going on with your husband, after 30 years of a great marriage,

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Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, MA, LGPC, CFLE are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

you've obviously learned how to talk to each other. This kept the relationship healthy and going strong. So, talk to your husband and ask him the questions you need answered.

Now, we detect some anxiety in you toward your husband. Therefore, we would suggest that you change your self-talk and approach your husband as the friend you have been for all these years. Avoid accusing him of anything sinister or using language that will make him defensive. In fact, choosing the right time to have this conversation is as crucial as the conversation. Perhaps during the weekend when you both have more down time might be the best time.

Approach the conversation in a casual way, as part of your everyday conversation. Express what you have noticed and what you would like to know, rather than indicting him of anything. Also, use "I" messages, rather than "You" messages. This simple technique will help protect your conversation and keep both of you talking without escalating into a big argument.

Here's an example of what you can say to your husband: "Hey baby, I've noticed during the last few months that I haven't had the closeness with you that I've been used to during most of our marriage. From my vantage point I've made myself available to you. However, I feel that there has been no follow-up from

your side. And, behavior from me that in the past would have received a romantic physical response from you, it seems to me these days, goes unanswered. Is there anything you would like to share with me to help me understand what is going on with you? Regardless of what's going on, I want you to know that I am here for you, and want to assure you that I believe we can work out anything together for the good of our marriage."

This kind of non-threatening conversation with your husband should assure him of your unconditional love, and willingness to hear him, and empathize with him. Subsequently, without pressuring him, allow him to take his time and share with you what he believes is going on with him, and how what is happening or not happening is affecting your relationship.

By the way, in your question you mentioned that you and your husband are in your mid-fifties, which makes the question you have posed a very plausible one at this stage of your

marriage. It isn't unusual for sexual activity among married couples of your age to begin to slow down a bit. Of course, this doesn't mean that your sexual life is over. However, as you speak with your husband openly about what you have experienced lately in your marriage, it may also be necessary to involve your primary care physician for help, as well as simply accept that with the aging process you will need to adjust to a new normal.

Despite what we've just shared above, we encourage you to have the non-judgmental conversation with your husband that we mentioned earlier. Despite the fact that the best marriages are never without challenges, it is important to always give your good marriage the benefit of the doubt.

Ask God to help you with the right attitude and words to speak with your husband. After all, He has promised that if you ask, it will be given to you (Matthew 7:7). You and your husband are also in our prayers.

This Marriage Is Ruining My Spiritual Life: Can I Get Out? God's Regard for Your Marriage and the Powerful Good It Can Do

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: If my marriage is making me unrighteous instead of righteous, what should I do?

A: Thank you for your direct question. We wish we had more background to the question you are asking so we could be more directly aligned with your concerns. However, we will trust God to lead us to an answer that will help you and others who want to live in His will.

Because you associated the question about the unrighteousness you are experiencing to your marriage, someone may think the obvious and logical response would be to terminate your marriage so you can be righteous. However, it is important to note God's regard for marriage, and His intention from the beginning for it to be a permanent relationship between a man and a woman, until death separates them from each other.

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said about marriage, in Matthew 19:4-6: "And He answered and said to them, Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'. So then, they are no longer

two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

If you are a Christian married to an unbeliever, the Apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 7:12-16: "...If any brother has a wife who does not believe, and she is willing to live with him, let him not divorce her. And a woman who has a husband who does not believe, if he is willing to live with her, let her not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. But if the unbeliever departs, let him depart; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases. But God has called us to peace. For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife?"

So rather than having your marriage challenge your righteousness, the Word of God says your relationship with God should impact your marriage in a positive way. To be sure, the Bible is clear that righteousness comes from God, and anyone who wants to be righteous needs to be connected to God each day. On the other hand, we are all unrighteous, without having to do much. It is a part of our inheritance as members of the human race. In fact, Romans 3:23 shares in a matter-a-fact way: "For all have sinned and fall

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, MA, LGPC, CFLE are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

short of the glory of God.” So, whether or not your marriage is making you unrighteous, you already are by default. But the good news is the message found in Romans 6:23 that states: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

So, eternal life is a gift from Jesus when we accept Him by faith. To have access to this gift, we need to be righteous, but that righteousness is also a gift from Jesus when we accept Him as Lord of our lives. Ephesians 2:8-10 offers: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

Today, we offer you the hope of righteousness that is found in Jesus which no one can take away, unless you choose to give it up. That choice is one you must make every day, and if you choose Jesus, His power will even impact your marriage and give it the righteousness that will so much desire.

This leads us to the message of hope found in Jude 24:25 that declares: “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. To God our Savior, who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.”

You and your marriage will continue in our prayers as you trust God to make you a blessing each day.

Keep Me From Screaming at These Kids!

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: My children are driving me insane. I am a single parent and have two children, six and nine. Two girls. Sometimes I feel like I am going to have a stroke when they continually bicker with each other and don't listen to me asking them to stop. What concerns me is that I often scream at them, and I know that cannot be good. However, I find myself screaming at my girls too often, and I need help to stop before I damage them beyond repair. Please help.

A: Thank you for your thoughtful question, and for your willingness to be so vulnerable to make sure you become the best mother you can be to your girls.

Welcome to the challenging world of parenting, where there are no perfect parents because there are no perfect people. In the process of responding to your question we inevitably are thinking about the many times our responses to our children, who are now adults, were far less than ideal. The truth is, all parents blemish their children in some way. One of the important goals of parenting, then, has to be to keep the blemishing of our children to a minimum. It is really important that we don't completely destroy our children

beyond repair. The fact that you are writing to us conveys that you are the type of mother who does not want to get to the place of completely shattering the childhood of your children.

There is no denying that parenting, like all other relationships, takes intentionality to determine what kind of relationship one wants to have with one's children. You must ask yourself the question if you want to have an awful relationship with a few "good" times. Deciding what kind of parent you want to be, will help you stay away from the kind of parent you don't want to be.

In their excellent book, *The Parent You Want to Be*, Drs. Les and Leslie Parrot encourage parents to brainstorm for a few minutes and write down qualities they want to avoid in their parenting. Circle the top two traits they are most likely to have, and be intentional about avoiding that type of behavior. If you are aware of your weak spots and practice emotional intelligence—staying in control of your emotions—you are more likely to parent in a way that will be constructive, rather than destructive to your children.

One of the biggest problems with parenting is the notion that to be a parent means to control one's children from behaving in undesirable ways, by any means necessary. Back in the 1980's there was a very popular family show on television where we once heard the father say to his son—

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albeit in humor: “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.” While this may sound like a funny statement, it isn’t at all funny, given the reality that many children are being abused by their parents, even to the point of death. To stay away from negative practices with your children, you have to decide ahead of time, what behaviors you will not allow yourself to engage in.

Ellen White, a prolific and gifted Christian writer, states in her book *Child Guidance* (page 86): “The requirements of the parents should always be reasonable; kindness should be expressed, not by foolish indulgence, by wise direction. Parents are to teach their children pleasantly, without scolding or faultfinding, seeking to bind the hearts of the little ones to them by silken cords of love.”

Ultimately, what children most need from their parents is unconditional love. This kind of love, to be sure, is only found in Jesus, and can only be replicated by parents when the love of Jesus dwells in them by choice.

The apostle Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 13:4, “Love suffers long (is patient) and is kind...” We encourage you to determine you will practice being patient and kind with your children each day, while setting healthy boundaries for them to follow. Mostly, though, your children will tend to follow the behavior you live before them each day.

You will continue in our prayers.

I'm Transgender: Does God Love People Like Me?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q: I am a 14-year old male who feels like a woman trapped in a man's body and I'm considering having sex reassignment surgery once I turn 18. I love God but I've been told that God hates homosexuals and LGBT people. Is that true? Is it a sin to have transgender feelings and how should I deal with these feelings?

A: Dear Sam, thank you for reaching out to us. We appreciate your genuine desire to remain committed to God and His truth. Since you are not yet a legal adult, whatever answer we provide here in this column should not be taken as a professional diagnosis or clinical advice and should be shared with your parents or guardians.

In addition, we strongly advise you, with your parent's help, to seek professional help from a licensed, Christian counselor who has experience in working with LGBT issues and gender identity dysphoria.

So first of all, God loves everyone! Most importantly, God loves you! It doesn't matter who you are and what you are feeling. God never stops loving you. If anyone tells you that, it is a lie, and they simply do not understand

the "breadth, length, height and depth" of God's love (Ephesians 3:18)

What you have described about your feelings is related to gender identity and gender dysphoria. First, let's define the terms.

Gender identity is how people experience themselves as either male or female and how masculine or feminine they feel.

Gender dysphoria is when one feels a deep and enduring discomfort over the contradictory feelings they have between their biological sex (sexual organs one is born with¹) and the emotional experience of their gender identity.

Hence, based on what you have told us, you are experiencing a mismatch between your psychology (feelings) and your biology (anatomy).

Feelings are not necessarily good or bad. It is what you do with those feelings that really matters. You should not feel guilty or ashamed about how you are feeling. What's important is understanding how to manage or deal with your feelings.

As we develop from birth, there is a natural tendency to desire some of the traits of the opposite sex. Of course—like you—some experience these tendencies much stronger than others. Although, you may feel like you

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have more female qualities than male qualities, consider the fact that the real major differences between men and woman are anatomical.

Men have the ability to impregnate and women are able to give birth. So even if you were to have a sex reassignment or gender confirmation surgery, you will never be able to biologically bear a child or naturally breastfeed.² But being male doesn't preclude you from experiencing traditionally female traits such as being sensitive, caring, and nurturing. You can get married to a woman, and have children and fully participate in all other aspects of childrearing. You will be able to love and nurture your child in the way that God, the ultimate Father, loves and cares for you. You can express all of these emotions and traits while still being male.

Before you were born, God had a plan for your life (Jeremiah 29:11), so ask God to reveal His marvelous plans to you. Tell God how and what you are feeling, and seek guidance from your parent's or/and your pastor on how to better understand God's truth for those who choose to follow Him.

Life is about choices, and each day we are all faced with difficult decisions that push us to live with integrity based on our values. As Christians, this means that many, if not all, of our choices will require us to make personal sacrifices and we will have to go against the prevailing cultural norms. But when we choose

to follow Christ and walk according to His truth, we will grow stronger in our faith and have a clearer understanding of His will for our lives.

Following Christ means that we seek His truth and not our own truth. The overwhelming opinion in today's world is that we must "live" or "speak" our own truth. Yes, your truth is how you are feeling. That is very real.

However, God's truth is bigger than your truth; it's bigger than the world's truth! In fact, here's the one real truth—God is love! God wants to heal your hurts and your pain and He wants to set you free! Free to all that you can be for Him!

We pray and hope that you will let God fully enter your heart, mind, and soul that when you look in the mirror, you will see yourself as a beautiful reflection of His image, just as He created you to be (Genesis 1:27).

Notes

¹ Some people are born with both male and female sex organs and parents or doctors will select one.

² Studies show that males who undergo gender confirmation or sex reassignment surgery face a higher risk of depression, suicidal thoughts, and psychiatric issues compared to the rest of the population.

We Disagree on Everything: Manage Your Emotions the SMART Way

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q. I am 30 years old and have been married for 18 months. We were so in love when we got married that I just knew our marriage was going to be a fairy tale life. Boy was I wrong! The last three months have been a nightmare as my husband and I have been disagreeing on just about everything. We can really use your help with some tips to improve our communication and attitude toward each other. Please help!

A: Thank you for being big enough to acknowledge that your marriage needs a little coaching despite being very in love with your husband. The truth is, most marriages can cause marital distress, and if not dealt with may lead to the ultimate breakdown of your marriage—as many, unfortunately, have experienced—this is a pattern that can be broken and fixed. As long as you and your spouse are willing to pay attention to what’s happening, and understand that you can intentionally choose a different response, your marriage can get back on track, and there is no better time than right now.

A good place to begin is with prayer. Invite your spouse to join you for prayer at the beginning and ending of each day. Find good things about each other you want to

thank God for, and mention these good traits in your prayer. Pray for patience and the capacity to be kind to each other regardless of the circumstances. Pray for your ability to communicate better with each other, and to be intentional about thinking before you speak. Choose a response that will build rather than destroy your marriage.

There are many books we have referenced and shared through this column, and we would like to recommend that you get an read *SMART Love* by Dr. David Stoop and Dr. Jan Stoop.¹ It is a book about improving your emotional intelligence as it relates to your marriage.

The essence of Smart Love is pretty simple and practical, and works if you employ the concepts shared here in your marriage. SMART is actually an acronym:

- S - stands for Self-Awareness
- M - stands for Managing your Emotions.
- A - stands for Accountability.
- R - stands for Reading the Other Person’s Emotions.
- T - stands for living Together in the Land of Emotions.

Most human beings live with little awareness of what it is that makes them tick. Their emotions, values, patterns of behavior in response to certain situations, what’s most important in their lives their dreams, their

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goals, and even their aspirations for the future. The more self-aware we become, the greater our capacity will be to manage our emotions, to live by our values, and to relate to the most important people in our lives with dignity and respect.

The more self-aware you and your husband become, the easier it will be to manage your emotions, to be accountable for your behavior, to read each other's emotional moods, and together live in the land of emotions, which means being constantly mindful of each other's needs. It means living with empathy—the capacity to push yourself to feel what your spouse might be feeling, and to choose a response that acknowledges the needs of those feelings.

We encourage you and your husband to claim God's promises to provide for your marriage what it needs in this moment and believe that God will hear and answer your prayer. In Matthew 7:7, Jesus declares: "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you." So claim, this promise and trust God for the rest.

You will continue in our prayers. Remember to get the book and read it.

Notes

- ¹ Dr. David Stoop, and Dr. Jan Stoop. 2017. *SMART Love: How Improving Your Emotional Intelligence Will Transform Your Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Revell.

He's Always Late

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q. My husband is always late. After almost 25 years of marriage I expected things would have gotten better in that area and he would have been more punctual by now, but nothing has changed, and I am growing more frustrated every day. Otherwise, he is a good husband, and a great father, but his tardiness is appalling. Please help!

A: Idiosyncrasies are really something, aren't they? Before people get married they tend to be drawn to individuals who are different than they are, and tend to downplay the importance of those variances. Once married, those dissimilarities become so visible, it becomes difficult to reconcile the reason one married that person.

While being on time is a desirable practice, learning to love one's spouse unconditionally—especially if they are not engaging in immoral or illegal practices— is most important. The more one practices wishing one's partner were different, the more easily one becomes dissatisfied with one's marriage. And practicing to be dissatisfied with one's marriage will invariably lead to viewing one's marriage through the lenses of the proverbial glass that is half empty, rather than half full. Pessimism

becomes the order of the day, rather than optimism. And, it is common knowledge what happens when people approach a situation from a pessimistic perspective; they become cynical, suspicious, and distrustful, which does not bode well for the health of any relationship, especially a marriage relationship.

It is rather easy—when you are married—to be tempted after the honeymoon, to want to have a slightly superior model of your partner than the one you actually have. Of course, it doesn't really mean you want a different spouse, just a slightly improved one than the one your mate turned out to be. How helpful is this practice? Will this kind of fantasy lead to your spouse getting better, or will this expectation be met with utter disappointment?

The drawback with this imaginative process is that while it seems that life would be so much happier if your partner became more responsible and behaved equal to your expectations, once that adjustment materialized you would soon find additional traits in your flawed partner that needed to be changed. This development, to be sure, would never end; neither would your need for additional improvement from your partner, who is human.

The truth is, when this is the approach any married person takes in relationship to their spouse, no amount of change in their partner will really make that much of a difference. A

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preferable approach is to accept your spouse as he is, and ask yourself what would happen if you chose to quit wishing your partner would change for them to be acceptable in your eyes? What do you think would happen if you decided to love him just the way he is?

Of course, once you change your self-talk about wishing your spouse could be different, to giving thanks to God for giving you a husband with amazing qualities, including being a great father to your children, your perspective will also be transformed. You will find yourself being more accommodating and forgiving, and less critical and contemptible. This change of attitude, to be sure, will change your insolence toward your partner, making him less defensive and more pleasant to be around, and building stronger bonds of attachment and commitment between you.

Because we tend to marry people who are often opposite in personality to ourselves, it is very likely that if we don't like certain traits of theirs, it is safe to assume with a high degree of probability that they will find many of our peculiarities less than pleasing to deal with. So, when you identify qualities in your spouse that are less than delightful—which every married couple will experience at some point in their marriage—especially if the offensive behavior is not immoral or illegal, the best response is to embrace the message of Philippians 4:11b, that says: "...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content."

Please know that we are praying for God to give you the patience and kindness to manage the situation with grace, and help make of your home a little heaven on earth, despite your husband's less than perfect traits.

RESOURCES

Hope for Today's Families

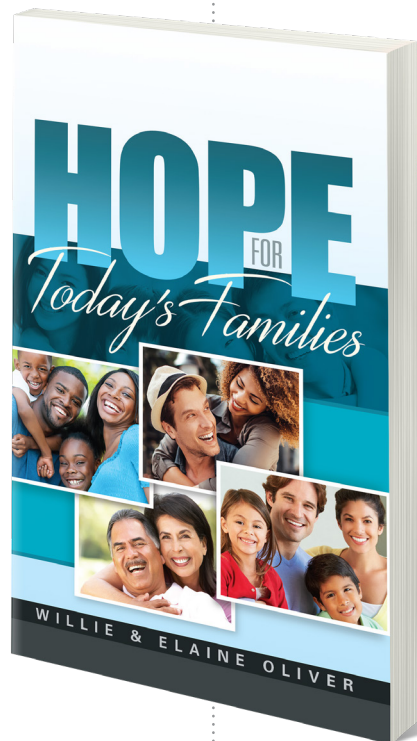
WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2018

94 pages

Missionary book for 2019. This sharing book for free distribution focuses on how to build stronger and healthier relationships. It offers hope for today's families using time-proven principles that will facilitate a meaningful and happy life.

Available in various languages at Adventist Book Centers worldwide or through your local publishing house.



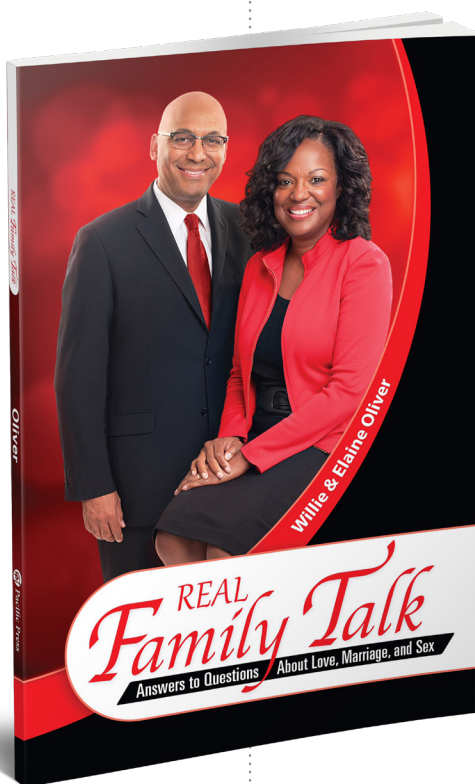
Real Family Talk

Answers to Questions About Love, Marriage and Sex

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER
Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho, 2015
127 pages

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This book is a compilation of selected columns on relationships written by Willie and Elaine Oliver for the *Message* magazine in response to questions from real people. The authors provide expert advice, based on biblical principles, for questions about marriage, sex, parenting, being single and other real relationships issues. In their counsel, the authors remind us of the reality that we all face challenges in our relationships and in our homes. Their discerning answers direct us to seek God's guidance, reminding us that God's plan is for us to have healthy homes and relationships where each person seeks the harmony that God desires for us to experience.



Help! I'm a Parent: Christian Parenting in the Real World

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

AdventSource

Lincoln, Nebraska, 2013

102 pages, 1 DVD

This is a resource for parents, grand parents and caregivers of children from birth through age 7. It consists of a manual with 10 interactive chapters, two DVD sets, and instructions for sharing this seminar with your church or community. The authors instruct parents to

build and disciple young children, and address challenges experienced in their God-given roles. In a world where raising children is becoming more complex, this resource is a helpful tool that provides practical applications based on God's word.

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Altogether Wonderful: Exploring Intergenerational Worship

KAREN HOLFORD

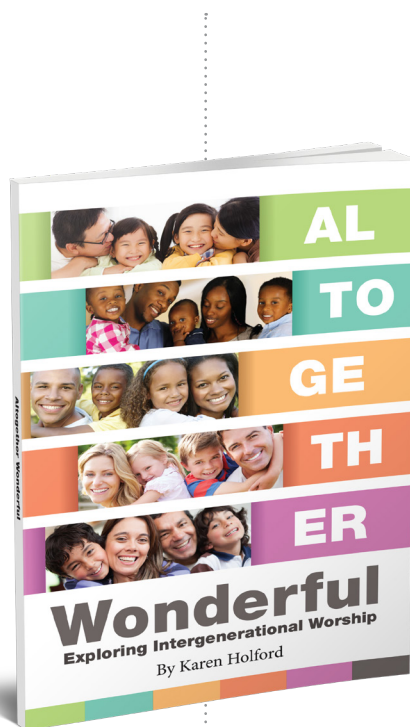
General Conference Department of Children's Ministries, 2017

164 pages

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Think about the children in your church who struggle to be there. What did they experience in church last Sabbath? What do they think about coming to church? What decisions have they already made about whether they will continue to come to church when they are old enough to walk away? What would make church the best place for them to be on Sabbath morning? What might your church need to do differently to save even one of these children? How could you help them choose to stay in the church, by involving them and their family, and caring about their happiness?

Every Sabbath is an opportunity to reach our children, or to push them away. What are you and your church willing to do to help your children feel welcome, wanted, included, and loved? This book may help you to make an eternal difference in their lives.





Any time is the right time to have a...

REAL *Family Talk*

with Willie & Elaine Oliver



Strengthening Families, Inspiring Hope

Real Family Talk gives us a place to talk about family dynamics and share tools to strengthen our marriages and families. Our discussions are family friendly, biblically rooted, and designed to enrich your life spiritually.

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Coping with Grief • Forgiveness in Relationships • The Refugee Crisis • 5 Tips for Success in Marriage*



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Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects, Vol. 1

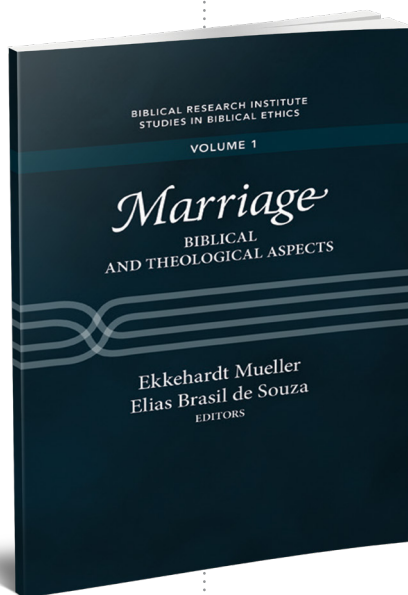
EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2015

290 pages

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This book offers thoughtful and detailed studies on several areas of concern for pastors, church leaders, and members. After showing the beauty of marriage and the relevance of Scripture to a sound understanding of marriage and sexuality, this volume tackles crucial topics such as singleness, gender and roles in marriage, sexuality, religiously mixed marriages, and divorce and remarriage.



Family Ministries Planbooks

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER, EDITORS

Available on family.adventist.org/planbook

The annual Family Ministries Planbook is a rich resource filled with sermons, seminars, and other leadership resources that can equip new and experienced family ministries leaders and other ministry leaders who are interested in serving families.

Download past issues of the Family Ministries Planbook, available in English and several languages.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY MINISTRIES

IMPLEMENTATION

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

Note:

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

Downloadable Material

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2019>

A Family Ministries Policy and Purpose Statement

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The congregation and staff of the

.....

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

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

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

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

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

The Family Ministries Leader

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

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

What Is a Family?

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

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

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

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

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

Committee and Planning Guidelines

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

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

- What do you like best about your family?

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

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

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

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

A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things

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

Handouts

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

shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.

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

Introduction

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

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The Ten Commandments of Presentations

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

Family Life Profile Survey

Name Date of Birth

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

Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

Address

Telephone (Home) (Work)

Baptized SDA ☐ Yes ☐ No

If Yes, local church membership

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

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Marital status:

☐ Single, never married

☐ Single, divorced

☐ Single, widowed

☐ Married—Spouse's name Date of Birth

☐ Spouse is SDA—Local church membership

☐ Spouse is not SDA—Present religious affiliation

Children whose primary residence is with you:

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Children whose primary residence is elsewhere:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Other family members living with you:

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Family Relationship

Name Birthdate

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Family Relationship

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What is the most significant thing the Family Ministries Committee could do this year to address the interests/needs of your family?

.....

.....

.....

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

- ☐ Telephoning as needed
- ☐ Participating in planning sessions
- ☐ Providing transportation
- ☐ Preparation for events
- ☐ Help with meals/refreshments
- ☐ Child care
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Other

Presenting lectures/classes/seminars/workshops or other presentations Your interest area(s)

.....

.....

Family Life Profile

Church Date

Family Category

Active Members

- ☐ With Children Under 18
- ☐ No Children Under 18

Married–Spouse is a Member

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

Single–Never Married

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

Inactive Members

- ☐ With Children Under 18
- ☐ No Children Under 18

Married–Spouse is a Non-member

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

Single–Divorced

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

Family Ministries Interest Survey

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

Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

From the topics below, please select the five that are of most interest to you.

Place a check in front of each one you select:

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

Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name

Address Telephone

Area(s) of specialty

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

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

Community Family Life Education Survey

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?

.....

2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area?
(Select as many as you wish.)

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

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

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

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

Sex: ☐ M ☐ F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

☐ 17 or under ☐ 19-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ 71+

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

Are you:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Never married | ☐ Married |
| ☐ Separated | ☐ Divorced |
| ☐ Widowed | ☐ Remarried after divorce |

Sample Evaluation

1. What inspired you most about this workshop?

.....

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

.....

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

.....

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

.....

5. How could this workshop be improved?

.....

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

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

7. Who made this evaluation?

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

Gender: ☐ M ☐ F

Marital Status:

☐ Never married ☐ Married
☐ Separated ☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

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

.....yearsmonths

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

APPENDIX B

VOTED STATEMENTS

An Affirmation of Marriage

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

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

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

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

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

This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on April 23, 1996.

Statement on Home and Family

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

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

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

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the church, stated: "The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are the 'issues of life' (Prov.4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences." -The Ministry of Healing, p. 349.

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



This resource also includes free presentations of the seminars and handouts. To download them please visit:
<http://family.adventist.org/planbook2019>

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

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- Pray About It

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- Longings and Losses: Working with Grieving Families
- Intimacy Training: Steps to Deepen the Level of Intimacy in Your Marriage
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DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY MINISTRIES

GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904, USA

301.680.6175 office

family@gc.adventist.org

family.adventist.org

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