



2017  
PLANBOOK



REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

# GROWING DISCIPLES

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



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# GROWING DISCIPLES

— WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER —

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# Preface

The message is clear, pointed, distinct, and unequivocal, as Moses shares God's commands with the children of Israel saying:

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES. DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 (ESV)

This passage of scripture—the *Shemá*—known as such since Old Testament times, was the prayer every observant Hebrew knew by memory and recited twice a day—evening and morning—as a part of their daily *family worship*. It was considered the essence of the Torah.

*Growing Disciples* is the Family Ministries theme for this year. This comprehensive notion must become one of the central activities promoted and advocated by our corporate church, and by every local congregation and family within our ranks. After all, Christian existence is dynamic,

and must be progressing every day to a closer and more meaningful relationship with Jesus. To be sure, this will not transpire unless those of us in leadership are also growing in the love and grace of Jesus every day. To speak about *Growing Disciples* without a compelling awareness of our daily personal need of Jesus is like walking through the desert without access to potable water to quench our inevitable thirst.

It is our hope that family worship will become the place where each family and single adult will make the time to connect with God in a profound and consequential way, by engaging in daily Bible study, prayer, meditation and becoming an active member of the family of God. After all, for the church to experience *Growing Disciples*, the membership must be intentional about seriously looking for God while He can still be found (Isaiah 55:6).

We hope this will be your practice during this year and for the remainder of your life, and by reaching up to God each day, experience the peace that only growing disciples have.

For stronger and healthier families,

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

# 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 Department

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 counseling; 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; and became authors of the Real Family Talk column on Adventist World online.

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.



# 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.

VIII

## **Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 11-18**

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 11, (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 18, (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 3-9**

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 9 (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/planbook2017>

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# SERMONS

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# Rock or Sand Builders?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

## The Texts

MATTHEW 7:24-27;

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8;

EPHESIANS 5:25

## Introduction

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On a recent trip to Cotê d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), for leadership meetings with the Family Ministries Directors of the West-Central Africa Division, our flight from Paris to Abidjan was delayed by a couple of hours. Already scheduled to arrive an hour before midnight, the delay meant the Division driver picking us up from the airport would be having a very long night and early morning, a matter completely out of our control.

To add insult to injury, instead of making up time—which often happens with many delayed flights—our layover in Ougadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, became a disaster. A passenger that boarded in Paris, headed to Abidjan, could not be found, causing anxiety among the crew, and further postponing our arrival in Abidjan. This new reality made us somewhat apprehensive, wondering if our

driver, who we had never met, would still be at the airport when we arrived in the wee hours of the morning.

Our story has a happy ending. We are convinced it had to do with something that happened many years before. Someone obviously poured great values into Charles, our driver. Integrity, honor, and an amazing work ethic, were all on display that day.

Charles was at the airport to meet us, as though it was the middle of the afternoon. A man with a very kind and pleasant disposition, he drove us safely to our lodging place at three o'clock in the morning. There is no doubt in our minds Charles' character was built on the solid Rock.

Our sermon today is titled *Rock or Sand Builders?* Let us pray.

## Obedience vs. Disobedience In Everyday Life

In Matthew 7:24-27 we find the following notable words of Jesus uttered as part of what is known in Biblical literature as the Sermon on the Mount:

THESE WORDS I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT  
INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS TO YOUR  
LIFE, HOMEOWNER IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR

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

STANDARD OF LIVING. THEY ARE FOUNDATIONAL WORDS, WORDS TO BUILD A LIFE ON. IF YOU WORK THESE WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A SMART CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT—BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK. BUT IF YOU USE MY WORDS IN BIBLE STUDIES AND DON'T WORK THEM INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A STUPID CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SANDY BEACH. WHEN A STORM ROLLED IN AND THE WAVES CAME UP, IT COLLAPSED LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.  
MATTHEW 7:24-27 (MSG)

On the banks of the Sea of Galilee, probably very close to Capernaum, the village where Jesus lived (Matthew 4:13) during His years of ministry; also the place where Peter, Andrew, Matthew, James, and John made their home; Jesus was ending what was perhaps the most prolific discourse He had given about the ethics of the Kingdom of God and the expectations for those who would be followers of His.

The Sermon on the Mount is the frequently used title given to the teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew chapters 5–7. Whether the name can be accurately employed for the fairly comparable portion in Luke 6:20–49 depends upon one's understanding of the literary relationship between the two. Luke's version is habitually called the Sermon on the Plain because it is believed to have been delivered on 'a level place' (Luke 6:17) rather than 'on the mountain' (Matthew 5:1). Nevertheless, both expressions probably represent the same place considered from two different perspectives.

In the past it was commonly believed that the Sermon on the Mount was a single homily delivered by Jesus at a particular time. This unquestionably appears to be the case as it is recounted in Matthew. Jesus and His disciples sat down (v. 1), Jesus opened his mouth and taught them (v. 2), and at the conclusion of it all the crowds were astonished at his teaching (7:28). However, many scholars are of the opinion that the Sermon is really a compilation

of sayings of the Lord—'a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached' (W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1, p. 79). They argue there is too much intense material here for one sermon. That the comprehensive array of issues is too much for a single presentation. They also believe certain segments of the sermon appear unexpectedly. That Luke's narrative seems more coherent and better contextualized as responses to questions raised by the disciples and others. Some scholars suggest that this makes it more likely that Matthew transferred sayings of Jesus into the single Sermon, than the fact that Luke found them there and distributed them throughout his Gospel. Others propose it is distinctive of Matthew to bring together teachings under certain captions and place them into the narrative of Jesus' life (cf. B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, 1930, pp. 269–325), suggesting that the Sermon on the Mount is consequently merely the first of these informative sections.

These reflections, to be sure, do not oblige one to consider the complete Sermon as an illogical masterpiece. The historical context of Matthew 4:23–5:1 directs us to anticipate a notable dissertation presented at a specific time. In the Sermon are several structures that seem to be sermonettes of Jesus and not simply interesting anthologies of isolated maxims. When compared with Luke's Sermon, there are many parallel details. They both begin with blessings, close with the parable of the wise and foolish builders, and the interposing Lucan content about loving one's enemies in 6:27–36, and judging 6:37–42, develops in the same progression in Matthew, proposing that in the wake of both versions there was a shared informant. Prior to the writings of either Matthew or Luke, it is fair to believe that there was an original structure which matched an actual sermon presented at a specific time. The truth is, uncertainties as to whether the Sermon as it appears in Matthew is closer to the original than the account given by Luke, or if Matthew stuck to a structure provided by an earlier source, are still issues of intellectual debate. To be sure, it is sufficient to presume that Matthew took an original sermon source and enlarged it in order to introduce important information for the followers of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Referencing the portion of Scripture we just read from the Sermon on the Mount, Ellen White shares:

THE SAME DANGER STILL EXISTS. MANY TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT THEY ARE CHRISTIANS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY SUBSCRIBE TO CERTAIN THEOLOGICAL TENETS. BUT THEY HAVE NOT BROUGHT THE TRUTH INTO PRACTICAL LIFE. THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED AND LOVED IT, THEREFORE THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE POWER AND GRACE THAT COME THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE TRUTH. MEN MAY PROFESS FAITH IN THE TRUTH; BUT IF IT DOES NOT MAKE THEM SINCERE, KIND, PATIENT, FOREBEARING, HEAVENLY-MINDED, IT IS A CURSE TO ITS POSSESSORS, AND THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE IT IS A CURSE TO THE WORLD” (WHITE, *THE DESIRE OF AGES*, p. 309)<sup>2</sup>

Matthew Henry, a noted Biblical commentator, suggests that the gospel writer “shows, by a parable, that hearing these sayings of Christ will not make us happy, if we do not make conscience of doing them; but that if we hear them and do them, *we are blessed in our deed.*”<sup>3</sup>

### Obedience vs. Disobedience In Marriage

The Christian life and married life are not much different when observed from a similar vantage point. Knowing what God expects and doing what God requires are two entirely different realities.

It is difficult to miss that in the heart of the Sermon on the Mount the sacredness of marriage looms large. Matthew 5:27,28 declares:

“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID TO THOSE OF OLD, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.’ BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER LOOKS AT A WOMAN TO LUST FOR HER HAS ALREADY COMMITTED ADULTERY WITH HER IN HIS HEART.” THE

BIBLE WRITER FURTHER EXPLICATES THE INTENTION OF THE PASSAGE IN VERSE 32 BY AFFIRMING: “BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE FOR ANY REASON EXCEPT SEXUAL IMMORALITY CAUSES HER TO COMMIT ADULTERY; AND WHOEVER MARRIES A WOMAN WHO IS DIVORCED COMMITS ADULTERY.”

Referencing the currency of every healthy marriage, the Apostle Paul declares under divine inspiration in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8:

THOUGH I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I HAVE BECOME SOUNDING BRASS OR A CLANGING CYMBAL. AND THOUGH I HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY, AND UNDERSTAND ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE, AND THOUGH I HAVE ALL FAITH, SO THAT I COULD REMOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I AM NOTHING. AND THOUGH I BESTOW ALL MY GOODS TO FEED THE POOR, AND THOUGH I GIVE MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, IT PROFITS ME NOTHING. LOVE SUFFERS LONG AND IS KIND; LOVE DOES NOT ENVY; LOVE DOES NOT PARADE ITSELF, IS NOT PUFFED UP; DOES NOT BEHAVE RUDELY, DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN, IS NOT PROVOKED, THINKS NO EVIL; DOES NOT REJOICE IN INIQUITY, BUT REJOICES IN THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER FAILS.

So many married Christians today have totally forgotten that marriage was established by God at the very beginning of human history as a divine institution of foremost importance, when He declared in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” A few verses later (vs. 24), God declared: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

And lest anyone suggest that this is an Old Testament notion that no longer applies to us as New Testament Christians, we read a

reference of this Old Testament passage in the New Testament, with additional stipulations uttered by Jesus in Matthew 19:5-6: “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.”

These passages of Scripture are filled with indisputable imperatives, including the reality of husband and wife being in the singular, rather than the plural form. It is the normative Biblical injunction of marriage meant to take place between one man and one woman. Anything more or less than that is of human origin, and does not support the model established by God in Eden. And it is certainly difficult to overlook the detail that God’s intention was for marriage to be forever.

Going back to the message of 1 Corinthians 13, Warren Wiersby offers: Christians are ‘taught of God to love one another’(1 Thessalonians. 4:9). God the Father taught us to love by sending His Son (1 John 4:19), and God the Son taught us to love by giving His life and by commanding us to love each other (John 13:34–35). The Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another by pouring out God’s love in our hearts (Romans 5:5). The most important lesson in the school of faith is to love one another. Love enriches all that it touches. The purpose of spiritual gifts is the edification of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:3, 5, 12, 17, 26). This means we must not think of ourselves, but of others; and this demands love.”<sup>4</sup>

To be sure, as people of God, we have all been endowed with spiritual gifts for the edification of the church; every relationship in the church, including our respective marriages. We cannot speak about love without living the very essence of love, by practicing its virtues in our closest and most intimate relationship.

On the same question, Matthew Henry advances that: The apostle gives us in these verses some of the properties and effects of charity [love], both to describe and commend it, that we may know whether we have this grace and that if we have not we may fall in love with what is

so exceedingly amiable, and not rest till we have obtained it. It is an excellent grace, and has a world of good properties belonging to it.”<sup>5</sup>

Why then, are so many married Christians ignoring God’s intent for marriage? Why do they believe that staying in their marriage or relating to their spouse through the agency of the spiritual gift of love, an option they can afford to ignore?

When it comes to your marriage, are you a rock or sand builder? Are we simply speaking with the tongues of men and of angels to show off and appear to be spiritual or are we practicing patience and kindness in our marriage every day?

### Choices In Marriage And The Need To Reach Up

God who created human beings for fellowship and love declared in Genesis 2:18: “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” And Paul proclaimed in 1 Corinthians 7:2: “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.”

While Paul reflects about many wonderful realities in marriage between verses 2-9 of 1 Corinthians 7; in verses 10-11, he profers: “Now to the married I command, yet not I but the Lord: A wife is not to depart from her husband. But even if she does depart, let her remain unmarried or be reconciled to her husband. And a husband is not to divorce his wife”.

As we consider the evidence of Scripture, we must ask ourselves if we are rock or sand builders. If we only talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk, are we simply fooling ourselves and missing out on God’s power and blessings?

While we tend to forget God’s design is perfect and was created with our well being in mind, we need to go to Him to learn from Him and receive power from Him to live out His plans for our lives. Because, every crisis in marriage is a spiritual crisis that can only be

solved through the power of God, when we put into practice the teaching He has left for us to build our marriage relationships on the solid Rock.

It is remarkable that social science is catching up with God's intention for intimate relationships in the human race. In a recent article, Dr. Sue Johnson, well known Psychologist and marriage and family expert shared:

NEW SCIENCE IS REVEALING HOW VITAL ROMANTIC LOVE IS—AS WELL AS HOW IT WORKS, WHY IT GOES WRONG AND WHAT WE CAN DO TO MAKE IT LAST. THESE FINDINGS ARE INCREDIBLY TIMELY. SOCIOLOGISTS AGREE THAT PEOPLE ARE BECOMING LONELIER AND MORE ISOLATED THAN THEY WERE IN EARLIER GENERATIONS. WITH THE STEEP RISE OF TECHNOLOGY, THE AVERAGE SIZE OF A PERSON'S REAL-LIFE SOCIAL NETWORK HAS PARADOXICALLY SHRUNK; PEOPLE TRUST EACH OTHER LESS THAN THEY USED TO, AND FEWER AMERICANS KNOW THEIR NEIGHBORS. SOCIOLOGISTS ARE ALSO FINDING THAT OUR LIFE PARTNER IS OFTEN OUR ONLY RELIABLE SOURCE OF SUPPORT AND COMFORT. WE NEED THESE RELATIONSHIPS MORE THAN EVER—AND INDEED, EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT IT'S WELL WITHIN REACH TO IMPROVE OUR ROMANTIC BONDS. <sup>6</sup>

To have a great marriage, it is important to have excellent communication in one's relationship. Of course, this often eludes us because of habits we have developed in our families of origin.

GOOD COMMUNICATION IS NOT A SKILL WE OFTEN BRING TO MARRIAGE. MOST OF US CAME UP IN FAMILIES IN WHICH VOICES WERE RAISED—SOMETIMES MORE THAN JUST A LITTLE—WHEN PEOPLE DISAGREED WITH EACH OTHER. THIS UNFORTUNATE LEGACY MUST BE DISCARDED TO SURVIVE THE RIGORS OF REAL LIFE IN MARRIAGE. <sup>7</sup>

To be rock builders means to construct our marriage relationship on the solid teachings of

Jesus Christ, rather than on the sands of our own opinions, or those offered by the secular media. To be rock builders means to stay close to Jesus and be sustained by His Spirit, by reaching up to Him daily through prayer and Bible study, to be able to live our lives in obedience to His will.

This kind of life is only possible when we keep in our minds messages like the following ones found in Ephesians 6:10, 11: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." And in Psalm 29:11: "The Lord will give strength to His people; The Lord will bless His people with peace." And also in Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

## Conclusion

As we consider the implications of this message, of late we have been at once intrigued and challenged by the message of Ephesians 5:25: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her." While we are mindful of the context of this passage to include vs. 21: "submitting to one another in the fear of God." As well as the very often quoted vs. 22: "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord." It is vs. 25 that has grabbed us, based on the message of vs. 23: "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body."

If the husband is the head of the wife, as presented by Scripture, and husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her; then husbands have a pretty awesome responsibility to be in their marriage what Christ is to the church.

When we carefully examine how Christ loves the church, we have to consider Biblical history from Genesis to Revelation, offering exhibit after exhibit of Christ's incredible love for the church to His very death in her behalf. To give you a little taste of our intentions we begin in the book of Genesis

with Adam and Eve—the church—who by the time we get to chapter 3:6 have sinned; and by the time we get to vs. 15 of the same chapter, Christ has already offered Himself—gave Himself for her—to ransom the church from death. “And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, despite repeated disobedience of His people—the church—Christ continues to intercede in their behalf until His literal death on the cross, as dramatized in the Gospels, for her—the church. So, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.” What an incredible responsibility in marriage for husbands as head—leader—in their respective marriages, to be.

Although we believe in mutuality in marriage—found in the context of this text—we find greater responsibility for the husband, who is a type of Christ to his wife; and the level of love he is expected to give—like Christ loved for the church. This calls for true rock builders, in the context of the Sermon of the Mount. “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

May God help us to be rock builders today and for the remainder of our lives.

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# A Disciple-making Parent

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

## The Text

ONE WHO RULES HIS OWN HOUSE WELL,  
HAVING HIS CHILDREN IN SUBMISSION  
WITH ALL REVERENCE (FOR IF A MAN  
DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO RULE HIS  
OWN HOUSE, HOW WILL HE TAKE CARE  
OF THE CHURCH OF GOD?).  
1 TIMOTHY 3:4-5

## Introduction

As Jesus addressed His disciples, He gave them their marching orders:

GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES  
OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM  
IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF  
THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,  
TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL  
THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU.  
MATTHEW. 28:19-20.

Those marching orders were not only for Jesus' disciples then; they are also our marching orders today.

Many of us have taken Jesus' Gospel Commission to heart and have been doing all

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we can to bring God's message of salvation to people, and bringing them to the foot of the cross.

At the same time, sometimes we are so involved in working for the salvation of others that we tend to forget and neglect the salvation of those closest to us—our children.

In a very succinct way, Ellen G. White writes that, "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home..." and then she asserts in a very emphatic way, "There is no missionary field more important than this" (White, *The Adventist Home*, p.53).

The work of pastors, teachers, evangelists, or missionaries is extremely important and has yielded marvelous results, but the work that each of us gets to do in our homes is crucial to the salvation of our children.

We all have been sent to the world to make disciples for Jesus. What we sometimes forget is that our children also need to be disciples of Jesus. And we, their parents, are the disciple-makers of our children.

Even in Moses' day God taught the Israelites about the crucial role disciple-makers parents play in the life of their children. Through Moses, God instructed the Hebrews on the way to the Promised Land:

AND THESE WORDS WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE IN YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE UP. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES. DEUTERONOMY 6:6–9.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul wrote to young pastor Timothy about the role of parenting among those who are in leadership positions as “one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:4–5).

In the Old Testament we read of Eli the Priest who was disqualified from leadership because he did not restrain his children from doing wrong (1 Samuel 3: 12-13).

So we need to ask ourselves, what kind of parents are we? One who is permissive? Who allows their children to do anything, say anything, go anywhere, without any kind of restraint or guidance?

Or are we the type of parents who, with God’s help and His wisdom, guide and lead our children to be followers of Jesus?

Are we disciple-making parents?

Some parents are...

**1. Lifeguard parents – the type that often rescue their child from the consequences of their actions**

None of us like to see our children suffer, even if it is as a result of their own choices, their own decisions, their own actions.

And yet, letting them experience failure, letting them experience the consequences of their own decisions may be the best lessons for the rest of their life.

One of those things we need to teach and remind our children of regularly is what Paul said,

DO NOT BE DECEIVED, GOD IS NOT MOCKED; FOR WHATEVER A MAN SOWS, THAT HE WILL ALSO REAP. GALATIANS 6:7

Other parents are...

**2. Ocean-wave parents – coming and going, inconsistent**

Children need the consistency and security of a healthy home. If you tell them they can’t do something one day and the next day you allow it, they won’t know what to expect from day to day.

Two verses in the book of Proverbs remind us of the importance of the fair guidance and correction children crave from their parents:

THE ROD AND REBUKE GIVE WISDOM, BUT A CHILD LEFT TO HIMSELF BRINGS SHAME TO HIS MOTHER.

CORRECT YOUR SON, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU REST; YES, HE WILL GIVE DELIGHT TO YOUR SOUL. PROVERBS 29:15, 17

Your children need the correction, discipline, and guidance from their parents if they will become disciples of Jesus.

By the way, correction and discipline must never become punishment and abuse.

In fact, the word discipline comes from the same root as disciple. The goal of discipline is not to break a child’s will and force them to submit. Rather, the goal of discipline is to guide them to become disciples. Jesus led His disciples gently, wisely, and patiently; not angrily, impatiently, or abusively.

Keep in mind that discipline is not something you *do to* your child, but something you *do for* your child.

The author of Proverbs writes,

DISCIPLINE YOUR SON, FOR THERE IS  
HOPE; DO NOT SET YOUR HEART ON  
PUTTING HIM TO DEATH.  
PROVERBS 19:18, ESV

Discipline, loving discipline, is one of the best things a parent can do for their children. Or as a motivational speaker Zig Ziglar said,

THE CHILD WHO HAS NOT BEEN  
DISCIPLINED WITH LOVE BY HIS  
LITTLE WORLD WILL BE DISCIPLINED,  
GENERALLY WITHOUT LOVE,  
BY THE BIG WORLD.<sup>1</sup>

Other parents are...

### 3. Railroad track parents

While these parents may have the same goals and desires in mind, they work separately, without consulting with each other as to the best way to lead, guide, teach, or discipline their children.

Like railroad tracks, they live parallel lives, going in the same direction, but not working in unity as they try to disciple their children. Of these types of parents the prophet Amos asks the question, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

### Disciple-Making

The best example of disciple-making found in the New Testament is that set by Jesus Himself.

As Jesus began His messianic ministry, He surrounded Himself with a group of men whom He would train to be His disciples.

As Jesus preached His first public message, the first sermon delivered to the multitude gathered on the slope of a hill overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Jesus began to set the stage for His instructions for those who wished to follow Him.

In most cultures today when a teacher delivers their instructions to their students they stand up, but in Jesus' time Jewish teachers

would sit to expound the Scriptures, often with disciples sitting at their feet.

For many, the *Sermon on the Mount* was 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 THROUNGS 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.<sup>2</sup>

A look at the methods Jesus used reveals several important aspects:

1. First of all, *Jesus gathered the disciples around Him*. Jesus used a small, intimate group.

While we read of several large gatherings, some as large as five thousand people, His work of disciple-making was done with a small group of twelve and later seventy (Matthew 10:1ff, Luke 10:1ff).

That is why in our home, with our family, surrounded by our children, our work as disciple-makers is most effective.

2. *Jesus spent time with them*. During three and a half years Jesus and His disciples traveled, ate, slept, worked and rested together.

Except for the times when they were sent on mission journeys (Matthew 10:5), or other errands (Matthew 21:2), the disciples were with Jesus constantly. Ellen White points out that this time together was no coincidence but rather very much part of Jesus' training program for His disciples.<sup>3</sup>

Disciple-making parents spend both quality and quantity time with their children. One cannot be a good disciple-maker unless one invests time in the life of their disciples.

**3.** In addition, *Jesus taught and trained them.* This teaching and training was done at times privately, like the time the disciples came to the house where Jesus was staying and asked Him to explain to them the parable of the tares of the field (Matthew 13), or when they could not cast a demon out of a child suffering from epileptic seizures (Matthew 17:14-21).

At other times Jesus' teaching and training of the disciples was done while addressing a larger group (Matthew 5, 13, 15).

There were times when Jesus even had to teach them by settling some disputes and questions among the disciples (Matt 18; Luke 9:46, 22:24).

Disciple-making parents must keep in mind that we are always teaching our children. Our daily interactions with others, how we spend our time, what we do and say, everything is teaching them. Our children are watching us, listening to us, learning from us.

**4.** *Jesus paired them with a mentor.* When Jesus sent seventy other disciples on their first missionary journey (Luke 10:1ff), they were not haphazardly matched, but rather carefully selected for the benefit of the younger, less mature ones.

Ellen G. 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 often met for prayer and counsel.

As a result both were strengthened in the faith.<sup>4</sup>

In her book *Evangelism*, Ellen G. 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.<sup>5</sup>

As disciple-making parents, we can also pair our children of different temperaments for the benefit of both.

**5.** *He sent them to work for others.* For Jesus, disciples are co-laborers with Him, so while the other aspects of disciple-making are important, His commission to His disciples is to "go and make [other or more] disciples" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Ellen G. 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 to learn that they "held in trust for the world the glad tidings of salvation".<sup>6</sup>

Disciple-making parents are preparing their children for future ministry, regardless of what career path they choose to take.

**6.** One final step in Jesus' training of His disciples was that He left them with the assurance that after *He was gone, He would send them the Holy Spirit* (Luke 12:12; John 14:26; Acts 1:8) to be with them and thus they would continue to grow spiritually and in numbers.

Again, Ellen G. White speaks of this transition from Jesus to the Holy Spirit when she writes that Jesus prepared His disciples for the reception of the Holy Spirit by leading them to feel their need of Him, and it was under the Spirit's teaching that they received the final qualification for their ministry and lifework.<sup>7</sup>

Disciple-making parents prepare their children for the time when they will be on their own, and for the time when their parents may rest in death. Disciple-making parents assure their children that they will never be alone but that the Holy Spirit will be their constant companion.

The result of Jesus' training of His disciples was that they were not the same uneducated,

uncultured men He first called, but had been changed to reflect Jesus in mind and character, and the result was that people noticed this drastic change.<sup>8</sup> (Acts 4:13).

That is the ultimate goal of discipleship; that His disciples may be like Him.

The role of a disciple-making parent is to nurture the 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. Parenting small children is not just about teaching them rules and regulations.

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” (Ephesians 6:4).

The Greek word for nurture in this text is *paideia* and means “training, learning, instruction.”

This word is used in Hebrews 12:5, 7B8, 11 with a spiritual sense where it is translated as “discipline” or “chastening.”<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the author of Hebrews urges parents to nurture or disciple their children with the use of God’s Word, the Bible, borne of the parents’ love for God like that described in Deuteronomy 6:5: “you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.”

And by the way, your marriage 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 sanctified (1 Corinthians 7:12-14, 16).

### **The Dust Of Discipleship**

I love the phrase “in the dust of the Rabbi.”

It is so foreign to our 21st century ears, but so important for us to understand today.

The implications for disciple-making parents is powerful.

In the dust of the Rabbi. That’s where you want to be.

That’s where you want your children to be.

And when you see where that is, if you haven’t already, you will want to get there as soon as possible.

And you will want your children to be there as soon as possible.

You will want to live there.

And you will want your children to live there, too.

So, what does it mean to be “in the dust of the Rabbi”?

To help us understand that phrase, let’s go back to first century Israel.

Jesus, the Son of God, came to do something very special in the grand plan of God.

He came to save His people from their sins.

While on earth He undertook a public teaching, preaching and healing ministry to show them how to live a righteous and godly way of life in proper relationship with God.

It was His life and message and ministry that led up to the point of his saving act—his death.

Jesus had many important things to say, do and teach.

So important, in fact, that He called disciples to come after him not only so they could witness it all, but so He could impart to them His way of living His faith.

And some of them He specifically charged with the leadership of taking His message to the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20).

He called disciples after Him just like the religious Rabbis and sages of His day.

A Rabbi or sage of Jesus' day would take disciples after him whose main job was to follow the Rabbi everywhere he went.

But it wasn't simply to follow him; it was to be with him. It was to learn everything he had to teach.

It was to watch and learn his lifestyle, how he practiced his religion.

It was to ask him questions.

It was to get answers.

It was a first-hand, on-the-job learning and training experience.

Disciples of Rabbis memorized their Rabbi's words.

They literally wanted to become as much like their Rabbi as humanly possible, gaining all his knowledge and wisdom, adopting for themselves how he practiced his religion.

They wanted to eat like him.

They wanted to recite Scripture like him.

They wanted to pray like him.

They wanted to teach like him, serve others like him, help like him and so on.

And they left everything and gave their lives to be their disciple, for life. It was full-time, 24-7-365.

No vacations, no time off, no breaks.

That's why a potential disciple would have to count the cost of discipleship to a famous Rabbi before embarking with him (this is what is happening in Luke 9:57-62).

It was not a fad, a passing interest, or a simple curiosity.

Following a wandering teacher would not always be easy, and often the sleeping arrangements for the night were uncertain.

The next meal could also be uncertain.

If they were married, a potential disciple would need to get his wife's permission to leave her for a set time while he was off following the Rabbi.

Others would need to sell some or all of their possessions in order to be detached from them so they could follow the Rabbi.

It was a 100% life commitment for a set period of time.

It was serious business.

It was a complete honor.

So, the phrase "in the dust of the Rabbi" refers to the disciple following closely behind his Rabbi, so much so that the disciple would literally be walking in the dust kicked up from the Rabbi's feet.

It symbolizes the teacher-disciple relationship which often would become closer than the disciple's relationship with his own father.

It symbolizes the adherence of the disciple to the teacher.

It symbolizes the disciple's deep yearning, desire, passion, and willingness to learn everything the Rabbi has to teach.

It symbolizes where God wants us to be today, and where He wants our children to be.

Jesus still calls us to follow Him and his teachings.

He still calls us to give up everything that gets in the way of our discipleship walk with Him.

He still calls us to count the cost of discipleship to Him before embarking with Him.

He still calls us to watch His life and learn everything He has to teach; this is where Scripture comes in.

He still calls us to be with Him, to learn how He practiced His religion, to memorize His words, to become as much like Him as humanly possible, to gain all His knowledge and adopt His religious practices, to recite Scripture like Him, to pray like Him, to teach like Him, serve others like Him, help like Him, to put Him before any other thing or relationship we have, to make and keep a total life commitment of discipleship to Him for the rest of our lives.

Jesus still expects us to become and live as His disciples.

We can still walk in the dust of the Rabbi; in fact, that is right where He wants us.

And when you are there, the dust that covers you will be the relationship with Him that is closer than a father.

22 The total commitment of the disciple to His teacher.

The deep yearning, desire, passion and willingness to learn everything He has to teach and to strive to put it into practice.

The only thing left to do is to strap on your sandals and come follow in the dust of the Rabbi.<sup>10</sup>

When we follow Jesus as His disciples, “in the dust of our Rabbi,” something miraculous takes place...our children walk “in our dust” which is nothing less than the extension of our Rabbi’s dust.

When we walk in Jesus’ dust, our children will also walk in the dust of their Rabbi, Jesus.

That is how we as parents are disciple-makers.

Not simply to make our children into our disciples, but more importantly, to make them into disciples of Jesus.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Zig Zigar. Retrieved from: <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/1335722>
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- <sup>9</sup> MacArthur, J. (1987) *The Fulfilled Family*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- <sup>10</sup> Christian Awake (2012, July 10). *In the Dust of the Rabbi*. Retrieved from <http://www.christianawake.com/2012/07/10/in-the-dust-of-the-rabbi/>

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# Be Gentle with the Young Man

GILBERT CANGY

## Synopsis

This message is inspired from the story of David and Absalom and addresses one of the challenges of modern parenting; namely career success versus family responsibility.

## Introduction

A few years ago, I was asked to give the Father's day Sabbath message at our local church. I was very conscious that my children were going to be in the congregation and that made me a little nervous as I prepared. On the preceding Friday night, I wondered what they really thought of their dad. I decided to investigate and started with Emilie, the younger one who was eight years old at the time. As I tucked her in bed, I asked her:

"Emilie, on a score of 1 to 10, what would you give dad on being a good dad?" She thought for a while and then gave me my score:

"9.5 out of 10, dad", she replied.

That was a pretty good score and I really should have left it there. However, the perfectionist streak in me kicked in and I wanted to know why I did not get the perfect score. So I asked, "What would

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it take for dad to get 10 out of 10?" Without a moment's hesitation, she replied,

"Three things dad; 1. Cook something different; 2. Help Mom around the house; 3. Be kind to my brother".

I wished I had not asked the question as I was reminded, yet again, how observant, perceptive and truthful our children are when it comes to assessing us as parents.

There was a time when good fathering was defined as earning a decent living and mowing the lawn on weekends while good mothering meant staying home, looking after the kids, cleaning and cooking. These days both moms and dads are working outside home, sharing the laundry, the house cleaning, the homework, the cooking, the driving, coaching, bedtime stories, the changing of diapers and the lot.

Often in the busyness of running our home, what we tend to sacrifice the most is the time to really get to know and understand our children. They are living in a rapidly changing world we can hardly keep up with. The words of the old song, "The Living Years", ring so true to-day. It is a song written from a son's perspective as he reflects on his journey with his late dad:

EVERY GENERATION BLAMES THE ONE BEFORE.  
AND ALL THEIR FRUSTRATIONS COME BEATING  
ON YOUR DOOR;

I KNOW I'M A PRISONER TO ALL MY FATHER  
HELD SO DEAR  
I KNOW THAT I'M A HOSTAGE, TO ALL HIS  
HOPES AND FEARS;  
I JUST WISH I COULD HAVE TOLD HIM IN THE  
LIVING YEARS.

CRUMPLED BITS OF PAPER, FILLED WITH  
IMPERFECT THOUGHTS;  
STILTED CONVERSATIONS, I'M AFRAID THAT'S  
ALL WE'VE GOT.

YOU SAY YOU DON'T SEE IT, HE SAYS IT'S  
PERFECT SENSE;  
YOU JUST CAN'T GET AGREEMENT, IN THIS  
PRESENT TENSE;  
WE ALL TALK A DIFFERENT LANGUAGE,  
TALKING IN DEFENSE

SO WE OPEN UP A QUARREL, BETWEEN THE  
PRESENT AND THE PAST.  
WE ONLY SACRIFICE THE FUTURE; IT'S THE  
BITTERNESS THAT LASTS.

I WASN'T THERE THAT MORNING WHEN MY  
FATHER PASSED AWAY.  
I DID NOT GET TO TELL HIM, ALL THE THINGS  
I HAD TO SAY.  
I THINK I CAUGHT HIS SPIRIT, LATER THAT  
SAME YEAR  
I'M SURE I HEARD HIS ECHO, IN MY NEWBORN  
BABY'S TEARS;  
I JUST WISH I COULD HAVE TOLD HIM IN THE  
LIVING YEARS.

SAY IT LOUD, SAY IT CLEAR; YOU CAN LISTEN  
AS WELL AS YOU HEAR  
IT'S TOO LATE WHEN YOU DIE, TO ADMIT YOU  
DON'T SEE EYE TO EYE.

I am sure there are many sons and daughters who could echo the sentiments in this song as they reflect on the relationship they have or had with their fathers.

For our message today, I would like to reflect on a biblical story written from a father's perspective. From the perspective of a dad who failed to admit a few things to his son in the living years. The story comes to us from the scriptures in the book of Samuel. Our theme is 'Be gentle with the young man'.

*PRAY*

***Read 2 Samuel 18: 1-5***

*"Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake".*

From the day the young shepherd boy David had singlehandedly defeated the giant Goliath, a star was born in the nation. Overnight, he was thrown from the privacy of the shepherd's life onto the center stage of public life. He received a high ranking position in the army. Rapidly David climbed up the corporate ladder and soon became the one who led the nation of Israel in all its military campaigns. At the death of the king, it was evident that David would become successor to the throne.

He had become a remarkable leader. He was brilliant in the area of foreign relations. He provided sound economic leadership and demonstrated creative leadership in architecture, in the arts and education as well as amazingly strong spiritual leadership for the whole country.

But King David was probably best known as a man of war who led Israel in all its conquests. On this particular occasion we just read about, he had mustered his entire army for another military expedition, but this time it was different.

It was different because the king had taken counsel not to march out with his army.

It was different because he was not sending his army against an enemy nation, but to deal with an internal rebellion. A rebellion that was led by Absalom, his own son.

As he farewells his soldiers from the city walls, he takes a deep breath, and yells out a command that must have sent the entire army in absolute confusion. They all heard him as he blurted out a command that did not make sense:

*"Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake".*

David's soldiers were the finest of the times; they were known to be as fierce as wild bears

robbed of their cubs. On this occasion David is begging these fierce wild bears he had personally trained to be gentle on the battlefield. Gentle towards the leader of the rebellion, he knew what the outcome would be if his son was to be on the receiving end of his soldiers' blows.

The great King David was torn between his duty as the leader of the nation and his love as a father for his own son.

The question that begs to be answered is this: *how did Absalom get to the place where he had turned against his own father?* I am not suggesting that we can always find a clear answer as to why children rebel and reject parental values. However in the case of David and Absalom, the story is intentionally written in such a way as to expose some tragic parental mistakes that we would do well to pay attention to.

David's name has gone down as one of the greatest leaders in history. In fact, he led the tiny nation of Israel into becoming a world power during that era. However, the expert leadership he displayed outside his home was a far cry from his leadership effectiveness inside his home.

This is quite common in our day and age. Some time ago, Fortune magazine had a cover article entitled "Why Grade 'A' Execs get an 'F' as parents".<sup>1</sup>

The article refers to some sobering statistics: 36% of the children raised by leaders on executive levels in the work place require regular forms of treatment for drug abuse or psychiatric disorder as compared to only 15% in the general population. How can fathers who exercise such strong leadership at a high level in the corporate world miss on being an exemplary dad at home?

In the biblical story, David disappointed his son to the point where Absalom was deeply hurt. Absalom took it so badly that he spent much of his life looking for ways to get even with his dad who had hurt him so deeply. Throughout his life, Absalom was filled with overflowing rage and resentment toward his dad. As the result, he was always scheming to get even with the man, who had damaged him so.

And as King David yells out his strange command from the city wall, it is not the cry of an angry king, but it is the cry of a broken-hearted father who had painfully come to terms with the things he had done or not done for his son. For he knew deep down that the end had come for his son Absalom.

And we ask ourselves the question, how could a man as spiritually alive as David, with incredible leadership ability fail to reflect God's character in his relationship with his son? How could a man like that wind up being such a huge failure with his son inside his very home?

David only made a few parental mistakes, but the few mistakes he made were the costly type, the kind of mistakes with huge consequences attached to them. As parents and fathers in this congregation, let's have a closer look at the mistakes he made, and maybe we can avoid the same mistakes.

## 1. Turning A Blind Eye

In other words, the inability to discipline and to have the courage to do the right thing.

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There is a very sad story early in Absalom's life when his blood sister was raped by his half-brother Amnon who was David's firstborn.

### *Read 2 Samuel 13:1-4*

Tamar was a beautiful innocent girl. Amnon her half-brother was smitten by her beauty. He got some advice from his 'so called' good friend Jonadab that went like this:

PRETEND TO BE SICK; WHEN THE KING COMES TO VISIT, TELL HIM HOW SICK YOU ARE AND THE ONLY FOOD THAT WILL HELP YOU GET BETTER IS THE KIND OF FOOD PREPARED BY YOUR SISTER TAMAR AND SHE HAS THIS SPECIAL WAY OF SERVING THAT WILL BRING SOME APPETITE BACK. YOU NEED TO EAT FROM HER HAND.  
2 SAMUEL 13:5

So the king agreed to the request and Amnon asked for all the servants to leave and to have the doors locked and when Tamar began

to feed him, Amnon took advantage of her; we pick up the story in verse 12:

***Read 2 Samuel 13: 11-20***

And this horrible event happened in David's palace right under David's nose.

Of course Absalom fully expected that when David learned of this odious crime he would bring full justice to bear on the perpetrator. He would do everything in his power to support and rebuild the shattered life of his sister.

But when David learned about the crime, he got indignant and furious. He expressed his displeasure about this odious crime. But there is no record whatsoever that he ever lifted a finger to do anything to right the wrong. From the biblical record's perspective, he swept the matter under the carpet and looked the other way. Absalom was devastated by his father's poor response.

David the giant-slayer, the great warrior on the battlefield, the commander-in-chief of the entire military, displays all his courage out in the world. But in his home, he cannot stand for what is right; he becomes passive. He does not have the courage to confront when things get out of hand.

And Absalom's anger grew day after day until he finally defended his own sister's honor by having Amnon killed. Absalom said to himself, "If my father David does not have the courage, I'll get the job done".

That was a breaking point in the relationship between father and son. David's unwillingness to confront and do the right thing triggered Absalom's bitterness.

Parents, let us remind ourselves of something basic about parenting. We are to love our children. Part of that love involves drawing lines, drawing boundaries and holding our children accountable for unacceptable behavior.

The wise man wrote, "Spare the rod and spoil the child" (Proverbs 13:24). The rod here is often misunderstood to mean corporal punishment. However the Shepherd's rod was never used to hit

the sheep; rather to guide and to protect. "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me" Psalm 23: 4.

Deep down, our children wonder whether we love them enough. Deep down our children wonder if we love them enough to draw boundaries for them. Deep down they wonder if we have the courage to define those limits and enforce them.

Even though our children express displeasure, stomp and fuss about rules and regulations. Even though they argue about the character lessons that we invoke on them from time to time underneath it, they are breathing heavy sighs of relief that someone loves them enough, and someone has the courage to set the boundaries for their wellbeing.

My wife often tells me that I sound so much like my mother. Growing up in my home, my mother was the disciplinarian and I was often at the receiving end of a real rod. She loved us that much. In fact, when she died, I made the personal reflection that I had just lost the only one in the world who loved me unconditionally. But she had rules in the home and the seven of us feared her greatly.

When I consider the story of David and Absalom, I can see another weakness that plagued their father/son relationship.

## **2. The Absent Father Syndrome**

Let me be quick to clarify that I am not talking about physical abandonment. I'm not talking about leaving babies on doorsteps and I'm not talking about dads who run off and never come back.

Abandonment can happen even if a father is physically present. It is entirely possible for a father to be physically close to his children, while at the same time, be emotionally distant from them. Some have called this "Phantom Fathers"!

When Absalom killed his half-brother, he fled to a hiding place called Geshur and he spent three whole years there.

It must have been three difficult years for him, dealing with what had just happened to his

family and to himself. There must have been a lot of emotions to process: fear, guilt, and anger. It was a time when he really needed his dad. But for three years he was kept at a distance.

The strange thing is that David desired to see his son because he had come to terms with the circumstances for Amnon's death. In fact he was consoled over the whole thing.

***Read 2 Samuel 13:38, 39***

David wanted to see his son Absalom, but surprisingly, he never made a move to act on it. There was no reason for him to hold back from reaching out to his son, but he chose not to. At a time that his son needed him most, he denied his own paternal feelings.

Like David, there are fathers who tend to shut themselves off when their children make wrong decisions or choose the wrong paths in life. Some fathers deny their own desires to see their children come home.

Is it because of pride? Family reputation? Church reputation? What would other people think?

Maybe Absalom reminded David of his own past mistakes. Maybe the memory was too painful for him to face up to again although God had already forgiven him.

Finally, Joab a trusted friend and commander of his army decided to make a move.

King David was known to deal justly, fairly and with great compassion towards his people. In fact, he was known as the angel of God. But there was something about him whereby he could see very clearly the issues in other people's lives, and give wise counsel, and make right kinds of pronouncement, but he could be blind to his own situation.

So those who knew him best had found a unique way to confront the weaker side of his character.

Joab set up a scenario whereby he sent a wise woman with a story they had fabricated together.

This woman went to the king all distressed and grieving, telling him that she was a widow who had two sons who were involved in a fight. One had killed the other and now the whole family was asking for the dead brother to be avenged. They were asking for the remaining son to be handed over to be killed. But her dilemma was that this course of action would leave her with no descendant. So she had come to ask the king for help.

In response, David, the wise king showed compassion and made three promises to her. This is what he said:

1. I will issue an order to the people on your behalf.
2. No one will ever say anything against you without incurring my judgement.
3. Your son will live and not a hair of your son's head will fall to the ground.

And at that point, the woman said to the King...

***Read 2 Sam 14: 13-14***

“WHY THEN HAVE YOU DEVISED A THING LIKE THIS AGAINST THE PEOPLE OF GOD? WHEN THE KING SAYS THIS DOES HE NOT CONVICT HIMSELF, FOR THE KING HAS NOT BROUGHT BACK HIS BANISHED SON? LIKE WATER SPILLED ON THE GROUND WHICH CANNOT BE RECOVERED, SO WE MUST DIE. BUT GOD DOES NOT TAKE AWAY LIFE; INSTEAD, HE DEVISES WAYS SO THAT A BANISHED PERSON MAY NOT REMAIN ESTRANGED TO HIM”.

David understood the lessons and he called Joab in.

***Read 2 Sam 14:21, 24***

The king asked Joab to bring back Absalom, but Absalom has to stay in his own house and not see his father, the king. So Absalom was not able to see his dad's face. Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face.

Can you imagine what it might have been like when Absalom received the news that his father wanted him back in Jerusalem. “At last”, he said, “dad wants to see me”. He was all excited about

the prospect of coming home and he said: “at least things are going to be different”. Maybe now his dad was going to show some interest in him.

So Absalom returns home and upon entering the city he is told that he is not going to be welcomed into the palace to live there with his father, but that private quarters elsewhere have been arranged for him. He should move in these private quarters and then patiently wait for David his father to contact him.

Absalom is broken, and in his broken spirit he moves into his private quarters while he waits. And he waited. He waited in vain. His anger and resentment grew every single day. He waited for two years.

After two years, Absalom takes the initiative to arrange an appointment for him with the King through Joab. Now, even Joab refused him the privilege. He could not even get an appointment with his dad’s secretary, Joab. That redefines abandonment.

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That really put Absalom over the edge. He hires a few friends and charges them to set fire to the secretary’s fields. They do and ruin his entire harvest and the secretary runs to Absalom and wonders what’s going on. And Absalom says, “Now that I got your attention, I want an appointment with my dad”.

So Absalom meets with his dad for the first time in five years.

By then, it is too late. The damage caused by Absalom’s sense of abandonment is not going to be easily fixed. And the stage was set for a lifetime of heartache between the father and son.

Dads and parents, if we bring sons and daughters in this world, we must be involved in their lives. We have to be close to them physically, and we have to be with close to them emotionally. By understanding their needs, we will be able to reach out to them and be present with them relationally and learn about what is happening in their lives. We must learn to talk about feelings, not just share information.

Child development experts tell us that the critical window in the lives of kids is from infancy to age 10. They say what happens in that 10-year season sets up each child for a life of blessings or a life of brokenness. What an opportune time to invest in the lives of our children! Perhaps this could be a time when we choose to slow the pace of climbing the career ladder, or a time to listen the needs of our children whether emotional or otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

Well let’s go back to Absalom.

Scripture tells us that at that point, he decided to plot an insurrection. He decided to go after his father by undermining that which meant most to him, his throne; the leadership base in his career. Absalom gained the hearts of the people; he lied and undermined his father’s influence for four long years, day in and day out. Shortly after that, Absalom organised an army and when his father got knowledge of that, he realised the seriousness of the situation and he fled from the city temporarily with those who had remained loyal to him.

But King David, for the sake of the nation had to take action. So he mustered his entire army, those who had remained loyal to him, and sent them to restore order.

The king waited on the walls of the city until he saw a man running back towards the city in the distance with news from the battlefield.

The first question the king asked was “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

***Read 2 Samuel 18:32, 33; 19:1-4***

The great King David’s public expressions of humility, sorrow, grief and genuine brokenness over the death of his son do not fail to touch the hearts of all fathers.

His grief over the loss of his son was so great that victory was turned into mourning. The truth that love, nurture, care and well being of one’s children is of greater significance than corporate success and military achievements finally crashed home for the king. He recognized his mistakes

and even genuinely wished that he had died instead of his son.

Fathers who like David are not perfect and are also wrestling with past failures cannot fail to sympathise with him. Fathers are not perfect. None of us score 10/10.

The amazing thing is that in spite of all his failures, David was known to be a man after God's own heart. In fact, it was God himself who made that pronouncement:

AFTER REMOVING SAUL, HE MADE DAVID THEIR KING. HE TESTIFIED CONCERNING HIM, 'I HAVE FOUND DAVID, SON OF JESSE A MAN AFTER MY OWN HEART'.  
ACTS 13:22

It was certainly not David's perfect performance as a father or as a king that earned him the title. It was his honesty in recognizing and confessing his failures in his dealings with his son. It was the admission of his mistakes and his willingness to humble himself even in the presence of his subjects. It was his intense love for the son whom he loved, awkwardly may be, and who had become his enemy, and the one for whom he would have readily died.

And so we see king David publicly expressing his sorrow as he is fleeing the city.

THE WHOLE COUNTRYSIDE WEPT ALOUD AS ALL THE PEOPLE PASSED BY. THE KING ALSO CROSSED THE KIDRON VALLEY, AND ALL THE PEOPLE MOVED ON TOWARDS THE DESERT...BUT DAVID CONTINUED UP THE MOUNT OF OLIVES, WEeping AS HE WENT; HIS HEAD WAS COVERED AND HE WAS BAREFOOT.  
2 SAMUEL 15:23,30

And we know of another one who crossed the same Valley, and climbed the same Mount in the same kind of circumstances, and for similar reasons.

So we read in the Gospel of John 18:1.

"When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it".

This was the same Mount of Olives David had climbed.

Mark 14:32 tells us about Jesus, that "he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death'".

This time though, it was not a father, but a son; not a son who was estranged from his father, but a Son who had been sent by His Father; a Father who was not only wishing that he could die for his rebellious sons and daughters, but had come in the person of His Divine Son to give his life that the whole human family might be reunited to Him.

FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE.  
JOHN 3:16

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It is here that there is hope for the fathers like David like all human fathers, who do not score a perfect 10. There is hope for all sons and daughters who haven't had a human father who to inspire them. We have a father in heaven who knows us by name and loves us too.

There is grace and forgiveness and healing in the Father's love. He promises to make up for when we do not have. He offers us a wonderful parenting partnership.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> O'Reilly, B. and Hammes S. (1990). *Why Grade A Executives Get an 'F' as Parents*. Retrieved from [http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune\\_archive/1990/01/01/72933/index.htm](http://archive.fortune.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1990/01/01/72933/index.htm)

<sup>2</sup> United Way, (2010, July). *Early Childhood Development: Building Blocks for Life*. Retrieved from [https://www.gtcuw.org/\\_asset/stt995/eli\\_BriefingPaperFinal.pdf](https://www.gtcuw.org/_asset/stt995/eli_BriefingPaperFinal.pdf)

# Parents as Role Models for their Children

PEDRO AND CECILIA IGLESIAS

## Importance of Home Education

One of the greatest concerns of parents, is to give a good education to their children that is not only temporal but more importantly eternal.

What qualities and concerns must parents keep in mind to be successful with the education of their children? Today we present 'Parents as Role Models' as a significant notion. Whether they choose to or not, parents are role models for their children.

In Deuteronomy 6:4-9, we read the following:

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD,  
THE LORD IS ONE! YOU SHALL LOVE THE  
LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART,  
WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL  
YOUR STRENGTH. "AND THESE WORDS  
WHICH I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL  
BE IN YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH  
THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN,  
AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT  
IN YOUR HOUSE, WHEN YOU WALK BY THE  
WAY, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN  
YOU RISE UP. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A

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SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE  
AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU  
SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF  
YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES.  
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9

This famous passage from the Old Testament is a clear testimony to God's sovereignty and is a command from God that should never be forgotten. Living out these commands is a commitment of loyalty to God, and a declaration of our faith.

This portion of scripture speaks to parents of the importance of passing on the sacred legacy of God from generation to generation, and the importance of obedience to God's directives. Just before presenting the Shemá, Moses shares the following with the children of Israel:

NOW THIS IS THE COMMANDMENT,  
AND THESE ARE THE STATUTES AND  
JUDGMENTS WHICH THE LORD YOUR  
GOD HAS COMMANDED TO TEACH YOU,  
THAT YOU MAY OBSERVE THEM IN THE  
LAND WHICH YOU ARE CROSSING OVER  
TO POSSESS, THAT YOU MAY FEAR THE  
LORD YOUR GOD, TO KEEP ALL HIS  
STATUTES AND HIS COMMANDMENTS  
WHICH I COMMAND YOU, YOU AND  
YOUR SON AND YOUR GRANDSON, ALL  
THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE, AND THAT YOUR  
DAYS MAY BE PROLONGED.  
DEUTERONOMY 6:1-2

Later on Moses tells the children of Israel that in order for these objectives to be achieved, these words had to be put into practice in their own lives. "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart". (Deuteronomy 6:6). Before teaching the children to fear and serve the Lord, parents must aim to be excellent role models for them. Commenting on this order from God, Ellen G. White wrote:

NOT AS A DRY THEORY WERE THESE THINGS TO BE TAUGHT. THOSE WHO WOULD IMPART TRUTH MUST THEMSELVES PRACTICE ITS PRINCIPLES. ONLY BY REFLECTING THE CHARACTER OF GOD IN THE UPRIGHTNESS, NOBILITY, AND UNSELFISHNESS OF THEIR OWN LIVES CAN THEY IMPRESS OTHERS. WHITE, EDUCATION P. 41.1

After keeping these words in their hearts, parents must ensure that their children and grandchildren should also put them into practice. "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

This beautiful statement from God is a clear invitation to all parents to be obedient and faithful adherers to God's Commandments and to be good role models for their children. By following this high calling, they would achieve the objective of the Shemá, which is how this passage from the Old Testament is called, and is organized, in the following way (Deuteronomy 6:4-9):

- Teach our children about God's loving character.
- Claim God's powerful protection over our families and our children.
- Unite our families around Faith and God's Word.
- Transmit our spiritual heritage from generation to generation:

WHEN YOUR SON ASKS YOU IN TIME TO COME, SAYING, 'WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE TESTIMONIES, THE STATUTES, AND THE JUDGMENTS WHICH THE LORD OUR GOD HAS COMMANDED YOU?' THEN YOU SHALL SAY TO YOUR SON: 'WE WERE SLAVES OF PHARAOH IN EGYPT, AND THE LORD BROUGHT US OUT OF EGYPT WITH A MIGHTY HAND; AND THE LORD SHOWED SIGNS AND WONDERS BEFORE OUR EYES, GREAT AND SEVERE, AGAINST EGYPT, PHARAOH, AND ALL HIS HOUSEHOLD. THEN HE BROUGHT US OUT FROM THERE, THAT HE MIGHT BRING US IN, TO GIVE US THE LAND OF WHICH HE SWORE TO OUR FATHERS. AND THE LORD COMMANDED US TO OBSERVE ALL THESE STATUTES, TO FEAR THE LORD OUR GOD, FOR OUR GOOD ALWAYS, THAT HE MIGHT PRESERVE US ALIVE, AS IT IS THIS DAY. THEN IT WILL BE RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR US, IF WE ARE CAREFUL TO OBSERVE ALL THESE COMMANDMENTS BEFORE THE LORD OUR GOD, AS HE HAS COMMANDED US. DEUTERONOMY 6:20-25

### **It is a challenge to be 'Role Models' for our children**

John Sebastian, at 11 years of age, had decided for the first time to start saving. He wanted to buy an MP3 Player. The best way to purchase one was by saving what little money he received from random odd jobs he was given to do around the house. He was counting on his mom to save the money she promised. When he believed he had saved enough money saved to buy his MP3 Player, he asked his mom for the money. To John's surprise, his mom said she had not saved any money, and that he would have to wait until she got paid. Here is where we ask, how can parents expect their children to learn to manage their finances if they themselves don't know how to do so? The truth is, it is important for parents to learn to manage their money so they can teach their children to do the same.

## Whether They Choose to or Not, Parents Are ‘Role Models’ for their Children

On this issue Ellen White offers the following:

CHILDREN IMITATE THEIR PARENTS; HENCE GREAT CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN TO GIVE THEM CORRECT MODELS. PARENTS WHO ARE KIND AND POLITE AT HOME, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME THEY ARE FIRM AND DECIDED, WILL SEE THE SAME TRAITS MANIFESTED IN THEIR CHILDREN. IF THEY ARE UPRIGHT, HONEST, AND HONORABLE, THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE QUITE LIKELY TO RESEMBLE THEM IN THESE PARTICULARS. IF THEY REVERENCE AND WORSHIP GOD, THEIR CHILDREN, TRAINED IN THE SAME WAY, WILL NOT FORGET TO SERVE HIM ALSO. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 215.2

White also suggests that:

EVERY CHRISTIAN HOME SHOULD HAVE RULES; AND PARENTS SHOULD, IN THEIR WORDS AND IN THEIR DEPORTMENT TOWARD EACH OTHER, GIVE TO THE CHILDREN A PRECIOUS LIVING EXAMPLE OF WHAT THEY DESIRE THEM TO BE... WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME P. 305.3

### How to be successful as ‘Role Models’

#### 1. Parents must follow their own Role Model

The Apostle Paul wrote: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Here Paul is inviting his readers to imitate him, but in the same sentence, he declares that he is an imitator of Christ. Paul also tells the congregation at Ephesus: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Ephesians 5:1-2). Role Model parents must focus on God in order to reflect His character.

Ellen White continues to say:

THEY SHOULD MAKE IT MANIFEST THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CONTROLLING THEM, BY

REPRESENTING TO THEIR CHILDREN THE CHARACTER OF JESUS CHRIST. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 215.3

The daily study of the Bible will fill the life of mothers and fathers with its sacred message. This will be evident in their daily lives and relationships.

Meditating on the life of Christ will transform lives into blessings. On this subject Paul shares: “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 Corinthians 3:18).

#### 2. Fathers and Mothers that would be models for their children must have a clear vision of what they want their children to see in them

God’s attributes must be reflected in the home. Ellen White suggests in her book *Education* that love, gratitude, confidence, tenderness, justice, and tolerance are traits of character parents should model in their home.

Ellen White further states that: “The child who by trust and submission and reverence toward his earthly protectors learns to trust and obey and reverence his God. He who imparts to child or pupil such a gift has endowed him with a treasure more precious than the wealth of all the ages—a treasure as enduring as eternity”. (White, *Education* p. 245).

#### 3. Role Model Parents should live in a way that makes the Gospel attractive in the home

The joys and blessings that are experienced as a result of being a committed Christian should flourish and be enjoyed and shared in the home.

Children should see in their parents undeniable evidences that following Jesus is a joyful and worthwhile experience.

Answered prayers, miracles performed in our lives, stories of marvelous conversions, among other things, are testimonies of God’s mercies that should be brought to the children’s avid ears. It is very sad to note that sometimes what is discussed at home are negative things that occur in God’s Church such as mistakes members have made, or long-winded Sabbath sermons.

#### 4. Role Model parents gladly obey God's Commandments

This is how the Psalmist viewed the Law and its obedience: "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant giving light to the eyes" (Psalm 19:7-8).

When we observe the Sabbath we need to approach it with gladness and praise to God and not portray this obedience to God as a burden. We need to make every effort to make the Sabbath observance a delight in our homes. Every opportunity should be taken to highlight and demonstrate the benefits of obeying God. In this regard, a well planned Sabbath day will be a powerful tool to strengthen the connection of our children. An enjoyable sundown worship, will leave an indelible mark on the impressionable minds of the children.

#### 5. Role Model parents convey the joy of the gospel

Discipline administered on the basis of shouting, beatings and physical abuse terribly undermine the gospel's teachings on love, justice and respect.

#### 6. Role Model parents are excellent witnesses of God's love

Take every opportunity in the home to reaffirm how great God's love is for His children.

The Psalmist David, rejoiced about God saying: "I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

#### 7. Role Model parents are thankful to God for the blessings they receive from Him

In many Adventist churches around the world, a part of the mid-week worship service is dedicated to allowing members to share testimonies about how good God has been to them. God's children should never forget to thank Him for all they receive from Him each day. Paul declares: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

When parents give thanks in their homes for food, clothing, health, shelter, and for all the things that they have received from God, they are teaching their children to do the same. This practice will also teach children to learn to be grateful for what their parents do for them.

#### 8. Role Model parents are confident about representing the character of Christ

Parents should take advantage of every opportunity to respond positively to their children. Each of these occasions should be used to influence their children to be more like Jesus.

On this note, Ellen White shared the following "duties" of fathers and mothers in regards to role modeling:

- In the family, fathers and mothers should ever present before their children the example they wish to be imitated.
- Parents should show a tender respect in word, look, and action.
- Parents should demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is controlling them, by representing the character of Jesus Christ to their children.
- The powers of imitation are strong. And in childhood and youth, when this faculty is most active, a good pattern should be set before the young.
- Children should have confidence in their parents, and thus take in the lessons they should instill in them. (White, *Child Guidance* p. 215.3).

#### 9. Role Model parents grow daily

Despite his supernatural conversion, his close walk with Jesus, and all that He was able to accomplish to advance the gospel, the Apostle Paul, recognized his need to grow even more. On this point he wrote: "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:12-14).

### Illustration

Several years ago, a marriage retreat was held with almost 100 couples in attendance. As the meeting began, the guest speaker asked the couples among them, who had been married the longest. The older couple sitting at the front with silver hair on their heads and wrinkles on their faces, were the obvious choice. The older couple had one of their children with their spouse in attendance, who pointed at them in response to the speaker's question. There was applause from the group, as well as a special gift for the older couple when they shared they had been married for 65 years.

During the break, the older couple was asked about the secret of their longevity, and why a couple who had enjoyed 65 years of marriage was attending such a retreat. The wife answered: "Our children invited us. Besides, you can always learn something new in an event like this one."

Even after many years of experience as parents and as a married couple, we must always be on the lookout to learn something new. Children grow, and family dynamics change. So, parents need to be constantly adapting new ways of educating their children according to this reality. Praying, reading the Bible, as well as other good books, and attending parenting programs, may be of help in this growing experience.

### 10. Role Model parents toil for their character building and for that of their children

On this matter, Ellen White says the following:

IT IS ... BY A REPETITION OF ACTS  
THAT HABITS ARE ESTABLISHED AND  
CHARACTER CONFIRMED.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.2

Since character is closely related to good habits, the formation of good habits in our children should have prime importance. However, it is not an easy task to achieve this reality. Consistency, patience and perseverance are needed in order to establish good habits in our children. We must stay on task.

About this Ellen White says:

THE CHARACTER IS FORMED, TO A GREAT  
EXTENT, IN EARLY YEARS. THE HABITS  
THEN ESTABLISHED HAVE MORE INFLUENCE  
THAN ANY NATURAL ENDOWMENT, IN  
MAKING MEN EITHER GIANTS OR DWARFS  
IN INTELLECT; FOR THE VERY BEST TALENTS  
MAY, THROUGH WRONG HABITS, BECOME  
WARPED AND ENFEEBLED.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

The earlier years are the right time to establish good habits in the lives of our children.

### Illustration

An anguished mother came to a counselor requesting help for her son. Among other things, the son didn't want to work nor help with the house chores. He just spent time playing video games and watching TV. The counselor asked how old her son was, and she answered very sadly that he was 31 years old.

The task of establishing good habits must be started very early in life.

On this issue Ellen White says the following:

THE EARLIER IN LIFE ONE CONTRACTS  
HURTFUL HABITS, THE MORE FIRMLY WILL  
THEY HOLD THEIR VICTIM IN SLAVERY, AND  
THE MORE CERTAINLY WILL THEY LOWER  
HIS STANDARD OF SPIRITUALITY.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

Parents must pay careful attention to the negative behaviors small children practice. At times, parents are too indulgent and overlook negative behaviors and bad habits in their children. Bad actions should be corrected the very moment they occur. However it is a mistake to believe that children will eventually get rid of their bad habits.

ON THE OTHER HAND, IF CORRECT AND  
VIRTUOUS HABITS ARE FORMED IN YOUTH,  
THEY WILL GENERALLY MARK THE COURSE  
OF THE POSSESSOR THROUGH LIFE.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 199.3

## 11. Role Model parents live what they preach

Role Model parents don't do things they don't want their children to do.

### Illustration

Some friends came to visit an old acquaintance in his home. As they approached the dwelling, they noticed that he was sitting under a tree about 130 feet from the house, and he was eating a snack. Playfully, his friends asked why he was eating in hiding away from his family. He responded he had been given some cookies, and didn't want his children to see him eating between meals.

## 12. Role Model parents ask for forgiveness when they make a mistake

### Illustration

A mother noticed that a piece of dessert was missing. Without any proof, she accused the youngest son of taking it. He was the more avid eater of her two children. When she asked him, the boy said he had not taken it. But the mother didn't believe him. A few days later, the truth surfaced. Her older daughter had taken the piece of dessert.

This mother had made a mistake, just like many mothers and fathers do. The good thing, though, is that she had the integrity and courage to ask her son's forgiveness.

## Two Models Role Model Parents Can Imitate

**1. Christ.** Parents should have Jesus Christ as their Model. They should love their children with unconditional love.

**2. The Gardener,** Ellen White speaks in the following quotation.

PARENTS, IN THE TRAINING OF YOUR CHILDREN, STUDY THE LESSONS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN IN NATURE. IF YOU WOULD TRAIN A PINK, OR ROSE, OR LILY, HOW WOULD YOU DO IT? ASK THE GARDENER BY WHAT PROCESS HE MAKES EVERY BRANCH AND LEAF TO FLOURISH SO BEAUTIFULLY,

AND TO DEVELOP IN SYMMETRY AND LOVELINESS. HE WILL TELL YOU THAT IT WAS BY NO RUDE TOUCH, NO VIOLENT EFFORT; FOR THIS WOULD ONLY BREAK THE DELICATE STEMS. IT WAS BY LITTLE ATTENTIONS, OFTEN REPEATED. HE MOISTENED THE SOIL AND PROTECTED THE GROWING PLANTS FROM THE FIERCE BLASTS AND FROM THE SCORCHING SUN, AND GOD CAUSED THEM TO FLOURISH AND TO BLOSSOM INTO LOVELINESS. IN DEALING WITH YOUR CHILDREN, FOLLOW THE METHOD OF THE GARDENER. BY GENTLE TOUCHES, BY LOVING MINISTRATIONS, SEEK TO FASHION THEIR CHARACTERS AFTER THE PATTERN OF THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST. WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE P. 36.3

Good Role Model parents will always have Christ as a Model and Inspiration. But, they also have clear in their minds that the Gardener's work is theirs.

## Appeal

Invite all fathers and mothers to consecrate or reconsecrate their lives to God daily. Ask God for help to be model children of the Model Father. And, ask God to help all parents in attendance to be Role Models for their children.

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# CHILDREN'S STORIES

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# Bullying Is not Right

LITIANA TURNER

## Biblical Principle

DO NOT LET ANY UNWHOLESOME TALK  
COME OUT OF YOUR MOUTHS, BUT ONLY  
WHAT IS HELPFUL FOR BUILDING OTHERS UP  
ACCORDING TO THEIR NEEDS, THAT IT MAY  
BENEFIT THOSE WHO LISTEN.  
EPEHSIANS 4:29 NIV

Olive was super excited because she was going to be starting big school in the morning. Her Mamma had spent the last few weeks telling her how wonderful it was going to be. They had even practised spending a whole day doing school activities and other tasks around the house, to see if Olive could stay up all day without a nap in the afternoon.

To celebrate her transition to big school Mamma had bought Olive a new lunch box, it was bright orange with balloons on it. Olive couldn't wait to go to school and use her brand new lunch box.

Early the next morning before anyone was awake in the house, Olive was up. She snuck into her parent's room to check if it was time to get ready for school, but Papa said to her... "Olive sweetheart, you go back to bed and we'll wake you up when it's time to go to school". It didn't seem too long before she heard her Papa calling

for her to wake up as it was now time to get ready for school.

Arriving at school, Mamma and Olive went to meet with Miss Amelia, Olive's Grade 1 teacher. There were lots of mums and dads bringing their children for their first day of Primary school. It was everything Olive had hoped for, lots of children, a reading mat, even a sand box outside in the playground, Olive just knew that school was going to be great fun. Mamma sat with Olive for a little while and then Miss Amelia began to thank all the parents for coming to drop off their children at school however it was now time for them all to leave.

When her Mamma left, Olive felt the warmth of the sun streaming in through the glass window. Miss Amelia had given her a desk that was close to the window, so Olive could look outside at the trees and the sand box. In the desk next to her was a girl called Patricia. Olive smiled at Patricia and whispered "Hello" but Patricia did not even smile back instead she poked her tongue out at Olive.

Olive was a little surprised by what Patricia had done, because her Mamma had always told her it was very bad manners to poke your tongue out at people. So Olive tried to say hello to Patricia again, but this time she offered her hand like Mamma and Papa had shown her when you meet someone new. Patricia took her hand and squeezed it really hard, she squeezed it so hard that Olive's eyes welled up and two giant tears rolled down her cheeks.

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Suddenly big school was not fun anymore, Olive felt all alone and her hand hurt where Patricia had squeezed it. It was only her first day of school and already Olive just wanted it to be over. Mamma had told her that if there was any problems to ask Miss Amelia for help. Olive didn't know what to do, she really wanted to be friends with Patricia but she was not being at all nice.

Miss Amelia called the class together and said to them that it was now lunchtime and everyone had to bring their lunch boxes out. Olive went to her bag and brought out her brand new lunch box. Seeing the bright orange colour and the balloons made Olive smile and she quickly took her seat under the shade of a nearby tree. Olive ate as much as she could but could not finish her lunch because she was looking forward to playing in the sand box. When the eating time had finished everyone in Grade 1 could return their lunch boxes to their school bags before they had a few minutes of play.

Olive eagerly packed up her lunchbox and then raced back to the sand box. When she arrived at the sand box, Patricia was already there and she said to Olive, "You cannot come in here" Olive asked, "Why not?" and Patricia said, "because I said so!" Olive was very unhappy. All the excitement and joy of being in big school was evaporating and Olive felt like she did not belong.

At home, that evening Mamma and Papa had made Olive's favourite dinner to celebrate her first day in Grade 1, however, Olive just played with her food. Papa asked, "Olive is everything alright?" Olive did not say anything to her Papa. So Mamma tried, "Olive tell Papa and I about your first day at school sweetheart", Olive began to talk about her first day at school and when she got to the part where Patricia poked her tongue out and then how she squeezed her hand really hard, tears started to fall down Olive's cheeks. Mamma and Papa looked at each other and then they looked at Olive, quickly they left their chairs and came together to give Olive a big hug. Papa pulled Olive close and said to her, "So, you've had a hard day at school?" Olive just nodded her head miserably.

Mamma and Papa said to Olive well there are two ways we can help you to deal with this issue; firstly, Mamma and I could come with you to school tomorrow and speak with Miss Amelia about the situation or we could show you what you can do if Patricia or anybody does something that you are not comfortable with. So Papa and Mamma talked with Olive about what she should do and say if anyone was horrible towards her. Papa said "Olive when somebody does or says something you do not like you must say to them in a firm voice, "Stop it! I don't like what you are doing" then, you must walk away". Sometimes, you may meet people like Patricia who behave in inappropriate ways, if this should happen to you, please talk to an adult or let somebody you love and trust know.

# Grandparents' Celebration Day

ROSEMAY CANGY

## Biblical Principle

I AM REMINDED OF YOUR SINCERE FAITH, A FAITH THAT LIVED FIRST IN YOUR GRANDMOTHER LOIS AND YOUR MOTHER EUNICE AND NOW, I AM SURE, LIVES IN YOU.

2 TIMOTHY 1:5, NRSV

ONE GENERATION SHALL COMMEND YOUR WORKS TO ANOTHER AND SHALL DECLARE YOUR MIGHTY ACTS.

PSALM 145:4

ONLY TAKE CARE, AND KEEP YOUR SOUL DILIGENTLY, LEST YOU FORGET THE THINGS THAT YOUR EYES HAVE SEEN, AND LEST THEY DEPART FROM YOUR HEART ALL THE DAYS OF YOUR LIFE. MAKE THEM KNOWN TO YOUR CHILDREN AND YOUR CHILDREN'S CHILDREN.

DEUTERONOMY 4:9

## Why have a Grandparents Celebration Day at your local church?

Grandparents hold a unique place in the lives of children. They have invaluable

knowledge through their life experiences and they are the link to the family's past and future. Grandparents are often the keepers of the family's stories. They are in a position to teach the children about their family heritage but more importantly, their experiences with God's saving grace, their walk with Him and His answers to their prayers are a sacred legacy that they can pass on to the younger family members. God desires to see the coming together of generations in a loving relationship that involves the sharing of God's love and His plans for our lives.

## Grandparents' day planning

Prepare your congregation by announcing beforehand when you will have a Grandparents' Celebration Day.

## Ideas for Grandparents' day

- Invite grandparents and grandchildren to come to the front. (Also invite the elders in your church who stand as grandparents).
- Introduce this special moment by reading Deuteronomy 4:9 and sharing what the Bible says about the old and young generations and God's desire to see them come together to learn more about Him.

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- Prior to this day, ask one grandparent to share one favorite story about their faith journey with God or stories from their childhood.
- Interview two or three grandparents and ask them questions about an answered prayer. Practice the interview process before the day.
- In the weeks leading to Grandparents Day, do a video recording as you ask grandchildren this question “Why is a grandparent special”? Have children of all ages respond to this question and compile a video that you can show on this day.
- Purchase a gift for each grandparent in your church such as a flower or a book mark that grandchildren can hand out to them.

In closing, invite an older grand child to read the following prayer:

GOD OF ALL GENERATIONS:  
 WE THANK YOU TODAY FOR THOSE WHO  
 ARE GRANDPARENTS/ELDERS.  
 WE ESPECIALLY THANK YOU FOR THOSE  
 WHO ARE GRANDPARENTS TO US —  
 THOSE WHO ARE GRANDPARENTS BY BLOOD  
 RELATIONSHIPS, AND  
 THOSE UNRELATED BUT OLDER THAN WE  
 WHO GENEROUSLY SHARE  
 THEIR LOVE AND WISDOM,  
 THEIR TIME AND TRADITIONS  
 SO THAT WE HAVE ROOTS, STORIES, AND HOPE.  
 WE BLESS YOU FOR THE GIFT OF  
 GRANDPARENTS,  
 AND WE ASK YOUR BLESSING ON THEM,  
 THAT THEIR DAYS MAY BE FILLED  
 WITH DELIGHT IN THEIR GRANDCHILDREN.  
 MAY THEIR GIVING AND GRACE TOWARD  
 YOUNGER GENERATIONS  
 BRING FULFILLMENT TO THEM  
 AND MAY THEY BE A BLESSING  
 TO ALL THEY LOVE AND CALL  
 GRANDCHILDREN,  
 THROUGH JESUS CHRIST, OUR LORD.  
 AMEN.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Discipleship Ministries. Retrieved from <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/grandparents-day-worship-resources>

# I know I am Somebody

LITIANA TURNER

## Biblical Principle

I WILL PRAISE YOU, FOR I AM FEARFULLY  
AND WONDERFULLY MADE;  
MARVELOUS ARE YOUR WORKS,  
AND THAT MY SOUL KNOWS VERY WELL.  
PSALMS 139: 14

Mr. Campbell was the best librarian in the school. He knew all the kids names and even better than this, Mr. Campbell knew from the lists he'd get from the teacher's when all the major assignments would be due. He worked with Mrs. Lehn to make the library environment, comfortable and inviting so that even if you didn't visit the library often, whenever you walked in, you'd feel welcomed.

It was the middle of the year and in June it is Winter in the Southern Hemisphere so the library was decorated like a Winter Wonderland. Mr. Campbell and Mrs. Lehn had outdone themselves, there were the most beautiful pictures of mountain ranges from around the world, the snow-capped and lily-white, Swiss Alps, the gorgeous glacial Mt. Cook of Aotearoa also known as New Zealand, the Dolomites in Italy and even Australia's very own Mt. Kosciusko was up on the wall. Nestled amongst all of these pictures was a solitary pencil drawing of a chubby faced toddler, whose hands cupped his face as his elbows rested

on the table in front of him. Below his picture was the caption, "I know I'm somebody 'cause God don't make no junk"!!

Arieta had arrived from Fiji (a tropical island in the Pacific Ocean) in the previous year and she was still finding the Winter months in Australia to be quite cold, because she was new to the high school it was also quite challenging to make new friends. Everyone else seemed to fit easily into friendship groups because they either caught the train to school together or they lived on the same side of town. Arieta unfortunately was new, she came from the poorer side of town and did not really know anyone at the school, she wore second hand shoes and her uniform had seen better days, she was shy and looked different to everyone else. However the one thing that Arieta loved to do more than anything else was to read. So Arieta would spend many lunchtimes reading in the library. Her favourite books were in the fiction section of the library and she began spending many hours pouring over the novels she found there.

One day, Mr. Campbell came to Arieta while she was in the library and he asked her why she didn't go out and spend more time outdoors playing hand ball at lunchtime. Arieta said to Mr. Campbell, "Sir I don't know anyone and I don't fit in, everyone in this school either has blue or green eyes. Their hair if it is not blonde, will be light brown or straight, they are all of European

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descent, whereas I have brown eyes, dark skin and an afro on my head and I come from a tiny pacific island called Fiji. I am a nobody"! and besides Arieta added, "I love to read and in these books I can discover a whole new world". Mr. Campbell smiled kindly at Arieta and said to her, "Please come with me to the front of the library, I have something to show you".

Mr. Campbell took Arieta to the wall with all the pictures of the snow capped mountains from around the world. He pointed out the Swiss Alps, the Dolomites and Mt. Cook, he even showed Arieta how small Australia's Mt. Kosciusko was in comparison to all the other

mountains and then he told her something she would never forget.

"Arieta", Mr. Campbell said, "just because the Australian mountain is small in comparison to the Swiss Alps and Italy's Dolomites, it does not make it less beautiful. These iconic places in the world, these mountains are beautiful because of the fact that they are unique to their country.

You are a Fijian and your afro hair and mahogany skin colour makes you special because you represent and come from a beautiful nation, God does not make junk and you were handcrafted by a loving God".

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# SEMINARS

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# Building Your Marriage on the Rock

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

## The Text

THEREFORE A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS  
FATHER AND HIS MOTHER AND HOLD  
FAST TO HIS WIFE, AND THEY SHALL  
BECOME ONE FLESH  
GENESIS 2:24

44

## NOTE:

Use sermon by Olivers in this planbook "Rock or Sand builders" as a useful reference for this seminar

## Introduction

Weddings are beautiful, delightful and blissful occasions. When a couple stands at the altar, holding hands, gazing into each other's eyes, reciting their vows, they have so much promise and so much hope. Every couple believes their love is so special and their bond so strong, they will remain together "in sickness and in health".

The reality is that most couples will end up on one of three paths: couples who stick, couples who are mostly stuck, or couples who simply stop (S. Stanley, 1998). In the United

States and in many countries of the world, 40 to 50 percent of first time marriages will eventually end in divorce.<sup>1</sup> What happens to the vows of staying together "until death do us part"? Is it that those making the vows didn't take them seriously? Or is there a lack of true understanding of what the vows really mean. In addition, it seems that as couples hear about the high failure rate of marriage, they are watering down their marriage vows. Some vows now say, "as long as we both shall love" instead of "shall live". It would appear that some couples are setting their expectations lower just in case they are not able to live up to such a high level of commitment.

With this daunting reality, how does a couple stay married for a lifetime, and happily so? How does a couple in today's society build a marriage that is rock solid and not one that washes away with the sand?

## The Science of Love and Relationships

Most of us have heard about or have experienced first-hand *falling in love*. At least that's what it is called in contemporary society. That giddy, butterflies in the stomach, rush of feelings we get when we meet someone we are powerfully attracted to. The truth is that this is not really love it's just the body's natural response to the neurochemicals that are being

.....  
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pumped into the brain when we meet someone that we find attractive. We prefer to call it “*falling in like*” or infatuation. Another truth is that this response is not sustainable with the same person unless we are intentional about connecting positively on a daily basis. The powerful force that connects us at the beginning begins to wear off once we stop all doing all the wonderful things we did at the beginning of the relationship and we have to negotiate the daily cares of life. Because we are wired (by God) to intimately connect with another human being, when the romantic feelings dissolve, we believe we have fallen *out of love*.

In the article “*The Power of Love*”, Sue Johnson (Johnson, 2016) states that new science is revealing how essential romantic love is to human beings. Sociologists and psychologists are also finding how this love works, why it goes wrong, and what couples can do to make it last longer. Their findings reveal that from ancient times, humans have had the need to connect with someone and this need provides trust, safety and security. Its opposite is isolation, which is coded in our brains as dangerous. Furthermore, these findings on love reveal that a life partner is often our only or most reliable source of support, comfort, and intimacy. In this age of growing isolation and loneliness, even scientists agree that now more than ever, people need to be in “forever” committed relationships and evidence suggests that it is possible to sustain the romantic bonds for a lifetime.

## God and Marriage

At the end of creation week, after God had finished creating the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the sea, the animals, the man, He looked at everything and “behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:30). According to the Genesis account, everything was perfect—all but one thing—the man, Adam, was alone. Thus God declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Genesis 2:18). Earlier, we said that new advances in social science have revealed that loneliness and isolation are dangerous and

detrimental for our well-being. To be sure, it takes science a while to catch up with God, and it is very gratifying when it happens.

God created human beings to be in relationship with Him first and then with others. When He created Adam, and then Eve, He knew that humankind would need the kind of relationship where trust, safety, openness, and closeness could thrive. This is the definition of intimacy or the oneness that God talks about in Genesis 2:24, 25, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” God also knew that this high level of intimacy would require a deep vulnerability that would be quite risky without a covenant, so he instituted marriage. Marriage provides the safety of a covenant, a mutually binding agreement that is not found in other replicas of this institution, including cohabitation and consensual partnerships.

Sadly, in Genesis 3, we see the effect of Adam and Eve’s sin on marriage and family relationships. The beautiful admiration, mutuality, and oneness of the first couple gave way to defensiveness, blame, hostility, separation and selfishness. However, God himself provided restoration, hope and healing for humankind through His son Jesus Christ, including restoring His original design for marriage. In the book, *The Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White says this:

LIKE EVERY OTHER ONE OF GOD’S GOOD GIFTS ENTRUSTED TO THE KEEPING OF HUMANITY, MARRIAGE HAS BEEN PERVERTED BY SIN; BUT IT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL TO RESTORE ITS PURITY AND BEAUTY...THE GRACE OF CHRIST AND THIS ALONE, CAN MAKE THIS INSTITUTION WHAT GOD DESIGNED IT SHOULD BE—AN AGENT FOR THE BLESSING AND UPLIFTING OF HUMANITY  
WHITE, *ADVENTIST HOME*, 100.1, 2.

The feeling of *falling in love* is a beautiful thing. But relationships are dynamic and they are

always changing. Thus, in spite of how deep this love seems, is it based solely on a feeling and an extremely shallow level of commitment that will eventually fade or dissipate. However, with much effort, time, commitment and willingness to keep going, it is possible to grow and sustain (or reignite) a love that can be satisfying and stable for a lifetime.

### Covenant Commitment in Contemporary Times

As we study scripture, the bible consistently points us to a creator God who longingly pursues His children with an everlasting love (Isaiah 54:5). In the Old Testament God invites the children of Israel to be His people and covenants with them to be their God. This covenant love is a love that endures, renews, forgives, and restores (2 Chronicles 7:14). In the New Testament God speaks about His relationship with His people as a marriage—thus elevating marriage as a symbol of the union of Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:32). This is the biblical model for Christian marriage and family relationships. If we are going to do marriage and relationships the way God intended, then we must have a Christian worldview. We must understand and follow the ways of God.

In marriage, spouses have the capacity to mirror God's covenant love to one another. Commitment that lasts a lifetime requires this type of covenant love. We can love our spouse unconditionally because we experience unconditional love from God (1 John 4:9, 10). In the book, *A Model for Marriage*, Jack O. Balswick and Balswick (2006) posit that covenant love goes beyond loyalty to marriage as an institution and surpasses the need for self-fulfillment. Covenant love is a "promise to sacrifice for the sake of the relationship". It is a commitment to care for the needs of each other, nurturing the relationship, and upholding the institution of marriage.

Covenant love and commitment requires an interdependence that goes against the individuality of our postmodern times. It also requires an egalitarian or mutuality that

challenges traditional notions of marriage which resulted in legalistic and inflexible relationships. It is a lifelong commitment to investing in the marriage and holding on to the investment in good and bad times.<sup>2</sup> When couples are intentional about spending quality time together doing joint activities, they learn to depend on each other, and this deepens their level of commitment.

### Rock and Sand Marriage Builders

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus shares the parable of the man who built his house on solid rock and the man who built his house on the sand.

THESE WORDS I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS TO YOUR LIFE, HOMEOWNER IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR STANDARD OF LIVING. THEY ARE FOUNDATIONAL WORDS, WORDS TO BUILD A LIFE ON. IF YOU WORK THESE WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A SMART CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT—BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK. BUT IF YOU USE MY WORDS IN BIBLE STUDIES AND DON'T WORK THEM INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A STUPID CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SANDY BEACH. WHEN A STORM ROLLED IN AND THE WAVES CAME UP, IT COLLAPSED LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.  
MATTHEW 7:24-27 MSG

This parable compares the building styles of two men, a wise man that built a house that was able to weather the heavy storms, and a foolish man who built a house that collapsed when the storm rolled in. Jesus then pointed out that those who only read His words but don't practice them in their lives will not be able to weather the storms of life. The analogy to marriage is clear—couples that obey God's word and apply them to their relationship will have a marriage that remains strong when the inevitable storms of life hit. Christian marriage is a marriage built on the Rock—the Rock Jesus Christ.

A marriage built on the sand is based on an immature covenant and conditional love. It is dependent on temporary institutions such as career success, materialism, personal fulfillment, partner performance, and other worldly values. If and when one spouse feels the other spouse or the marriage is no longer meeting their needs, or one loses a job, or there's a financial crisis, the marriage is so badly shaken by these storms that it eventually dissolves.

## Building Your Marriage on the Rock

When marriage is built on the Rock it provides a strong foundation for covenant commitment, trust, and intimacy to grow and thrive. This kind of marriage is based on a mature covenant and unconditional love and is fully possible through the power of Jesus Christ (Phillipians 4:13). God gives us His strength to remain faithful to our commitment in marriage and He provides guidance through His word to build a rock solid marriage. We offer below, five essential building steps for your marriage.

### 1) Build your marriage on covenant love

LOVE IS PATIENT AND KIND; LOVE DOES NOT ENVY OR BOAST; IT IS NOT ARROGANT OR RUDE. IT DOES NOT INSIST ON ITS OWN WAY; IT IS NOT IRRITABLE OR RESENTFUL; IT DOES NOT REJOICE AT WRONGDOING, BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER ENDS. AS FOR PROPHECIES, THEY WILL PASS AWAY; AS FOR TONGUES, THEY WILL CEASE; AS FOR KNOWLEDGE, IT WILL PASS AWAY.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-8 ESV

This is the kind of love that Christ has for us and it is how we are to love each other in marriage. Covenant love is unconditional love, it is agape love; it continues to love even when one feels like giving up. Jack O. Balswick and Balswick (2006) share this:

COVENANT LOVE AND COMMITMENT ARE WHAT GIVE SPOUSES THE ABILITY TO COUNTER THEIR HUMAN IMPULSE TO GIVE UP AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE. OUR COVENANT PROMISES THAT WE AS SPOUSES STAY ON EQUAL FOOTING AND PERSISTENTLY WORK OUT DIFFERENCES AND DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE.

Covenant love requires understanding each other's needs and being willing to sometimes practice self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Covenant love requires much energy and sacrifice but keeps us determined to creating the best marriage possible.

### 2) Accept each other's faults and imperfections

In marriage we must learn to value one another and accept that not one of us is perfect. We're talking about having a marriage filled with grace. The wonderful thing about grace is that it is underserved, you can't earn it, but love and acceptance is given anyway. All of us have received grace from God, and it is through His power that we can offer grace to our spouse (Jack O. Balswick & Balswick, 2014). When there is grace in the marriage, it creates an atmosphere that goes beyond guilt and shame, and sets the stage for growth and renewed commitment in the relationship

IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE HAVE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US AND SENT HIS SON TO BE THE PROPITIATION FOR OUR SINS. BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US, WE ALSO OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER  
1 JOHN 4:9,10, ESV

LET EACH GIVE LOVE RATHER THAN EXACT IT. CULTIVATE THAT WHICH IS NOBLEST IN YOURSELVES, AND BE QUICK TO RECOGNIZE THE GOOD QUALITIES IN EACH OTHER. THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEING APPRECIATED IS A WONDERFUL STIMULUS AND SATISFACTION  
WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME, 107.3

### 3) Listen, Listen, Listen to each other

Good communication in any relationship is like water and sunshine is to a healthy lawn. Good listening is like the fertilizer that will go deep beneath the surface to nourish and enrich the soil. In most relationships when there's a complaint it is because some needs are not being met—voices are not being heard. Couples who communicate well understand that active listening is an essential ingredient in their marriage.

Active listening means listening not only with your ears, but listening with your eyes and with your heart. It is the kind of listening that conveys to your spouse that you are more interested in hearing what they have to say than defending yourself and stating your point. In the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families*, Dr. Stephen Covey says, "Seek first to understand, then to be understood". Once again we see self-denial, another essential ingredient for marriage to last for a lifetime.

releases us from these feelings. Forgiveness in essence is for the forgiver more than for the forgiven (Smedes, 1984).

BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER AND,  
IF ONE HAS A COMPLAINT AGAINST  
ANOTHER, FORGIVING EACH OTHER; AS  
THE LORD HAS FORGIVEN YOU, SO YOU  
ALSO MUST FORGIVE.  
COLOSSIANS 3:13

It is only through God's power that we have the capacity to forgive.

Forgiving is a choice. When we choose to forgive, we honor God. Choosing not to forgive reinforces barriers between husband and wife, and it also builds barriers between us and God (S. M. Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 2013).

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, THE DESIRE OF AGES, 25.2

48

LET EVERY PERSON BE QUICK TO HEAR,  
SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO ANGER.  
JAMES 1:19

When each person in the marriage feels heard and understood, the couple draws closer to each other, intimacy increases and commitment to one another and the relationship is strengthened

### 4) Forgive often

*The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989) has this definition of forgiveness: 1) to stop feeling angry towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake; 2) no longer feel angry or wish to punish; 3) to cancel a debt.

Forgiveness paves the way for healing and reconciliation in every relationship.<sup>3</sup> In marriage, both individuals will inevitably hurt one another. When we forgive we give up our perceived right to punish or retaliate for the wrong that has been done to us. When we fail to forgive, bitterness and resentment increases in the relationship. Forgiveness

### 5) Hug more

Most couples can hardly wait to get married to enjoy the physical benefits of marriage. But as daily life takes over and the giddiness wears off, as we said earlier, we forget to do the things we did at first. Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily. When we hug or touch each other, the hormone oxytocin is released. Oxytocin is the hormone that increases our bond to another person; it also lowers blood pressure and reduces stress. So there are many benefits we can glean from a simple hug. We encourage couples to hug for a minute every morning before parting from each other, and every evening when they are reunited.

COME MY BELOVED, LET US GO OUT  
INTO THE FIELDS AND LODGE IN THE  
VILLAGES...THERE IT WILL GIVE YOU  
MY LOVE.

SONG OF SOLOMON, 7:11,12B

DETERMINE TO BE ALL THAT IS POSSIBLE  
TO BE TO EACH OTHER. CONTINUE  
THE EARLY ATTENTIONS. IN EVERY WAY  
ENCOURAGE EACH OTHER IN FIGHTING  
THE BATTLES OF LIFE...LET THERE BE  
MUTUAL LOVE, MUTUAL FORBEARANCE.  
THEN MARRIAGE, INSTEAD OF BEING  
THE END OF LOVE, WILL BE AS IT WERE  
THE VERY BEGINNING OF LOVE.

WHITE, ADVENTIST HOME, 106.2

If couples integrate these building steps into their marriage, they will build a marriage on the Rock and fortify it to weather the storms of life. They will also experience the joy and satisfaction that God plans for every Christian couple. Ultimately God intends for us to be drawn closer to him; He wants to make us holy. Far beyond our own joy and personal happiness, Christian marriage is for us to glorify God and be representatives of His grace and love here on earth.

I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH HIM  
WHO STRENGTHENS ME.  
PHILLIPIANS 4:13

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Divorcestatistics.org, and Eurostats.org
- <sup>2</sup> This statement refers to people who are in relatively healthy relationships. It is not referring to people who are in abusive relationships or dealing with infidelity. Those who are experiencing such trauma in their relationship should consult with their pastor or a qualified Christian counselor.
- <sup>3</sup> We again reiterate that this seminar is for people who are in relatively healthy relationships. It is not referring to people who are in abusive relationships or dealing with infidelity. Those who are experiencing such trauma in their relationship should consult with their pastor or a qualified Christian counselor

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# Growing Characters for Eternity

KAREN HOLFORD

## The Text

BUT THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT IS LOVE,  
JOY, PEACE, LONGSUFFERING, KINDNESS,  
GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS  
GALATIANS 5: 22

Happy and simple ways to grow your child's character (as well as yours!). An interactive parenting seminar.

50

## Materials needed:

- Bibles
- Flip chart paper or large sheets of paper
- Marker pens
- Pens or pencils for participants
- Copies of the Character Strength Bible Verse handout
- Copies of 'Exploring Character Strengths' worksheet – one per small group of 3-4 people
- Handouts of 'Creative ways to nurture your child's character' to give to parents at the end of the seminar

## Prayer

Open with prayer, praising God for His infinitely wonderful character. Invite the Holy

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Spirit to work in the space between your words and the hearts of the listeners, so that each person hears what God wants him or her to hear today.

## Introduction

We have often referred to character traits as if people are born with or without them, or as if we either have them, or we don't have them. It can be more helpful to describe character traits as 'strengths'. Then we can strengthen our characters, and the characters of our children. By finding ways to practice these different character strengths, develop them, and use them in different contexts, just as we would strengthen our muscles.

## What are character strengths?

CHARACTER STRENGTHS ARE DURABLE,  
FUNDAMENTAL QUALITIES THAT DESCRIBE  
US AT OUR BEST.  
EADES, 2008

Character strengths are positive qualities and values such as generosity, kindness, creativity, patience, humility, etc. It is encouraging to define character strengths as 'qualities that describe us at our best', because, when we think about our own characters, we often focus on the times when we have failed and messed up. So we tell ourselves: "I can't really describe myself as generous because of the time when I walked past a beggar in the

street and didn't give him any money.” We can easily use these challenging moments as evidence to disregard our character strengths, which can be discouraging. It is especially discouraging for children when we think and talk about them and their character strengths in this way.

But when we redefine character strengths as descriptions of ourselves at our best, and focus on what we have achieved in our most inspired and shining moments, then we can feel more encouraged to grow and nurture our strengths, and to become more like Jesus.

### Exploring God's Character

We will start by focusing on God's character, because then we will discover the kinds of character strengths that we need to develop to become more like Him.

#### THERE ARE TWO CHOICES OF ACTIVITIES TO HELP YOUR GROUP EXPLORE GOD'S CHARACTER.

Choose the one that will work best for your group and context. If there are lots of children present they may enjoy God's character alphabet. If you have plenty of time you can read Psalm 145 as a scripture reading, list the characteristics in the chapter, and then do the alphabet activity as a large group or in smaller groups.

#### God's character revealed in the Bible

- Invite someone to read Psalm 145 aloud to the whole group, as people follow along in their own Bibles.
- Then invite people to work in small groups, or families and to list all the character strengths of God that are revealed in this chapter, and at least three other character strengths that are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible.
- Give them some examples to help them get started, such as loving, kind, trustworthy, gracious, etc.

- Allow a few moments for them to make their lists.
- Then invite each group in turn to name 1-2 character strengths that they found in Psalm 145 and 1-2 character strengths from elsewhere in the Bible.
- If possible, write this list of character strengths on a flip chart for everyone to see.

#### God's Character Alphabet

- Give each group a large sheet of paper and a marker pen.
- Ask them to write the alphabet down the left side of the paper, one letter per line.
- Then invite them to use the alphabet as a prompt to help them list all the characteristics of God that they can think of. It is even possible to find some character strengths for the more challenging letters: for X use words beginning with eX, such as eXcellent, for Q - Quieting or Questioning, Z - Zealous, Y - Yearning, etc. (One group of children found more than 200 words to describe God's character!).
- Allow 5-10 minutes for the activity.
- Then invite feedback. If there is time, ask groups to call out one character strength for each letter, rotating through the groups. So group 1 would call out a characteristic of God beginning with A, group 2 would call out one beginning with B, group 3 C, and so on till you have one for each of the letters.
- Take a few moments to reflect on what the group has discovered about God's character as this activity often fills people with a sense of praise and wonder.

#### Developing character strengths

Let's look at what Peter says about developing character strengths in 2 Peter 1:5-8.

MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO ADD TO YOUR FAITH, GOODNESS; AND TO GOODNESS, KNOWLEDGE; AND TO KNOWLEDGE, SELF-CONTROL; AND TO SELF-CONTROL, PERSEVERANCE; AND TO PERSEVERANCE, GODLINESS; AND TO GODLINESS, MUTUAL AFFECTION; AND TO MUTUAL AFFECTION, LOVE. FOR IF YOU POSSESS THESE QUALITIES IN INCREASING MEASURE, THEY WILL KEEP YOU FROM BEING INEFFECTIVE

AND UNPRODUCTIVE IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE  
OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. 2 PETER  
1:5-8, NIV

**ASK: WHAT DO THESE VERSES  
HELP US TO UNDERSTAND  
ABOUT CHRISTIAN  
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT?  
(INVITE THE GROUP TO  
REFLECT AND RESPOND WITH  
2-3 IDEAS.)**

**Reflecting on your own character strengths**

We all have character strengths. Some of our strengths will be less developed than others, but we all have them to some degree.

- What do you think are some of your top character strengths? If you are not sure what they are, ask yourself what your spouse or child might describe as your top character strengths.
- Write down three of your main strengths, and then think about the different ways in which they have been strengthened in your life.

Perhaps they were strengthened by:

- Prayer
- Experiencing the transforming power of God in your life
- Everyday life experiences
- Unexpected and challenging life experiences
- The encouragement and nurture of other people
- Persevering towards your goals
- Other experiences...

What have you learnt about how your character has been strengthened that can help you to nurture other character strengths in yourself, and character strengths in children and others?

**Nurturing your child's character**

The main keys to nurturing your child's character strengths are giving your child small, fun and interesting opportunities to use their character strengths; exploring character strengths in family

conversations and worship times; noticing when your child is using one of their character strengths and responding positively to their actions; and having intentional conversations about character strengths.

Here are some ways you can put these into action:

- Create a list of character strengths. Use the list in the handout as a starting point, and add other strengths and values that you consider important.
- Once you are aware of a variety of character strengths you are more likely to create opportunities for your child to develop their strengths and to notice when they are using their character strengths. If you are not aware of these strengths then you could easily miss some useful opportunities to help you and your child to grow these strengths together.
- Help your child to choose one or two character strengths that they would like to work on. It's best to help them towards their goals rather than telling them what to work on.
- Pray that you and your child will grow more of this character strength.
- Use family worship to explore the character strengths in all kinds of ways. We will learn more about this later in the seminar.
- Help your child to make a list of things they could easily do at home, school, church and in your neighborhood to develop this character strength.

**Nurturing character strengths through intentional conversations**

It is also important to have intentional conversations about character strengths. It will help you and your child if you have these conversations regularly. Some families will do this every day and some will do it once a week.

Here is a sample outline for an intentional conversation about character strengths. Pick and choose different elements for variety, and to suit your child and your family context.

- Which character strengths did you use today?
- What happened when you chose to use your strength?
- Today I saw you use (name the strength) when

- (describe what happened). I was so proud of you for choosing to do that/working so hard/being so patient, etc.
- Today I worked on (name the character strength you worked on during the day). And this is what happened... (by sharing your experience you are encouraging your child, and showing that character development is a lifelong process.
  - Today I noticed (name a person) working on their (name a character strength). Who did you see working on their character strength today?
  - Tomorrow I would like to work on (name a character strength) because...
  - What character strength would you like to work on tomorrow?
- Design posters, bookmarks, and other objects that will encourage you all to use this character strength.
  - Share some of the things you make with other people, to inspire them to develop character strengths too.
  - Create a family journal together about the character strength. List the Bible verses and stories that inspired you, and the activities you did together. Include photos of some of your activities, and any themed artwork you have made.
  - Encourage other families to join you, so that you can create shared worships and activities that will help you to develop your characters.
  - In what other ways could character strengths be used to help you create positive themes in family worship?

### **Nurturing character strengths through family worship**

Character strengths make interesting, practical and inspiring topics for family worship times. Here are some simple ideas you can use in your family worships:

- Choose a character strength that you would like to develop as a family.
- Pray for inspiration and ideas about how God wants to nurture this character strength in each one of you, and in your family.
- Think of the times when God and Jesus used this character strength.
- Wonder about the other characters in the Bible who demonstrated this character strength. Research their stories, looking for clues about how they developed and nurtured their character strength.
- Search for Bible verses that speak about this strength or give positive illustrations of it.
- Think of creative and interesting ways to learn some of these Bible verses together.
- Search for inspiring autobiographies, video clips and short stories about Christians who have developed this character strength, including stories of Christians from around the world today. Read the stories to your children and show them suitable video clips.
- Make a list of all the ways you could practice this character strength as a family. Then choose at least three activities to do together that will help you all nurture this character strength.

### **Exploring a character strength**

We will explore some of the character strengths and create a rich resource of character strengthening ideas and activities for the families in our church and community.

- Form small groups of three to five people.
- Each group will be given a worksheet to help you explore a character strength, and to list ways to nurture this strength in children, young people and families.
- You will have 15 minutes to research, discuss and share ideas for nurturing your allocated character strengths through family worship activities, everyday experiences and practical family activities.
- Hand out the worksheets, and the list of character strengths and Bible texts.
- Allocate a different character strength to each group so that you receive a wider selection of ideas.
- Allow 15 minutes for group discussion and the gathering of ideas.
- Call the larger group together and invite each group to share their character strength and two to three of their best ideas.
- Gather all the worksheets together and find the best way to share the information with your wider group. Place them on a bulletin board, in a folder, or ask someone to type them up neatly so you can share the document.
- If there were some character strengths that were not explored by your group, you could

invite people to work on them at home and to return the ideas to you.

### Optional family activities

If you have children at the seminar, you might like to organize some family activities that will help to nurture character strengths. Some ideas and instructions for a few of these have been provided in this seminar pack.

If you plan to use these activities you will need to copy a few instruction cards for each table and gather the simple supplies needed for each activity. Arrange each activity in a different area of the room, or at a different table depending on the size of your group.

Invite families to find an activity that interests them and to try it out together. Allow families 20-30 minutes to explore the activities.

When you call the group together after the activities, encourage people to share feedback on the activities – what they enjoyed and what they learned together. If you have time, leave the activities so that families can try them after the seminar, too.

### Reflecting on the seminar

At the end of the seminar invite the participants to reflect prayerfully on their learning, asking God to show them what He would like them to take away from the seminar.

Then invite them to reflect on the following questions and to write down their answers for their private inspiration:

- The new things I have learned today about nurturing character strengths are...

- Three things I would like to do to nurture my own character strengths are...
- I will do this by...
- Three things I would like to do to nurture my child's/family's character strengths are...
- I will do this by...

### Wrap up

Invite people to share some of their insights, ideas and goals in response to what they have learned and experienced during the seminar.

If there are any questions, encourage the group to help answer them with their ideas and experiences.

### Closing prayer

Close with prayer, praying that each parent, child and family will nurture their character strengths and grow more like Jesus every day.

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## Some Character Strengths And Related Bible Verses

|                                |                      |
|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| Love                           | 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 |
| Kindness                       | Ephesians 4:32       |
| Desire to learn                | Proverbs 1:5         |
| Humility                       | Matthew 23:12        |
| Fairness                       | James 2:1            |
| Thankfulness                   | 1 Thessalonians 5:18 |
| Forgiveness                    | Ephesians 4:32       |
| Enthusiasm                     | Colossians: 3:23     |
| Appreciating beauty everywhere | Psalms 104           |
| Bravery                        | Joshua 1:9           |
| Caution                        | Ephesians 5:15-17    |
| Humor and laughter             | Proverbs 17:22       |
| Honesty                        | Philippians 4:8      |
| Creativity                     | Ecclesiastes 8:10    |
| Perseverance and patience      | James 1:12           |
| Self-control                   | Galatians 5:22-23    |
| Friendliness                   | Proverbs 17:17       |
| Spirituality                   | Micah 6:8            |
| Teamwork and cooperation       | Psalms 133:1         |
| Wisdom                         | James 1:5            |
| Generosity                     | 2 Corinthians 9:6-11 |

Spaces for other character strengths

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

## Exploring a Character Strength

Character strength:

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Bible verses about the character strength:

---

Bible characters who demonstrated this character strength:

---

Contemporary examples of people using this character strength:

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Creative ways to explore this character strength during family worship:

---

Practical opportunities and activities for developing this character strength in children and young people:

---

Creative ways to use this character strength as a family to share God's love with others:

---

Any other creative ideas or thoughts about this character strength?

# HANDOUT #3

## Creative Ways To Nurture Your Child's Character

Here is a list of different character strengths. Each one includes Bible verses, Bible stories and practical activities to nurture that character strength.

### Appreciating beauty and experiencing wonder

This character strength enriches our lives, helps us to notice the amazing things that God has created, and inspires us to make beautiful things, too.

Bible verses: Psalm 104

#### Biblical character: Creator God, David

- Watch a sunset, gaze at the night sky, or explore a shell, a flower, a tree, or a seed-pod and ask children what they think is most beautiful or wonderful about it.
- Describe the most beautiful things you saw today. Or share photos of beautiful things that you have taken with your cell-phones.
- Go for walks in nature. Encourage your child to slow down and notice the beautiful things all around them. Take a simple camera so they can photograph the things they discover.
- Take your child to art galleries, old churches, parks, and places where they can see beautiful things that people have created, too.
- Send them on a 'wonder hunt' to find five amazing and natural things in the garden, the forest, or the park, etc.

**CAUTION** helps to keep us safe, and protects us from saying and doing things we'll regret later.

Bible verses: Ephesians 5:15-17

#### Bible character: Many of the prophets cautioned the people of God

- Teach your child how to look out for dangers and avoid them. Read books about keeping safe, and search for online games that help children identify and avoid dangers.
- Help your child learn how to avoid abuse, bullying and cyber-bullying by using age-appropriate materials available from local sources.

- When you are with your child in different settings make it a 'game' to stop, sit down, look around and identify as many potential dangers as possible. When you identify a danger (such as a dangerous road, or a fast-flowing river, or an overhead electricity cable) think about what you could do to stay safe.

**COURAGE** is facing up to difficult, challenging or frightening situations instead of avoiding them.

Bible verses: Joshua 1:9, Proverbs 3:5-6

#### Biblical examples: Joshua, David, Elijah, Daniel and his friends, Esther

- Help your child learn how to pray every time they feel afraid, and to trust in God to keep them safe and strong. Along with the prayer encourage them to breathe deeply and slowly, as if they are blowing bubbles, which is a natural way to calm the body down.
- Give your child plenty of reassurance and support, especially when they are facing a challenge such as performing on the stage, visiting the dentist, or taking a test. Ask them what you can do to help them feel calm and brave.
- Make a bravery award poster and write a message on it every time you see your child being brave.

**CREATIVITY** is not just about being artistic. Creativity is having an open mind about how things can be made and used, having a vision for an end-product, and the determination to overcome the challenges of making it.

Bible verse: Ecclesiastes 9:10

#### Biblical examples: God creating the world and planting the garden of Eden; making the tabernacle; Solomon's temple; Jochebed making a waterproof basket to keep Moses safe; Mary using a manger for Jesus' bed

- Find an everyday object, such as a brick, a bed sheet, or a coat hanger and think of at least ten interesting and practical ways to use it.

- Let each child create a new kind of sandwich, a fruit smoothie using at least four fruits, or a different kind of topping for a pizza.
- Give each child a large cardboard box, some scissors and a set of chunky felt pens. Help them make their box into Noah's ark. Wonder how Noah arranged the inside of the ship to accommodate a wide range of animals and their needs.

**ENTHUSIASM** is doing things with energy and excitement rather than complaining.

Bible verse: Colossians 3:23

**Biblical examples: Rebekah giving water to the camels; Joshua exploring the Promised Land**

- Create your own family version of a 'high-five' – and use it to inspire enthusiasm when someone is tired and reluctant to get going.
- Encourage energy and enthusiasm by setting a time goal on a challenging task. Work together as a team to tidy up a room or to fold the laundry before a timer rings.
- Reward your child's positive enthusiasm by letting them know how much you appreciate their cheerful energy.

**FAIRNESS** is treating all people equally regardless of their differences.

Bible verses: James 2:1-5

**Biblical examples: Jesus; Peter and his dream of the unclean animals being lowered in a sheet**

- Play sharing games to help your child learn how to share generously and equally with others.
- Encourage your child to look around and find new and lonely children to include in their playground games.
- Make sure your family makes friends with other families from different cultures, and invite them to your home. Take the time to learn about their culture.
- Set a good example for your children by showing respect, courtesy and thoughtfulness to everyone you meet.

**FORGIVENESS** is being able to forgive those who hurt you, and knowing how to let go of your hurt and resentment.

Bible verse: Ephesians 4:32

**Biblical example: Joseph, son of Jacob, forgiving his brothers; Jesus forgiving Peter and those who crucified Him**

- Teach your child about God's complete forgiveness of them by using a symbolic act such as wiping chalk off a board, washing dirt off a stone, writing in a dish of salt and then shaking the dish so the words disappear forever.
- Teach your child that holding onto resentment and not forgiving someone is like holding onto something that is hurting their hand, like a stinging nettle, or a burning stick.
- Apologize to your child when you have hurt or upset them, and ask for their forgiveness. They will learn so much about forgiveness and apologies from your positive example.
- When your child has hurt someone else, or upset them, help them to say sorry and also to do something kind for the person they heard.

**GRATITUDE** is being thankful for gifts and blessings.

Bible verses: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Psalm 136:1

**Biblical examples: Paul is thankful in his letters; the leper who came back and said thank you to Jesus; Jesus' mother, Mary, when she sings her song of gratitude after the angel has told her she will be the mother of the Messiah**

- Let your child write and decorate 'thank you' prayers to make laminated placemats for the dinner table.
- Make an alphabet of gratitude together. Write several things you are thankful for, beginning with each letter of the alphabet.
- Make thank you cards together, and cookies or bread, and take them to people to say thank you for the different things they have done for you, however small.

**HONESTY** is telling the truth, even when it's hard, and being genuine and authentic.

Bible verse: Philippians 4:8

**Biblical examples: Elijah; Prophet Nathan and King David; Jeremiah**

- Do your part to create a safe place for your child to tell the truth. Respond warmly and lovingly when children

are honest about the mistakes they have made so they don't learn that telling the truth leads to punishment.

- Teach them how to tell the truth lovingly and considerately, and how to speak kind and encouraging words.
- Create a positive attitude of giving more than required, rather than cutting corners, skimping and giving less than their best at work.
- Teach your child about returning a generous portion of tithes and offerings to God. Help them to discover the joy in supporting God's work with their finances.

**HOPEFULNESS** is believing that the best things happen when you trust in God and when you work to achieve your goals.

Bible verses: Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28

**Biblical example: Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, David, Esther, Mary, Jesus, Paul**

- Make a hope book and fill it with Bible verses, positive comments, goals and ideas that nurture your child's hopefulness.
- Make a model of the heavenly city out of scraps and construction toys, and talk about your hopes for heaven.
- Find Bible promises that give hope and write them on homemade cards to send to people facing challenges.
- Make a simple card game, matching Bible characters to the things they hoped for. Shuffle the cards and then match them in pairs. Or use the cards to play a memory pairs game, by laying them face down on the table and taking turns to pick up two cards. If the two cards include the Bible character and the thing they hoped for, then the player keeps the cards, and he or she has another turn.

**GOOD HUMOUR** is about people laughing with each other and not at each other.

Bible verse: Proverbs 17:22

**Bible character: Solomon wrote some amusing proverbs**

- Enjoy having fun with your child.
- Tell each other the funniest thing you saw, heard or did during the day.
- Watch the funny antics of the animals in the zoo.
- Do some unusual, surprising and funny things occasionally. Wear your clothes backwards for an hour; serve breakfast in the bath; arrange slices of fruit to make a funny face; and hide treats in their bed or

lunchbox. These little things make special memories that will bring a smile to their face.

**KINDNESS** is being thoughtful about what the other person's needs, and then putting their needs before your own.

Bible verses: Luke 6:35, Ephesians 4:32

**Biblical examples: Rebekah, Ruth, Abigail, the boy who shared his lunch with Jesus, Mary who poured perfume over Jesus' feet**

- Involve your child in acts of kindness – bake a cake for someone, fill a basket with goodies for a sick person, pack a shoebox of essentials for an overseas child. Let them have fun choosing the gifts and experiencing the joy of giving.
- Make a kindness kit for your child to take to school. Include packets of fun tissues, BandAids with interesting and funny designs, a tiny fun toy, healthy cereal bars, etc. Encourage them to share these little things with other children who are hurt, sad, or hungry.
- Encourage your child to notice when others are tired, ill or sad, and to find ways to be kind to their family, teachers and friends.

**LOVE** is the other character strengths experienced within a caring relationship.

Bible verses: Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13

**Biblical examples: Ruth, Jesus, the Good Samaritan, the father of the Prodigal son**

- Ask your child when they feel especially loved by you. Find out how they like to be loved best with kind words, warm affection, thoughtful gifts and surprises, being helped and spending special time with you.
- Make a garland with a row of hearts cut from paper. Write and decorate a Bible verse about love on each heart, and hang the garland in your home.
- Find one way each week that your family can show love to someone else. Shop together for groceries for a hungry family; give needy children vouchers for a local toy-store; tidy up the garden for someone who can't manage it anymore, etc.

**SELF-CONTROL** is being able to wait for what you want, and to be disciplined about what you eat and what you buy etc.

Bible verse: Galatians 5:22-23

**Biblical example: John the Baptist**

- Teach your child to let others choose first, and make it fun for them to choose the smaller pieces of pie and cake by hiding little treats in them occasionally.
- Make it a game to see how who can wait the longest before eating a treat,
- Encourage your child to save up for something they really want, even if it takes a long time. It helps them to learn the value of money, hard work and patience.
- Plan a surprise for someone with your child and help them learn the self-control of keeping a secret.

**SOCIABILITY** is being aware of other people's feelings, as well as your own, and meeting other people's needs for comfort, encouragement, appreciation, hospitality, help, respect, etc.

Bible verses: Romans 12:9-21

**Biblical examples: Abigail, Jesus, Martha**

- Involve your child in welcoming guests to your home, and helping them to feel comfortable. Teach them by modelling, role-play, and your support, how to welcome people at the door, show them where to go, offer them refreshments, create a relaxing guest bedroom, etc.
- Sociability is being able to share in each other's feelings. Encourage your child to be sad with those who are sad, and to be happy with those who are happy!
- Some children prefer to be sociable with just one or two other children at a time, so let quieter children choose how they want to be sociable.

**SPIRITUALITY** is about believing that life has value, meaning and purpose. It includes helping children to learn about God and how to develop a positive relationship with Him.

Bible verse: Micah 6:8

**Biblical example: Many Bible characters**

- Learn about people who followed God. Discuss what helped them to stay faithful to God through the challenges they faced.
- Encourage your child to find enjoyable ways to pray, explore the Bible, and worship God. Provide the best resources you can afford to make the Bible interesting for your child's learning style. The more senses and actions

that are involved in their learning, the more likely they are to remember important truths, lessons and Bible verses.

- Children need to know that they are a gift from God to the world, that He loves them, and that He has special, exciting and happy plans for their lives.

**TEAMWORK** is being able to cooperate with other people in happy and supportive ways.

Bible verses: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12,  
Psalm 133:1, Romans 12

**Biblical examples: Noah and his family building the ark; the children of Israel building the tabernacle**

- Find some projects that involve your whole family working together, such as camping, planning a picnic or barbecue meal with friends, flying kites, and being part of other team projects.
- Model teamwork by working alongside your child when they face challenging tasks like tidying their bedroom!
- Provide your child with plenty of opportunities to participate in group activities like sports, musical activities, Pathfinders, and group performances, depending on their interests.

**WISDOM** helps us to make good choices.

Bible verses: James 1:5; James 3:17,  
Ephesians 5:15-16

**Biblical examples: Solomon, Jesus, Paul**

- Choose some of your favourite wise verses from the book of Proverbs. Write them neatly on plain index cards. Shuffle the cards, take one each, and then discuss what the proverb means and how it applies to our lives today.
- Discuss the wise and foolish decisions made by people in Bible stories, news stories, films and books. What helped people to be wise? How did they make their decisions? How can we apply their wisdom to our own lives?
- Describe a life dilemma and then discuss possible solutions. Make a list of your ideas and then evaluate each one for its 'wisdom' on a scale of 0-10.

**Further reading**

<https://kids.usa.gov/play-games/online-safety/>  
<https://www.esafety.gov.au/education-resources/classroom-resources>

# Parents Can Help Teens and Young Adults Say "No" to Drugs

ALINA BALTAZAR

## The Text

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO; EVEN WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.  
PROVERBS 22:6 ESV

## Introduction

Illegal drug and alcohol use is a statistically normative process during late adolescence and young adulthood in the world today. About half of high school seniors in the U.S. have used an illicit drug once in their life. Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drug in the U.S. and worldwide (Monitoring the Future Survey, 2013a). A vast majority (80%) of college students in the U.S. have used alcohol in their lifetime (Monitoring the Future Report, 2013b). Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) youths have lower rates of participating in these behaviors, but they are not immune to the culture around them. In a survey of 11,481 6-12th graders attending SDA schools in the North American Division back in 2000, 25% reported using alcohol in the last year, 10% had used marijuana, and 13% reported binge drinking (Five drinks or more in one sitting) (Gane & Kijai, 2015).

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This seminar will take about 60-90 minutes. Anticipated audience are parents of teens and pre-teens.

## Consequences of Adolescent Substance Use

There are three primary consequences to using substances. Most use is recreational, but there can be adverse health effects (even death) from one time or occasional use. Another consequence to recreational use is the tendency to have impaired judgement that leads to risky behaviors (e.g., driving while intoxicated, accidents, unsafe sex, and sexual assault). With prolonged substance abuse, research has found increased incidents of lung cancer, heart disease, liver disease, and breast cancer. With regular use there comes the risk of developing an addiction. With addiction the substance becomes one of the most important things in a person's life, causing problems at school, work, and with relationships. An addiction is hard to quit, even as consequences pile up (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016).

## Impact of Substance Abuse on Adolescent Development

Teens are especially vulnerable to substance use consequences. Adolescence is a very important time in human development. It is a time when teens are gaining more independence, are mostly physically developed, but executive functioning which dictates ability to be aware of long-term

consequences, is the last to develop in the brain. Adolescents are more focused on pleasure and overestimate their ability to handle consequences. When youth start abusing drugs, it actually stunts their emotional and even cognitive development. The age at which they start also has an impact on their development. The earlier they start, the most likely they will be addicted and suffer long-term consequences (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016). With these alarming statistics, what can parents do during a time when they feel they are losing control of their children?

### **Parental Bonding as Prevention**

The role a parent plays in preventing substance use starts in the very early stage. Bonding between parents and children begins at birth. It does not come naturally to all parents, but it has a significant relation to child development. Attachment is associated with the expression and recognition of emotions as well as interpersonal functioning (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Research has reported emotional regulation difficulties in substance use disorders and addiction has been considered an attachment disorder (Thorberg & Lyvers, 2010). Bonding also helps improve behavioral outcomes. A close parent/child bond can help motivate the child to cooperate with their parent because they want to please their parent who they believe cares for them (Baltazar, 2015).

### **Parental Modeling**

Whether or not we want them to, children watch what family members do. It is hard to say “do what I say, not what I do”. If parents, older siblings, or even grandparents use substances, youth are more likely to use them too (Cubbins & Klepinger, 2007). It becomes the normal thing to do, part of the family identity. Of course, the opposite is also true. In a study of SDA college students, using focus groups, this is what was reported: “If my parents didn’t use, I guess I won’t either” (Baltazar, 2015). When family members have used, having an honest conversation helps, especially regarding consequences (Baltazar, 2015).

### **Sibling Relationships**

The sibling relationship is also potentially protective. Siblings offer one of the first and most important peer relationships in an individual’s life (Heppner, 2014). Children spend more time with their siblings than with their parents. Siblings’ bonds depend upon their culture. In some cultures siblings may have a close relationship, in other cultures it is not as important for a family unit (Heppner, 2014). According to the Harvard Study of Adult Development, the longer we can sustain close sibling relationships in adulthood, the more it can benefit and protect us emotionally (Heppner, 2014).

### **Extended Family**

The importance of the extended family will vary from culture to culture. Grandparents and other family members such as aunts and uncles can play a significant role in both a family’s economic and social function. In every culture the extended family can provide a protective role in providing support to parents by assisting with the care of children, monitoring teenagers, being positive role models, passing on values, and showing love for children and youth in the family. Grandparent substance using norms were one of the strongest predictors of intention to use substances, in a population of American Indian youth (Martinez, Ayers, Kulis, & Brown, 2015).

### **Religious Upbringing**

By raising children in a religious home, there are many protective factors that come into play. Youth raised in a home with a religious affiliation had lower rates of drug use (Cubbins & Klepinger, 2007). Research has found church attendance, close relationship with God, personal devotions, and being involved in church related activities decreased substance use (McBride, 2012). In addition, church is a good place to find positive peers who are less likely to use substances themselves, though not a guarantee.

Religion also teaches values that relate to minimizing or abstinence of substance use. Some religions teach about these values more than others. The Seventh-day Adventist church teaches the value of taking care of the body because it is the temple of the Lord. In a survey of Seventh-day Adventist college students, the statement, “God wants me to take care of my body by avoiding alcohol and drugs”, was reflected in the 25% of variance in last year alcohol use and actually decreased the chance of regular alcohol consumption by 60% (Baltazar, 2015).

### Ways Parents Can Aid in Spiritual Development

According to Habenicht (1994) there are steps parents can take to strengthen their child’s relationship with the Lord.

- When there is a close bond between the parent and child, the child is more likely to believe in a loving heavenly Father.
- Similar to the benefits of role modeling temperance, modeling personal devotions, church attendance, and living a moral life are standards that children are likely to follow.
- When parents participate in religious communities it gives children a community they can lean on and a sense of security.
- Research has found many benefits to family worship. It is a time for families to spend time together, express their faith, and encourage spiritual development.
- Parents also should encourage individual religious practices in children (e.g. personal prayer and devotions).
- Since religion and spirituality can be complex concepts difficult for children to grasp, it is helpful to have an open dialogue to help answer any questions they may have.
- A great way for a parent to express their faith and help a child to internalize theirs is service to others.

### Parental Monitoring

Monitoring is the parent being aware of where the child is, their activities when they

are out, and communication of these concerns to the child. The National Survey on Drug Abuse of 2008 reports parents who monitor their children’s behavior and help with their homework decrease illicit drug use by about 50%. Mother not knowing how I spend my spare time related to greater regular alcohol use among Seventh-day Adventist college students (Baltazar, 2015). For parental monitoring to be effective rules should be clearly stated, consistently enforced, and punishment reasonable, swift and sure.

### Parental Involvement and Conflict

Positive involvement is the parent’s active participation in the child’s life when it comes to activities and school work. Parental involvement has been found to decrease substance use in adolescents and college age young adults. In a study of adolescents living in rural Idaho, USA, this answer: “If I had a personal problem I could ask my mom or dad for help,” was statistically related to lower substance use (Baltazar, et al., 2012). If positive parental involvement is preventative in adolescent substance use, then the opposite is also true. Family conflict was significantly associated with an increased risk of substance use disorders (Skeer, et al., 2009).

### Communication

It is important to communicate clear expectations regarding substance use. Clear communication was the only statistically significant parental influence on adolescent alcohol use in one study (Miller-Day, 2010). In a survey of Adventist college students, feeling comfortable talking to mother about drugs and alcohol decreased regular alcohol use by 25% (Baltazar, 2015). A participant in a qualitative study of Adventist college students summarizes it best, “I think it comes down to, when parents give good reasons why we shouldn’t be doing it, not just enforcing a bunch of rules that don’t have any substance or background to them, so, actually having rationale for the rules, or the things that parents try to implement to their kids”.

## Parenting Styles

Maccoby and Martin (1983) proposed there are four main parenting styles. Authoritative parenting is a more modern style of parenting commonly practiced in North American and European countries. Authoritative parents typically are nurturing, affectionate, set boundaries, and have open communication with their children. Authoritarian parenting is a more traditional parenting style where parents are strict, inflexible, and have high expectations for their children. Permissive parenting is also a more modern style where parents are nurturing, affectionate, but have few or inconsistent boundaries. Permissive parents prefer to take the role of “friend” with their children. Uninvolved parents are generally emotionally detached, self-absorbed, and have inconsistent or no boundaries.

## Parenting Styles Influence on Substance Abuse

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Research has examined the role parenting styles has on youth substance use behavior. Children raised with authoritative parents usually grow up to be independent, socially successful, and respectful of authority. Though permissive parenting may help with parent/child bonding, teens follow easily into peer pressure of drug and alcohol abuse. They feel their parents do not care about their substance use. Authoritarian parenting style adolescents will give into peer pressure in order to gain positive validation, even if the adolescent is fully aware of the consequence (Wood et al., 2004 and American Academy of Pediatrics, 2015).

## Family Meals

Traditionally family meals have been a part of all human cultures. Research consistently shows that having four or more family dinners per week significantly lower rates of substance abuse, sexual activity, violence and suicide ideation, victimization, obesity, and higher rates of safety behavior (e.g. wearing a helmet and seatbelt) (Matthews, et al., 2012).

How do family meals work? They can be faith building. For example when prayer/grace is said at the beginning of the meal. The meal is an opportunity for a parent to role modeling healthy eating styles and self-control. It also provides an opportunity to monitor a child’s daily activities and upcoming schedule. While families are eating they are also communicating between bites, which is a benefit that was mentioned earlier. The family meal is another way to stay involved in a child’s life and show their parent cares about them. However, family meals only work if the experience is pleasant.

## International Perspective

There is some slight variation on the role parents play in preventing substance use around the world and among different cultural groups. The following are a sampling of such studies. Dutch and Norwegian parents feel it is their responsibility to be a good example and set rules regarding substance use (van der Sar, et al., 2014). Among rural African American adolescents having family members who did not use substances, being raised by parents, spending afternoons with parents after school, having parents who talk to youth about dangers of substance use, and having parents who disapprove of child using were considered protective factors (Myers, 2013). In a study of Mexican-American adolescents, having family obligation values is associated with less substance use (Telzer, et al., 2014). Though there are some differences, the role of modeling, parental involvement, setting rules, open and clear communication, and family bonding have been found to be a universal benefit.

## Hope for Single Parents

Family forms have been changing in recent decades with 40% of children who will live in a home without two parents. Because of high divorce rates and children born out of wedlock, the nuclear family of two parents and children is no longer the norm. Children growing up in single parent households have higher rates of academic problems, more likely to become

sexually active, commit illegal acts, and use illegal drugs at young ages. This is probably due to disrupted parent/child bonding and overwhelmed single parents which leads to difficulties with communication, involvement, and supervision. Family disruption is particularly harmful during adolescent years (Antecol & Bedard, 2007)

When parents separate, children still need exactly what they needed before the separation. They need a secure emotional base, routine, protection, encouragement to learn, and the support of a trusting, loving parent. Successful single-parenting tips:

- Make time for one on one time with their children
- Show an interest in the lives of their children and their exhibited behavior and attitudes
- Make good use of family networks and mentoring programs
- Have a positive co-parenting relationship

### Tips for Blended Families

Children don't necessarily stay in single parent households indefinitely. According to the 2000 census 67% of families are blended. There are many types of family that exists in today's society, each important to the upbringing of any children. Here are some successful blended family tips:

- Give it time – 4 years on average
- Take time to build relationships
- Be flexible with roles
- Start new traditions

Braithwaite, Baxter, & Harper (1998)

### Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Drug use in teens frequently overlaps with mental health problems. These positive parenting strategies are also helpful in supporting good mental health. Sometimes it is hard to know which came first, the drug problem or the mental illness. Many use substances to self-medicate their symptoms of depression, mood swings, insomnia, difficulty concentrating, and anxiety. Substance abuse itself can lead to mental illness,

symptoms of depression, insomnia, mood swings, and difficulty concentrating. Even when parents do everything they can, there is a strong genetic component to mental illness. Depression, anxiety, ADHD, bipolar, borderline personality disorder, and PTSD (trauma) are linked to substance abuse. If a child has symptoms of these disorders, seek professional help, your child's life may depend on it! Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) website has a link to find resources near you. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> Pediatricians and local community mental health centers are a resource as well.

In conclusion, research has found the following roles parents play in preventing substance use/abuse in adolescents:

- Positive attachment/bonding
- Role modeling
- Religious upbringing
- Monitoring/supervision
- Parental Involvement
- Clear and open communication
- Frequent family dinners
- Authoritative parenting

There are no guarantees, but these can decrease the chances.

### Small Group Activity Application Questions (10-15 minutes)

- What do you believe your parents did that helped prevent your substance use?
- What could they have done better?
- What have you done as a parent to prevent your children from using?
- What could you do better as a parent?
- How can you be of support to other parents?

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# A Forever Friendship

CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

## The Text

NO LONGER DO I CALL YOU SERVANTS,  
FOR A SERVANT DOES NOT KNOW WHAT  
HIS MASTER IS DOING; BUT I HAVE  
CALLED YOU FRIENDS...  
JOHN 15:15

## 3. Reflect

- Do you feel more like Jesus' servant or His friend?
- What might help you to develop a closer friendship with Jesus?
- What would He have to do?
- What would you have to do?

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## ICEBREAKER GROUP DISCUSSION

### 1. Remember

- Who was your best childhood friend? What made them so?
- Are they still your friends?
- What keeps your friendship intact, healthy, and strong?

### 2. Review

- Read the entire section of John 15:1-17. How are verses 9 and 12 related to one another?
- How is love the essential dynamic of the Christian life?
- How does our relationship with Jesus change once we understand and start practicing the principle of verse 13?

## Overview

Our scriptural text reminds us that Jesus Himself calls us His friends. Think about what that means. Merriam-Webster (2013) defines a friend as “a person who you like and enjoy being with”. Think about that definition in terms of being friends with Jesus. According to the definition, if you are to call Jesus your friend then that means that you must firstly “like” Him and secondly “enjoy being with” Him. The only way that will occur is by spending time with Him.

When we first meet someone we do not call them friends but acquaintances. It is only as we spend time together that a friendship develops. In John 15, Jesus describes Himself as “The Vine”. Friendship is like the attachment that exists between The Vine and the branches. It is strengthened and nourished by time.

As we discuss the importance of introducing our children to a forever friendship with Jesus we will consider the following:

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- Modeling
- Family Worship
- Sabbath School, Church Attendance, and Sabbath Afternoons
- Daily Activities
- Benefits to Your Child of a Forever Friendship with Jesus

## Modeling

Perhaps you have heard the old adage, “Do as I say-not as I do”. We cannot expect our children to do what we are not doing. Instead, the old adage, “actions speak louder than words” seems to make a lot more sense. This has never been more true than in the area of parenting. Even very young children mimic what they see. They are the best reflectors of what they are exposed to. So, as we consider the topic of introducing our children to Jesus as their best friend, we must first look in the mirror.

Would your child say that Jesus is your best friend? What would make them answer the way they would? Do you speak of Jesus often in your home? Is He given a place of priority in your family schedule? Is He included in your family celebrations?

## GROUP ACTIVITY

Answer each question individually and then share your responses with the group.

1. If you could be a personal friend with anyone in the world who would that person be? Why?
2. What is the difference between knowing about someone and knowing them?
3. Do your friendships reflect your values? If so, in what ways?

If you want Jesus to be your child’s best friend then He must first be your best friend. This must be evidenced in all that you do. Jesus must be central to all that you do as a family.

Your child must know that Jesus is a treasured family member in the same way as grandma or grandpa. They will hold Jesus in the same place of priority in the family as the one you give to Him.

## Family Worship

Your family priorities are reflected in the way you spend your family time. What place does Jesus have in your home? Is the sum total contained in the few hours that you spend as a family in church each week? Or, is He a part of everyday activities?

As a family, you may readily recognize the value of proper nutrition, water, sunlight, rest, and other daily activities. Your bodies need those things in order to be healthy. In the same way you also need spiritual nourishment. Your family is nourished spiritually only through time spent with Jesus. He must be central to all that is done in your home.

Family worship should be a part of every day. It should be every day at a regular time. Be consistent and do not allow the busyness of your daily life to push it aside. Remember, it should not be hours in length. The point is to make sure that worship activities are age-appropriate for your child. A half hour of reading from the book of Revelation in the Bible may not be especially appealing to a two-year-old. Instead, try reading a short story from their favorite Bible storybook; play a Bible game; put a Bible puzzle together and talk about the story as you help your child put the puzzle pieces in place. Spend time in nature by collecting colorful leaves or bird watching and talk to your child about God as the Creator. These types of age-appropriate activities make family worship something your child will look forward to. Make it varied to keep it interesting. Have it indoors one day and outdoors the next when weather permits. Involve them in the planning when they are older, you may be amazed at what they will come up with.

As a parent, do you want your child to grow up to be an active member in your church? If so, consider this research. Benson and Eklin (1990) discovered that children who are most

likely to mature in faith are those raised in homes where faith is part of the normal ebb and flow of family life. Religious practices in the home virtually double the probability of a child growing up to be an active member of the church. In other words, what happens in your home affects their involvement in the church when they grow to be adults. The “normal ebb and flow of family life” today will affect them tomorrow. They must see Jesus in your everyday life at home in order to care about church attendance as they grow to make decisions on their own. This means that time spent in daily family worship as a child will set the stage for adult behavior later on.

### **Sabbath School, Church Attendance, and Sabbath Afternoons**

Scripture calls the Sabbath “a delight” (Isaiah 58:13). Would your child call it the same? It is far too easy to fill the Sabbath with a list of “don’ts” and things that “are not allowed”. Instead, make it a delight that it was intended to be not just for your children, but for your entire family. All week talk about how you look forward to the Sabbath. Talk about the special meal, the family outing in nature, or the opportunity to see a beloved friend again. Your attitude about the Sabbath will be contagious. If the day is a delight for you then it will also become a delight for your child. On the other hand, if you speak negatively about the day, so will your child.

IF YOU TURN AWAY YOUR FOOT FROM THE SABBATH, FROM DOING YOUR PLEASURE ON MY HOLY DAY, AND CALL THE SABBATH A DELIGHT, THE HOLY DAY OF THE LORD HONORABLE, AND SHALL HONOR HIM, NOT DOING YOUR OWN WAYS, NOR FINDING YOUR OWN PLEASURE, NOR SPEAKING YOUR OWN WORDS, THEN YOU SHALL DELIGHT YOURSELF IN THE LORD; AND I WILL CAUSE YOU TO RIDE ON THE HIGH HILLS OF THE EARTH, AND FEED YOU WITH THE HERITAGE OF JACOB YOUR FATHER. THE MOUTH OF THE LORD HAS SPOKEN.  
ISAIAH. 58:13–14

It may be very tempting to stay at home on Sabbath instead of going to church. Maybe it has been a tough week at work and you would relish the idea of sleeping in a few extra hours or lounging around the house all day. Have you noticed how Satan does everything possible on Sabbath mornings to create havoc in your home? The bathtub overflows, the toast burns, the dress shoes need polishing, and your little girl’s Sabbath dress is ripped. Oh, it is so tempting to stay at home! The extra effort of getting little ones up, fed, and dressed in nice clothes is exhausting before you even walk out of the door.

But, creating a habit of church attendance is important in raising godly children. A habit formed in childhood is often continued into adulthood. As a result, if a child attends church regularly, they will likely continue to attend when they grow older. You cannot expect teenagers to want to go to church if they have never developed a love for it as toddlers. Remember, your parenting efforts are not only for today’s challenges. Rather, you are training your children for tomorrow’s decisions also.

Perhaps one of a child’s favorite things about Sabbath is going to Sabbath School. It is there that they can sing the songs that appeal to them, listen to Bible stories told in age appropriate ways, ring the bells, and play with the colorful felt pieces. It also gives children the opportunity to socialize with a peer group that shares their family faith values. Now, this also means leaving the home even earlier than if you were only going to attend the worship service and listening to the sermon. But, put yourself in your child’s shoes when you are tempted to do this. In so doing your child would be missing out on perhaps one of the best parts of the day. If you were a toddler, wouldn’t you want to be in Sabbath School? That’s where the fun is!

TRAIN UP A CHILD IN THE WAY HE SHOULD GO, AND WHEN HE IS OLD HE WILL NOT DEPART FROM IT.  
PROVERBS 22:6

Don’t forget that the Sabbath day does not end with the benediction after the church

service. You still have half of the day left. And, even though your little one may need to nap in the afternoon, that still leaves several hours in the day to fill with appropriate Sabbath activities. That is a great time of the week to plan a special outing for the whole family. Fill every second of it with quality time to reconnect to God and to each other as family members. Ask your child for ideas. Allow their input in to how to spend the time. Keep a stack of special toys or games reserved only for the Sabbath hours. In this way those toys are special and not something that they get to play with every other day of the week. Purchase a special container and fill it with Bible puzzles, games, coloring books, Bible story books etc.

One way to make the Sabbath a delight is to plan special meals. In our home this was the one day of the week when we had a special dessert. We called it our “Sabbath Treat”. We also had special candles on the table, reserved for Sabbath that our little girls got to light on Friday evening as the sun was going down. And, that special container came out that was labeled, “Sabbath Toys”. Those simple things made the Sabbath a delight for our little girls. Instead of it being a day filled with a list of things they could not do, it was a day filled with special privileges reserved just for the Sabbath.

### GROUP ACTIVITY

1. Read the following texts: Genesis 2:1, Exodus 20:8-11, and Mark 2:27. What do you believe are the benefits God intended for us as we rest on the Sabbath?
2. List specific ways that the Sabbath can be made a delight for each member of your family.

### Daily Activities

Making Jesus our child’s best friend is not something that happens if we only go to church on Sabbath. In reality, this happens by being intentional every day of the week. It happens through the small things that we incorporate into our daily activities.

Prayer is one of those things. Yes, it means praying at mealtimes, even if we are in a family restaurant, but prayer also should happen at other times during the day. You can intentionally teach your child to take all matters to Jesus in prayer. For example, if your child is having trouble finding a favorite stuffed animal or blanket you can kneel with them and pray to Jesus to help them find it. Then when it is found you can take a moment to kneel with them again and offer a prayer of thanksgiving. You can pause at numerous times during their day to help them pray about their joys as well as their frustrations. Soon, it will become a habit for them to talk to Jesus on their own. It takes those few extra minutes but when it is a habit instilled in them you will know that every minute you spent was priceless and nothing else was of more importance.

Keep an open eye for those “teachable moments” that will occur unexpectedly during your normal daily routine. When you are stuck in a traffic jam and your child is in the car seat crying, start singing a song to Jesus that they are familiar with. When you see the first flower bloom in the spring time, take a moment and talk to your child about what it must have been like for Jesus on that third day of creation when He made all the beautiful colored flowers. Those moments fill our day and all you need to do is to ask God to point them out to you and to help you share them with your children.

### GROUP DISCUSSION

1. If you lived in Jesus’ time, what would you tell your children about Him?
2. What are your favorite stories about Jesus that would make Him real to your child?

### Benefits to Your Child of Having a Forever Friendship with Jesus

What are the benefits of making Jesus your child’s forever friend? Studies show the beneficial consequences of religious belief and practice on physical and mental health and on relationships.

It appears that one of the most important things parents can do for their children is to have a Christ-centered home (Dollahite and Thatcher, p. 10). A growing body of empirical research demonstrates that a family's religious involvement directly benefits children in a variety of very significant ways.

In their survey of the research literature, David Dollahite and Jennifer Thatcher (2005) found the following benefits of a family's religious involvement:

- Divorce rates are lower and marital satisfaction and quality scores highest among religiously involved couples.
- Religious practices are linked with family satisfaction, closer father-child relationships, and closer parent-child relationships.
- There is less domestic violence among more religious couples, and religious parents are less likely to abuse or yell at their children.
- Religious involvement promotes involved and responsible fathering and is associated with more involved mothering.
- Greater religiosity in parents and youth is inversely related with many high-risk behaviors, all of which have potential to greatly influence current and future family relationships.

Yes, Jesus wants a forever friendship with you and with your child. The benefits to your child are numerous. Here are some ways a forever friendship with Jesus will benefit your child:

1. **It promotes their eternal happiness.** When your child has Jesus as their friend, they will discover joy in Jesus Christ. They will understand that true lasting happiness is not in all the "stuff" the world has to offer but in knowing Jesus.
2. **It helps them make sense out of life.** Your child will come to understand that God is the Creator, how sin entered the world, God's gift of salvation, and will look forward to their heavenly home that waits.
3. **It's their best chance to accept Christ.** Research has proven that children tend to be more receptive to the gospel than any other age group. Take advantage of those young years to introduce your little ones to Jesus.

4. **It can help counter balance worldly influences.** Children need positive influences to counter-balance the negative influences in this secularized world. A friendship with Jesus helps them focus on the spiritual rather than the secular.

5. **It can help them learn to love others.** The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor. We must teach them this truth till it becomes a way of life, because it doesn't come naturally. A love for Jesus flows out to others.

6. **It is something fun to do.** Do you know who invented fun? God did. Do you know why? For His own glory. While entertainment and fun-seeking activities can become an idol, we should not think God is against fun. Being friends with Jesus is fun and it is your responsibility as a parent to focus on the joy of service, the beauty in nature, and the happiness that comes from knowing Jesus.

7. **It helps them with their relationships/ friendships.** Exposing your child to those who share your family's faith values will assist them in their choice of friends. This is a key benefit to your child as you have the opportunity to guide them in establishing positive relationships.

8. **It gives children special memories.** Think back to when you were a child. Can you remember a special Sabbath School teacher or other church related event? Things like crafts made in Vacation Bible School and songs learned in Sabbath School can become a lasting memory. Or, perhaps it is a favorite family worship activity or the way that you said family prayers. When Jesus is your child's best friend you expose them to many memory-making opportunities.

9. **It allows them to make friends with adult volunteers in a safe environment.** In our culture child safety is a constant concern, and rightly so. But there is still great value in kids relating with trusted adults. Your practices as a family will expose them to adults in significant roles such as a pastor, Sabbath School teacher, or other family friend.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How long has been your longest friendship? What has kept you as friends for that long?
2. Has somebody else ever tried to come between you and your friend? What did you do to prevent that from happening?
3. What can you apply from your earthly friendships to your friendship with Jesus? What can you teach your children?
4. Think about some of the friendships mentioned in the Bible (Ruth/Naomi; David/Jonathan; Paul/Barnabas; David/Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah). What can you learn from them? What do they have in common?

## Wrap Up

A forever friendship with Jesus for your child actually begins with you. Take some time for self-reflection. Would your child say that Jesus is your best friend?

Daily family worship may seem like another thing to add to an already over-scheduled day. Consider ways that you can enhance the experience for your family and make it something the children eagerly anticipate during the whole day.

Attendance to Sabbath School and church on a regular basis is important to the spiritual health of the entire family. Sabbath afternoons are a special time to enjoy each others' company and to connect with Jesus.

Common daily activities provide numerous opportunities to teach your child about Jesus. As a parent you need to be open and intentional in seeking those moments without fail. Ultimately, by having a forever relationship with Jesus Christ, your child will experience benefits that will last a lifetime and carry them through eternity.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the statement below. How does it speak to you, as a parent, about leading your child to a forever friendship with Jesus Christ?

THE WORK OF EDUCATION IN THE HOME, IF IT IS TO ACCOMPLISH ALL THAT GOD DESIGNS IT SHALL, DEMANDS THAT PARENTS BE DILIGENT STUDENTS OF THE SCRIPTURES. THEY MUST BE LEARNERS OF THE GREAT TEACHER. DAY BY DAY THE LAW OF LOVE AND KINDNESS MUST BE UPON THEIR LIPS. THEIR LIVES MUST REVEAL THE GRACE AND TRUTH THAT WAS SEEN IN THE LIFE OF THEIR EXAMPLE. THEN A SANCTIFIED LOVE WILL BIND THE HEARTS OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN TOGETHER, AND THE YOUTH WILL GROW UP ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH AND ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN THE LOVE OF GOD.  
WHITE, CHILD GUIDANCE, P. 66

## GROUP ACTIVITY

List some specific ways that you can help your child develop a “forever friendship” with Jesus.

## Try this at Home

Here are some things to try at home this week:

1. Remember to continue the “Bible Promise Project” we started in chapter one. Find a promise in the Bible that you can apply to helping your child have a forever friendship with Jesus. Write it out on an index card and put it in a prominent place in your home where you can see it throughout the day. Repeat it often, memorize it, and claim it as your own. And, remember to share it the next time you meet with your group members.
2. Begin putting together some toys, games etc. that will be reserved just for the Sabbath. Label it “My Sabbath Bag” and fill it with various age appropriate items. Remember, if you allow your child to play with it during the week you will defeat the purpose.

3. If you are not having family worship start today. Keep it at a consistent time every day, keep it short, and remember to make the worship activity age appropriate, enjoyable, and exciting for your child.
4. Look for those “teachable moments” this week and use them as opportunities to talk about Jesus.

### **A Prayer You May Say**

Dear Lord, I want my child to have a forever friendship with You. I know that it starts with me. Help me to reflect You to my child. Help me to be faithful in being a positive Christian role model. Help me to be a spiritual leader in my home in the areas of daily family worship and prayer. Help me to be faithful in church attendance. May words of praise and love to You be spoken so often in my home that it reflects that You are a precious part of our family circle. And, help my child to see You as their very best friend. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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# LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

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# Growing Disciples Through Transformational Learning

BONITA SHIELDS

Clarence first attended church on a dare.

He promised his pastor friend he would give church a try if the pastor could beat him in two games of checkers. The pastor won, and Clarence found himself in church the next week. He responded to God's Word and the love of the congregation, and eventually was baptized, along with his wife and children.

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A few weeks later, Clarence went to his pastor with a troubled heart. He did not know how to live the Christian life. "Before I was baptized," he said, "if you came to me and told me that you wanted to be a football player, I would not have just given you permission to do it, I would have shown you how to be one. I need someone to show me how to be a Christian."

Most of the time, those of us in spiritual leadership can effectively share with our church members why it is important to be a disciple of Christ, but often we stop short in teaching our people how to be a disciple. Both are important to the maturation of a Christian. But how can we, as pastors, follow through on what is called "transformational learning"—learning geared to not only inform but to transform?

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Serving as an editor and working with colleagues who have educational backgrounds has helped me appreciate the value of integrating the educational and theological models of ministry within our church. Of course, Scripture links these two models of ministry together. In Ephesians 4, the apostle Paul writes, "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, *some pastors and teachers*, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to *maturity*, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:11–13, NRSV; emphasis supplied).<sup>1</sup>

This article will show how an integration of the Learning Cycle, taken from the educational model of ministry and used to encourage transformational learning, can enhance pastoral effectiveness in preaching and teaching and, thus, enhance church members' understanding of the gospel and maturation as growing disciples of Christ.

## What is the Learning Cycle?

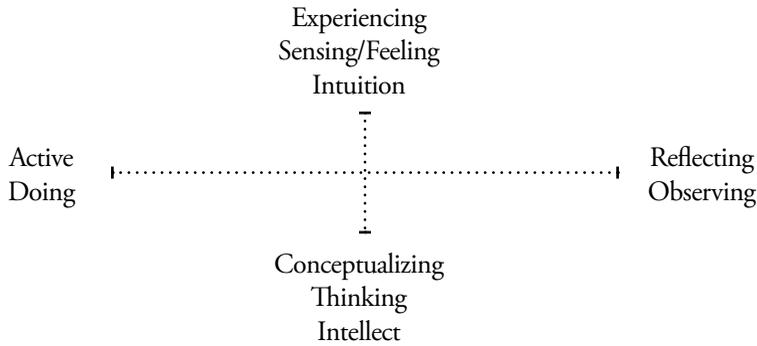
People learn in different ways. In the early 1970s, David Kolb identified two dimensions of learning: *perceiving* and *processing*.<sup>2</sup> The ways in which people perceive and process information constitutes their "learning style."

Some perceive life through their senses and feelings—by direct (subjective) experiences. Others

perceive life through their intellect (objectively) by conceptualizing or thinking. Most of us have a blend of these two lenses, but we usually favor one.

People process new experiences through *reflecting* (observing) or through *action* (doing)—or somewhere in between.<sup>3</sup> (See figure 1.)

**Figure 1:** How We Perceive (Vertical) - How We Process (Horizontal)

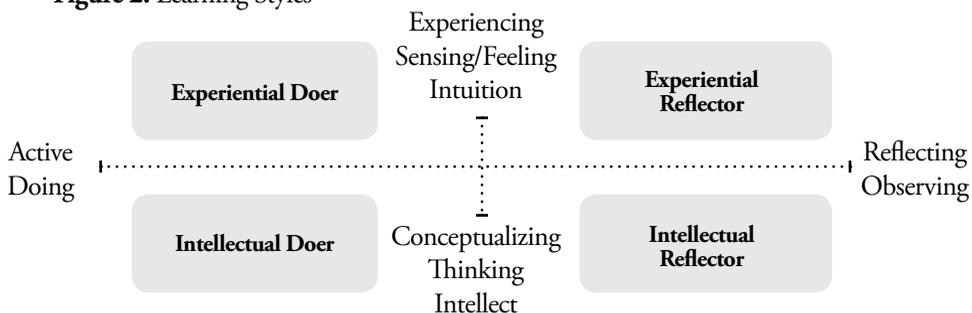


For example, while my husband and I share the same style of perceiving life—through direct experiences—we process it differently. He processes new experiences through action while I process them through reflection. Both are valuable. So, when we go to the beach, he is the first one into the water. And everyone usually knows it, since his zest for life is difficult to keep under wrap, and he yells with excitement as he enters the water! “Come in, Bonita,” he will urge. “The water is *perrrrrrfect!*” I, on the other hand, sit back and observe the situation for a while before I feel comfortable enough to go in. My internal dialogue runs along these lines: *OK, Bonita, there appears to be no undertow—Roy’s still standing.... It’s a sunny day, so the water won’t freeze me to death.... There aren’t too many people around, so I won’t have to dodge them.* Once I have gone through this reflection time, I am usually ready to jump into the new experience—unless I have a great book to read; then, forget the water.

Just as my husband and I perceive and process experiences in different ways, so do members of our congregations. They are of both types—and perhaps more. Some want to act, do, and experience; others want to reflect and observe before they experience. Some want to think about an activity more than others before they actually do something about it, and we have those who would much rather think and reflect on it than do something.

Using Kolb’s work as a foundation, Bernice McCarthy, in 1987, described four basic learning styles and the corresponding teaching strategies most effective for people to learn. According to McCarthy, each learning style asks different questions and displays different strengths during the learning process. These learning styles use both right and left-brain processing techniques.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when we integrate all four learning styles in our preaching and teaching, we are educating the “whole brain.” (See figure 2.)

**Figure 2:** Learning Styles



The *relational* learner asks the question, “*Why is this subject important to me?*” The *analytic* learner asks, “*What do I need to know about this subject?*” The *practical* learner asks, “*How do I use the information?*” The *dynamic* learner asks, “*What if I use the information this way?*”

My primary learning style is relational; the dynamic being my secondary style. Thus, as a preacher, I typically am very strong in answering for my congregation the questions, “Why is this subject important?” and “What if I use this information this way?” I am also fairly strong in the analytic aspect of “What do I need to know?” Unfortunately, I am often weak in answering the question, “How do I use the information?” Thus, as I prepare my sermons, I must be intentional about connecting with the practical learner

Have you ever heard church members say about their pastor, “He’s a nice man, but I just don’t get anything out of his preaching”? Or “Her sermons are too ‘dry,’ too ‘shallow,’ ‘just a bunch of stories,’ or ‘just plain irrelevant to my life.’” First, we must face the fact that we will never be able to reach everyone. However, as we come to better understand the learning cycle, I think we will begin to realize that one of the reasons people feel that way is because often we are skipping one or more of the components of the cycle. And, when we incorporate each component into our sermons, more of our listeners may connect with our message.

**How to use the new learning style**

So, how do we incorporate this educational model into our preaching and teaching?

First, visit the Web site listed within the sidebar of this article and take the learning style

inventory for yourself. That will give you a better understanding of your own learning process, as well as the needs of others.

You will also find other articles in the Web site explaining this concept.

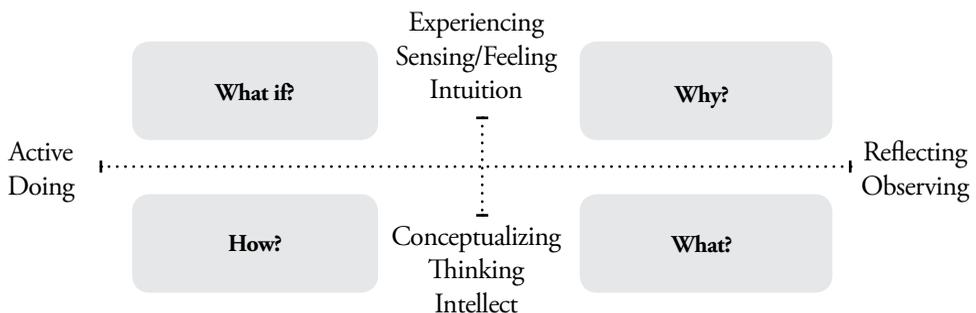
Second, think in terms of the four questions of the learning cycle as you prepare your sermon outline. (See figure 3.)

After you have chosen and exegeted your text, ask yourself the question, *Why should my listener find this subject important?* The objective of this question is to awaken an interest in the topic and prepare the listener for what will follow. Often, the introductory story answers this question. Thus, the purpose of an opening story/illustration should not be just for “entertainment.” With a weak introduction, your listener may not feel engaged enough to continue listening to you. In writers’ terminology, the introduction comprises the “hook” that draws the listener in.

The next question to ask is, *What does my listener need to know about this subject?* This, our homiletics teachers tell us, is the “Body” or “Argument” of the sermon. In this section, you want to offer information, facts, and state or define your subject more finely. Possible techniques to be used include comparing and contrasting, relating it to other subjects or even illustrating your points. As an experiential learner, I can say that while I appreciate our church’s more recent emphasis on the *experience* of salvation and our relationship with God, in some cases we may have gone to the extreme and not given our members enough facts about their faith.

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**Figure 3:** Answer These Learning Questions



Our next question is, *How can my listener use this information in everyday life?* This comes as the application section of our sermon. Recently, I found something interesting as I perused one of my preaching books. While the other aspects of sermon preparation were given a page or two, the element of application was given two paragraphs!

This component, when strong, encourages action—not merely “talking the talk but walking the walk.” It is here that we want to persuade our members of the benefits of applying the message to their lives.

The last question for us in creating our outline is, *What if my listener puts this information into practice; what will their life look like?* I believe this can correspond with our conclusion. As one teacher of homiletics describes, conclusion consists of “A few striking, well-chosen, soulmoving sentences or illustrations that give the central idea and purpose of the sermon.”<sup>5</sup> A strong ending to a sermon is as important as a strong introduction. As I recap the sermon, *What vision am I going to leave with the congregation? What will their lives look like after they have taken in this message?*

Third, once you have used your outline to create your sermon manuscript, enlist the aid of a spouse and/or elder to evaluate your effectiveness. Your spouse may have already given you an unsolicited opinion—and preachers need that! But be intentional about asking for it. Ask several people who have different learning styles from yours. Use their feedback as a means to discover if this model

has helped you strengthen a possible weak area in your sermons. With pre-sermon feedback always preferable to postsermon feedback, you still have time to make adjustments to your sermon before preaching it.

## The preaching moment

Preaching God’s Word remains a profound privilege—a supernatural experience. God uses our strengths, personalities, life experiences, and even our weaknesses to accomplish His purpose in the lives of His people. But God’s empowering does not negate the need to do what we can to be the most effective vehicles through which to fulfill that mission. The Spirit works through learning cycles. And, sometimes, the Spirit even works through a game of checkers.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For an excellent article on the need for these two branches of ministry to collaborate, see George Knight’s “*Two Ministries, One Mission*,” *Ministry*, December 2010.
- <sup>2</sup> <http://effective.leadershipdevelopment.edu.au/david-kolb-learning-styles/experiential-learning/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles Betz with Jack Calkins, “*Leading Adult Sabbath School*” (Lincoln, NE: Advent Source, 2001), 20.
- <sup>4</sup> See Dr. McCarthy’s office Web site at <http://www.aboutlearning.com>.
- <sup>5</sup> William Evans, *How to Prepare Sermons* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1964), 90.

# Family Leadership Through Submission

DAVID AND BEVERLY SEDLACEK

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The topic of submission is hard to address in families, even for many Christian families today. Perhaps nothing goes so strongly against our carnal human nature as to submit to another. And yet the experience of submission is that which will carry us through the remarkable events which are so soon to come. Satan has masterfully created different challenges to true Biblical submission in various parts of the world. In some cultures, submission implies total, unquestioning obedience of children, regardless of age, to their parents, and wives to their husbands. Anything short of full, immediate obedience could result in physical punishment for either children or women. In other places, there is too little respect for parental authority or spousal position. Both extremes (dominating subjection or permissive rebellion) are at odds with Biblical submission. Paul warns us about this in his letter when he says, "In the last days, people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving" (2 Timothy 3:1-3). These attitudes and behaviors are evidence of a self-focus that is uncharacteristic of Biblical submission.

Rebellion against God's law, originating in Lucifer's rebellion in Heaven (Isaiah 14:12-14) is the heritage of all of Adam's children whose hearts have not been regenerated by the indwelling spirit or character of God's love. Parents, as lawgivers in the family, stand in the place of God, The Lawgiver, and are to teach their children about the blessings of tranquility, order, and long life that is reaped when they keep the law. Parents teach their children about law not only by the rules they make but also by how they enforce these rules. When parents are inconsistent, children may take glee in "getting over on them." At the same time, children may be angry and disappointed that they were permitted to do so, and may judge their parents as being weak, gullible and easily manipulated. When parents are too harsh in administering discipline or do so in anger, children learn to comply out of fear. They don't internalize the love of law. Rather, fear of authority and rebellion against law are the seeds planted. If these seeds are not rooted out they will produce a harvest of rebellion against God.

Donna was a minister's daughter. Her father held such high standards for his daughters that they never felt able to please him. He did not trust his daughters and therefore made very rigid rules to control their behavior. Donna did her best to please her dad, but she feared him and resented the continual message that she was untrustworthy. On one occasion, when she dated a young man, innocent

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circumstances resulted in her getting home one hour after curfew. Instead of inquiring if there were extenuating circumstances, her father immediately accused her of being a whore and severely beat her. Later in life, Donna herself accepted Jesus as her Savior and developed a strong walk of faith. However, she made it clear that she would submit to no man, not even her husband. Further, she insisted the Christian life was *only* a walk of faith, and that obedience to the law had nothing to do with godly living. She continually hurt herself by overeating and eating unhealthy foods. She refused to exercise, but claimed the blood of Jesus to heal her from elevated blood pressures, as high as 300/180 (the normal range being 120/80). She did not see that her rebellion against the law was rebelling against God, and was causing her to hurt herself in the process. The root of this rebellion was in her relationship with her father, and spilled over into her relationships with anyone in authority, including her husband. Suggesting to her that she needed to look at the law from a different point of view meant that we were challenging her love of God and her Christian walk. Through gentle, persistent, persuasion and prayer, she experienced healing in her relationship with her father, which enabled her to deal with the spiritual strongholds. Deep spiritual and physical healing were the results, as she learned to care for herself.

There is perhaps no greater wounding of the spirit of a person than when a father molests his child. When the father of the family, intended to be God's representative, violates a child in such an intimate way, the spiritual wounding that takes place makes it next to impossible for that person to trust. A profound sense of rage seethes within the child, which leads to rejection of the violator and all he stands for, or to an unholy attachment to him in an attempt to get his love. While we cannot fully explore the ramifications of sexual molestation here, suffice it to say that such individuals will have great difficulty submitting to any authority figure including God (regardless of their external profession of faith). Rhonda's father was an elder in the church. They belonged to a church that had very high standards, and he held his family to them meticulously. Yet, there was a secret in this family: Dad regularly molested each

of the six girls in the family, including Rhonda between the ages of four and fourteen. One day, he offered Rhonda to a deacon in the church who also sexually abused her. It is a wonder Rhonda and others like her have not totally rejected Christianity, to say nothing of the church in which they were raised. Individuals like Rhonda will not submit in their hearts to someone they cannot trust. They may obediently comply, but their obedience may not be true submission.

### Submission Defined

The question then arises, what is true submission? For the Christian, an examination of Christ's life and death on the cross provides a wonderful illustration. Christ embodied submission to God by taking upon himself human nature and the penalty of sin, thus freeing us from the power of sin: "So when He [Jesus] came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. Then I said, 'Here I am: I have come-it is written of me in the scroll of the book to do your will O God'" (Hebrews 10:5, 7 NET Bible). "I can do nothing on my own initiative. Just as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of the one who sent me" (John 5:30, NET Bible). "But the Son of God was surrendered to the Father's will, and dependent upon His power. So utterly was Christ emptied of self that He made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day-by-day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will" (White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 208).

The embodiment of submission as a way of living is manifested in a willingness to be subject to another as Jesus was to His disciples when washing their feet. This embodiment reveals a spirit of humility and power that is born of meekness. Those who embody submission will inherit the new earth (Matthew 5:5).

In other words, submission is a principle of the heart, rooted in love for God and other humans, and is an expression of the indwelling presence of the life of Jesus. "He [God] made him who knew

no sin, to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians. 5:21). As a result of this amazing act, Christ has restored communion and fellowship with God to the human race and invites us to receive this power over sin. "We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Romans 6:6). Once we submit to him and embrace His life, death, and resurrection, we become the means to invite others into this experience: "Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians. 5:20). Submission is an essential ingredient, as we embody the fullness of Christ's life in us.

There are several implications of the embodied Christ living out his submission in us. First, submission is continuous. We do not jump in and out of submission depending on the circumstance. This continual submission stands against Satan's seeds of rebellion he planted in the human heart. Submission always results in obedience when it is a response to a command of God. "The submission on our part must be proportionate to the gift of God; it must be complete and wanting in nothing. We are all debtors to God. He has claims upon us that we cannot meet without giving ourselves a full and willing sacrifice. He claims prompt and willing obedience, and nothing short of this will He accept" (White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 188).

Second, submission does not always result in obedience when it comes to responding to the authority of other humans. Obedience is often an external, behavioral expression of submission. Therefore, it must be true that one can submit to rightful authority but not obey. Even though our obedience to other men is dependent upon their position of authority as assigned by God (parents, husbands, employers, church leadership) as well as the conformance of their command to the law of God, the Bible never sets such limits upon submission. It just states: "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" (Ephesians 5:21). "And

all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). It is, therefore, not only possible to submit even when you cannot obey, but it is required. A Biblical example of this is the three Hebrew boys as recorded in Daniel Chapter 3. King Nebuchadnezzar summoned all of the officials of the kingdom to the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon (Daniel 3:1-3). This command would not result in any violation God's law, and therefore, the three submitted to the command and obeyed. When the king commanded that everyone assembled bow down to the image he had erected, the three Hebrews in the assembly respectfully responded to the king ("May the king live forever," verse 9), thus honoring his authority. But, they politely refused to obey and were subsequently thrown into the fiery furnace. Thus, they demonstrated the embodiment of submission even as they refused to obey. Likewise, we are always required to submit to authority, even when we cannot obey.

Third, submission is between equals. God and Christ are equal in power and authority but Christ chose to submit to him for the task of saving humanity. Likewise, in the marriage relationship, the principle of mutual submission is based on shared authority. "The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife" (I Corinthians. 7:4). Eve's formation from Adam's side (Genesis 2: 4) is evidence of the equality of man and woman. Man's Biblical headship is descriptive of life in a fallen world, but not prescriptive of the way of life God intended.

Fourth, if submission is between two equals, it must be freely given, not forced. Children, spouses, and others under the control of others can be treated in such a domineering way that they will comply with a command obediently, but not embody submission in their hearts. God instead draws us into obedience through his self-sacrificing love (John 12:32). Jesus also said: "You are my friends if you do the things I command you" (John 15:14). Rather than

commanding obedience as he has the right to do, God invites obedience from the position of one friend to another. The position of humility assumed by God invites the human heart's submission.

Fifth, submission is learned. Looking at the experience of Jesus, Hebrews 5:8 reads: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through the things he suffered." In the Greek, the word for obedience is "hupakoe" (Strong's, 1890. 5218) which also translates as submission. Likewise, "He humbled himself, by becoming obedient to the point of death; even death on a cross (Philippians 2:8). What are the implications of these impactful verses? First, Jesus learned submission through suffering, just as we must to prepare us for the time of trouble ahead. Secondly, who did Jesus submit to in becoming obedient to death on the cross? Was it His Father that Jesus submitted to as a part of working out the plan of salvation? The Father and the Son were in agreement about Jesus' sacrifice of His life on the cross (see John 10:17-18). Through the Jews' actions, Satan killed Jesus on the cross. Jewish law required stoning for blasphemy, which was the charge against Jesus. Jesus could have insisted on stoning, but the hatred of the Jews was so great that they were willing to violate the very law they claimed to uphold by demanding the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus said of the Jews: "You people are from your father the devil, and you want to do what your father desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not uphold the truth" (John 8:44). It was Satan working through the Jews who murdered Christ. In becoming obedient to death on the cross, Jesus submitted to be killed; he submitted in this sense to the Jews and Satan. He did not submit to them because they were right, but because He knew that it was through submission to the evil that they purposed to perform that He would triumph over sin. This principle of victory through submission is one that every Christian must have written on the tablets of his heart especially in the days to come.

Lest some misunderstand our message, we are emphatically saying that Jesus *did* not obey Satan's commands, nor become a toy in his hands. He voluntarily chose to place himself under Satan's power so that He could

obtain the victory for us. In the temptation in the wilderness, twice Jesus permitted Satan to carry Him bodily away. "Then the devil took Him into the holy city, and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple." "Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain" (Matthew 4:5,8). Jesus won the victory by allowing Satan to tempt Him. True submission is always an active process, never a passive one. To submit does not mean to be a doormat, passively "taking" whatever abuse another wishes to dish out. It is an active, strong, voluntary act of the will to place oneself under another for the good of all concerned.

How do these principles relate to the relationship between husbands and wives? Genesis 2 speaks to the relationship God intended for husbands and wives to enjoy with each other. The two individuals are to become one. In giving everything to each other, there is no selfishness, for they are giving to themselves. Giving everything combats selfishness. Ephesians 5:25 amplifies the call to submission: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it". As we have attempted to build a case that submission is mutual and also an embodiment of self-sacrificing love, we interpret this verse to mean that husbands might take a leadership position in the family in submitting to their wives. Love always seeks the good of the other and challenges the selfishness of the human heart. Husbands can take the lead in modeling submission in their families even as God did for fallen humanity by giving his life for us. Submission is a principle of life for all of us to live continually because it is a part of the essence of the life of God that dwells in us.

Ephesians 5:22 says: "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Too often, this text has been interpreted to mean that wives are to be doormats, but this is not the case. From the pen of inspiration, we read: "A woman that will submit to be ever dictated to in the smallest matters of domestic life, who will yield up her identity, will never be of much use or blessing in the world, and will not answer the purpose of God in her existence. She is a mere machine to be guided

by another's will and another's mind. God has given each one, men and women, an identity, an individuality, that they must act in the fear of God for themselves" (White, *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce*, p. 25). "When the wife yields her body and mind to the control of her husband, being passive to his will in all things, sacrificing her conscience, her dignity, and even her identity, she loses the opportunity of exerting that mighty influence for good which she should possess, to elevate her husband" (White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 127). Submission does not imply in any way a lack of equality or a lack of dignity. Submission is an attitude of the heart and an act of the will. It is not something forced from us. The submission of the wife does not mean that her husband has superior wisdom. It is an acknowledgment of his position in the Lord. That is, the position of the husband's headship as Paul states in the book of Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church".

In other words, the woman's submission is motivated in a uniquely Christian way because the Lord wants it that way. Submission to the husband is submission to the Lord. The wife's attitude to her husband will always be submissive, but her obedience will not be unconditional. If asked to do something sinful, such as rob a bank, she would not do it. Her obedience is first to Christ, then to her husband. Anything else would be idolatrous. However, in most cases today, just the opposite problem exists. There is resistance to submission to our husbands. Jacinta came for counseling to get her life right with God. She was furious with her husband who was an addict and unfaithful to her. Their communication often happened with bitterness and contempt. She wanted to divorce him but was advised not to do so because he was pastor of a local church. So she had lived in misery for years but now had come to the end of her rope. She did not want to discuss reconciliation, but only getting her life right with God. In the process of helping her with her agenda, she saw how hardened her heart had become and how she contributed to creating the very thing she hated the most in the relationship. This revelation broke her

heart. She called him and acknowledged that she too had responsibility for the problems in their marriage. She apologized to him for her hardness of heart toward him. Several days later, her husband called to ask for help for his problem, broken by his wife's submissive attitude. Today they are shining examples of what a happy marriage is intended to be for Christians. They can talk over differences with a deep mutual love and respect. It is a joy for Jacinta to submit to her husband today. In this marriage, 1 Peter 3:1-2 has been illustrated: "In the same way you wives, be submissive to your own husbands; so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior". Nothing so much builds and reinforces a husband's sense of manhood as his wife's submissive respect.

What if there are legitimate differences between husband and wife regarding a course of action? After they have prayerfully sought the Lord's will together, listened carefully to one another, and discussed the situation, the final decision rests with the husband. What if it turns out that the man's decision was the wrong one? A wife who has learned to embody submission, who understands that the two of them are one, will not rub his face in his error nor expose him to others as the one responsible for the mistake, but will accept the consequences of the error as if she had made the decision. "Love not only bears with others' faults but cheerfully submits to whatever suffering or inconvenience such forbearance makes necessary. This love never faileth. It can never lose its value; it is an attribute of heaven" (White, *Testimonies for the Church, Vol 5*, p. 169.2) Submissive love is an attribute of heaven because self has died and the wife is operating on a heavenly plane. The gift of divinity has overshadowed her humanity. She is dead, and her life is hidden with Christ in God.

The Biblical principle of submission learned in families has far-reaching implications for God's people during the last days in which we are living. In addition to the foundational submission modeled in the lives of husbands

and wives, God enjoins children to submit to their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), employees to submit to their employers (1 Peter 2:18-21), the faithful to submit to church leadership (Hebrews 13:17) and all of us to submit to civil government (Romans 13:1-5; 1 Timothy 2:1-3; 1 Peter 2:13-16). While each of these injunctions is important, focus on submission to civil government is especially important to consider at the present time. More of our civil rights are being taken away. Very soon laws will be enacted taking away religious liberty and the faithful will be persecuted with economic boycott and ultimately a death decree (See Revelation Chapter 13). What will our attitude be during this coming time of persecution? Will we love our enemies? Will we continue to submit wherever possible except when a violation of God's law is at stake?

What were the attitudes of the cloud of witnesses that have gone before us when they were persecuted: the three Hebrew worthies, Daniel, John the Baptist, Stephen, the early Christian martyrs, the Waldenses, and especially Jesus Himself? Are we prepared to joyfully submit to the coming persecution regardless of the form it takes? Some of us will undoubtedly give our lives. Are we ready? Through all the trials which He has permitted in our lives, He has been attempting to prepare us for the days so soon to come. Without true submission, there will be no overcoming and no victory. "Do you remember what I told you? 'A slave is not greater than the master.' Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to me, they will listen to you. They will do all this to you because of me, for they have rejected the one who sent me". "...the time is coming, when those who kill you will think they are

doing a holy service for God. This is because they have never known the Father, or me" John 15:20-21; 16:2-3 (NLT).

Knowing the Father and knowing Jesus means knowing their heart of love and their willingness to submit to our foolish rebellion even while trying to win us with their love. They have allowed themselves so often to be judged by their creatures, to be made the butt of jokes, and their name to be used lightly. God knows what it means to submit to evil because even in the hearts of many professed Christians He coexists with the evil of a heart that is not fully dead to its enmity against Him. Will we choose to learn to love God so supremely that we would rather die than expose Him to any further disgrace? God embodies submission. Will you allow Him to embody it in you and through you?

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# The Elijah Message

TIMOTHY P. NIXON

In today's society the message seems clear in each instance. The generations seem to be arch enemies, constantly fighting against each other. There is no reconciliation, no unity, and no hope. There seems to be only a future of division, discontent, devastation and disaster. But is that the future God has planned for humanity? Is there any hope beyond our gloom and doom reality?

by repentance of the ungodly], lest I come and smite the land with a curse and a ban of utter destruction". The Elijah message of Malachi 4:5,6 is a message of generational reconciliation. With the racial, cultural, gender, economic and national tensions that exist among us today, the Elijah message calls us to reconciliation in the home. A reconciliation initiated by the hearts of fathers turning toward their children and children toward their fathers. Notice it does not say mothers but fathers; and that the force turning their hearts comes from outside of them. "HE" shall turn and reconcile the hearts, the Amplified Bible says. We are incapable of doing it on our own. The power that causes us to turn toward each other must come from God. And the important element to this reconciliation is that the father initiates it. The elder turns to the younger.

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God has a message for these times. A time when it seems the generations are at odds. And He has called His church to present that message during the final scenes of earth's history. It is found in the prophetic appeal of the prophet Malachi, last voice of the Old Testament. He writes in Malachi 4:5,6: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse".

The real key to the reconciliation called for in the Elijah message is the foundational principle of the kingdom of God. The one principle upon which all other principles rest. In order for generational reconciliation to take place, it requires mutual submission.

It is a text often referenced and mentioned in sermons by many. But few address the heart of its message, "And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse". The Amplified Bible says, "And he shall turn and reconcile the hearts of the [estranged] fathers to the [ungodly] children, and the hearts of the [rebellious] children to their fathers [a reconciliation produced

There is something very basic and fundamental about the existence of God that is often overlooked. When the Bible says in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God," the word that is used for God is "Elohim". In the Hebrew language the word "Elohim" is a collective or plural noun. So when the Bible introduces us to God in Genesis 1:1, the first thing we learn about the Deity is that God exists in community. And since each individual member

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of the Godhead is deity, in order for them to exist in community requires “mutual submission”. They willingly submit and subordinate themselves to each other in an atmosphere of perfect love and harmony.

If you haven't thought about it, the members of the Godhead elevate and uplift each other while placing themselves in a subordinate position. Jesus submits to the will of the Father. He says in John 5:30, “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me”. The Spirit uplifts the Son. In John 15:26 Jesus says, “even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me”. The Father elevates Jesus. In Philippians 2:9-11 it says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow... And every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the Glory of God the Father”. Jesus exalts the Spirit above himself in Matthew 12:33 when he declares, “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, neither in the world to come”. And finally, the Son magnifies the Father. 1 Corinthians 15:28 says, “And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all”.

In order for the mutual submission of the Godhead to function, each member must give up their rights, their personal prerogatives so that harmony, unity and community can exist among them. Particularity and personal freedom has no place among them, though as God, they have every right to exercise their individual divinity. Isaiah 9:6 says Jesus is “The everlasting Father”, yet in the Godhead, He chooses to be the Son.

Mutual submission is a concept that we discuss and is a part of every aspect of the Christian experience. It is central to our understanding of the “Body of Christ”. It is the key principle that distinguishes “Christian Marriages”, from secular ones. It is the basis upon which the principle of servant leadership is founded and yet it is rarely practiced in the Christian community.

Jesus said in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one

another; as I have love you, that ye love one another”. “One another” is a phrase of mutuality, mutual submission and mutual love. He then continues, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another”. Again, Jesus uses the phrase, “one to another”. It is a phrase of mutuality. But how can we be sure Jesus means mutual submission? He explains further in John 15:12 & 13, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you”. Here Jesus is explaining to us the quality of the mutuality. It is the kind of mutual submission that He exemplified. And lest we become confused He makes it crystal clear in the next verse, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”.

The Elijah message calls us to a higher quality of living in the community of faith that begins with generational reconciliation. That generational reconciliation can only be accomplished through mutual submission. A submission initiated by the elder toward the younger. It means giving up my rights and freedoms for a higher good, the greater good of community and unity. And when we are united generationally, we more fully reflect the character of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, a Godhead that exists in a loving relationship of mutual submission.

The Apostle Paul sets before the Christian community an ethic of living that says because Christ died for all, those who live no longer live for themselves, 2 Corinthians 5:14,15. He uses this premise to establish a higher principle of decision-making that all Christians must exercise. Whatever you believe your personal rights are, or however right you believe yourself to be, Paul gives this caution. He says in 1 Corinthians 8:9, 12 (TNIV) “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak”. He goes on to say, “When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ”. As Christians when we make decisions, the higher good is to place the other before the self. The harmony and well-being of the community is the higher good, not my personal rights and freedoms, even if those personal rights are not in and of themselves a sin. When we ignore how exercising our personal rights may affect someone in the community of faith and weaken them in their Christian walk, our actions become a sin against Christ. In other

words the unity of the community is greater than the individual and to ignore that principle in my decision-making is a sin. Paul's dictum can only be understood and appreciated when we understand the essential importance of mutual submission in the Christian experience. That is, to prefer others ahead of ones self. And in this instance Paul, as the elder, submits to the younger.

I have often been amazed at how little concern we have today in the church with how our decisions and actions effect those around us. Simply because the Bible gives no clear prohibition against something, is not the sole criteria in determining whether or not we should decide what we do. My personal understanding and conviction of what God requires of me may be the starting point, but it certainly does not end there. Think for a moment if Jesus' decision-making functioned at that level. If He had made decisions about our salvation based on His personal rights, what would have happened in the Garden of Gethsemane? What decision would He have made with the cup of our salvation? Our salvation would have been in tremendous peril. Most assuredly we would have been lost.

As I think about the generational tensions that exist in our churches today and the growing intolerance that seems to endure, I am troubled by the elders of our churches who seem to have no patience or forbearance with any deviation from the traditions of worship and music that have caused youth and young adults to feel unwelcome in their churches.

And yet I am just as troubled by millennials who make certain choices they know will offend their elders, including playing music that adults find difficult to accept. We may have a personal right or freedom, but that is not the sole criteria which determines a Christian's decisions or actions. The Elijah message calls us to mutual submission, surrendering our personal rights and freedoms for the good of the community and realizing that the highest good is living in harmony, not conflict and selfish discord. And if true generational reconciliation is to occur, then the elders must initiate the process of mutual submission by following the example of Jesus in John 13:13-17. Among humans, being right is not righteous, it is only judgmental. Only Jesus is righteous and He calls us to a higher standard of living that says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends".

As many times as we have failed and as messed up as we are, Jesus has not given up on us. He is still depending on His church to preach and live the Elijah message, in these last days of earth's history. And lest you think otherwise He says to us, "You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you. But remember the root command: Love one another" John 15:16-17 MSG.

The Elijah Message, let's start preaching it and living it.

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# By His Side

GORDON CHRISTO

Scripture informs us that God “works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). With that in mind we may ponder the purpose God might have had for creating Adam and Eve the way he did. For when it came to the creation of birds, fish, and land animals, the record leads us to assume that males and females were created together, because the narrator states: *“But for Adam no suitable helper was found”*. (Genesis 1:20. Emphasis supplied). All the creatures apparently had mates at that point except the human. The author intentionally draws our attention to this exception but makes no attempt to provide a reason for it.

## Plurality in Singularity

At the very outset God had declared his intention to create humans in God’s image. The pronouns used for God are seemingly contradictory. God said “let us make man in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26. Emphasis supplied), using plural pronouns “us”, and “our”. Then the narrator continues “So God proceeded to make man in his own image, in the image of God he created him” (Genesis 1:27. Emphasis supplied) employing singular pronouns for God “he”, and “him”. The explanation for this

is the Trinitarian concept of God which is, that God is plural and at the same time God is singular. Since God is one, it follows that each of the three members in the Godhead individually are less than one because all three are required to make the “One”. Perhaps it was to replicate that oneness of God that he decided the best way to create humans in his image was to create them first as one, then to divide them, and finally to charge them to cleave together again as one.

Though the Hebrew noun adam refers to the first human created and may be translated as “Adam”, or “man”, we are cautioned that:

... IT (ADAM) SHOULD BE DISTINGUISHED FROM 'ISH (MAN, AS OPPOSITE OF WOMAN, OR MAN DISTINGUISHED IN HIS MANLINESS) . . . (IT) ALSO REFERS TO GENERIC MAN AS THE IMAGE OF GOD. . . HENCE IN GEN 1-3 IT IS THE WORD USUALLY USED FOR MAN. (IN LATER PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE IT IS DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH IN MEANING FROM 'ISH.)  
L J COPPES, THEOLOGICAL WORDBOOK OF THE OLD TESTAMENT VOL I, P 10  
ADAM

The Hebrew 'ishah (woman) is the counterpart of 'ish (man) and not of adam which in the creation account may refer to the totality of male and female. The first time the word 'ish is used for Adam is after the creation of Eve. When Adam

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beheld her, he said, “she shall be called woman (’ishah) because she was taken out of man (’ish). For this reason a man (’ish) will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (’ishah), and they will become one flesh” (Genesis 1:23, 24.)

That Adam refers to the totality of man and woman in the creation story can be discerned from the text: “When God created man (Adam), he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them man” (Adam). (Genesis 5:1 NIV). One can additionally note here the usage of both singular and plural pronouns (him, them) for man (Adam) just as for God earlier in the passage (Genesis 1:26, 27).

### More than a Rib

God removed a "tsela" from Adam to fashion the woman. The Hebrew word "tsela" is used more than forty times in the Old Testament and nowhere else is "tsela" translated, nor does it ever mean, “rib”. There is another word in the Bible which always means “rib”, and never anything else. But the inspired author did not select that word. "Tsela" simply means “side”, especially when there is a corresponding opposite side. It has been used to denote one side of the ark, and also one side of the golden altar, which had two rings, and of the corresponding opposite sides which also had two rings (Exodus 25:12; 30:4). It is used to describe one side of a hill on which Shimei walked, cursing David as he went along the road; –and we may take for granted that that there was a corresponding side on the other side of the hill (2 Samuel 16:13). The "tsela" of Solomon’s temple were rooms on the sides of the inner sanctuary (I Kings 6:5).

The incontrovertible word for rib is used in Daniel 7:5 referring to the three ribs that were in the mouth of the bear. Though this passage is in Aramaic, the word ‘Ileen is common to Semetic languages and would surely have been available to the author of Genesis. Instead the author uses the word "tsela" suggesting that God possibly removed more than merely a rib from Adam to create Eve. He could have removed a whole side.

Adam himself declared that Eve was “bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh” (Genesis 2:23).

### An Equal Counterpart

Two Hebrew words are used to describe the role God designated for Eve. *Neged* and *Ezer*. *Ezer* is usually translated “helper”, but to think of her as an inferior assistant is to grossly misunderstand the term. *Ezer* occurs 21 times in the Old Testament, always as a stronger helper in time of desperate need. (For example see Psalms 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 89:19; 115:9-11; 121:2; 124:8; 145:5. Cf Dt 18:5; 33:7,9). It would have been more accurate to translate the word “*Ezer*” as “Saviour”. The overwhelming majority of references of *Ezer* are to God. “*Eliezer*” is representative of such use. It means “My God is helper”. The other word *neged* most often means opposite, against, or in front of. The translation used in the KJV, “meet for”, should be understood as meaning “suitable for”, but it does not do justice to the concept of opposite. The “help meet for” of the KJV would better be understood as “counterpart” or “mate”. Whereas earlier there was just adam, after Eve was created there is male and female.

What God did to create humans is just as mysterious as understanding the concept of God himself. Paul writes: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery” (Ephesians 5:32). Eve was Adam’s counterpart in more ways than just physical. She possessed qualities, attributes, and responsibilities that Adam lacked: to create life, yes, but more importantly, to complement his qualities, attributes and responsibilities, so that together they would reflect the image of God.

This is why male and female are drawn to each other—because they belong together. They juxtapose together. They attract like magnets that have been pulled apart. The opposite chemistries of their minds and bodies draw them closer and closer till they are one. When they do unite, they fulfil the Creator’s command to be one.

Ellen White states that God took a rib from Adam. But a careful reading shows that her burden is not to ratify the fact of the extraction of a rib, but to provide the significance for the location which is neither the head, nor the foot, but the side. Her exposition is revealing. She uses phrases such as “corresponding to”, “fitted to be his companion”, “stand by his side”, “as an equal”, and “second self”. She concludes with a reference to Ephesians 5:29 that the one should nourish and cherish the other as his own flesh, for no one hated his own flesh (White, 1890. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 46). In fact translating “tsele” as “side” fits in with her idea much better than “rib”. Her burden was that the two equals should become one.

### Becoming One Again

There are several ways in which a couple should be one. The first has just been expressed that they should be one in flesh (Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31). Husband and wife should treat each other as an extension of their own body, much like a Siamese twin. Thus they will not hurt each other physically or verbally because what hurts the other obviously would hurt self. Additionally, Paul admonishes each to “nourish and cherish”, the other, meaning that they should look out for the wellbeing, health, and prosperity of the other.

Next, they should be one in thought and purpose as God is. Husband and wife should share everything including their thoughts and emotions, but most importantly, their plans, goals, and dreams. Neither should dominate the other nor make a plea for rulership, but together they should work out their united purpose for their lives.

Finally, they should be one in doctrine in the image of God. They should be united in their faith. They should share their thoughts on God and religion, and should dialogue with each other on Bible passages, meditating and praying together. As they draw closer to God they will draw closer to each other spiritually. They will complement each other perfectly and this union will be a true reflection of God’s image.

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# REPRINTED ARTICLES

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# Wedding Wisdom

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q - I am getting married in a few months to the most wonderful man in the world. Our biggest stress right now is the cost of the wedding. My mother and I have been looking forward for many years now to my getting married and having a beautiful wedding that will be the talk of our church for years to come. However, the wedding I've always wanted is going to cost way more than I had imagined. The dream I've had for so many years is now becoming a nightmare. Do you have any wisdom to share with me about my dilemma? Thank you for your kind help.

A - Thank you for your excellent question. It is one we have answered many times, as we are often sought out by couples who are getting married, and are going out of their minds with the stress of the event.

We will make several points to answer your question:

First, remember that weddings are to get married. What we mean is that by the time you get through the ceremony, you want to be legally married, and more importantly, have God's blessing on your marital union. Everything else is simply superfluous (unnecessary or needless).

We have attended many weddings. Some have been very simple events that included the minister performing the ceremony, the couple getting married, and a handful of relatives and friends for a total of about 15 persons at the church. Everyone assembles in the living room for the ceremony, followed by something to drink and a slice of cake. Others have been elaborate ceremonies with a nicely decorated church, 30 attendants, several hundred guests; followed by a lavish reception at a well-appointed banquet venue with free-flowing hors d'oeuvres (appetizers), drinks in abundance, a four-course meal, and Christmas gift-type favors for every guest.

Second, develop a mission statement for your wedding based on your spiritual values, a statement that accurately represents your authentic self instead of the superficial you that emerges at moments like this. Such a statement will guide your decision-making from getting outlandish and causing you unnecessary pain and worry. The more genuine you determine to be, the less you will feel the need to do more than you can afford to impress people who don't really care or matter.

Third, put the emphasis on preparing for your marriage rather than simply getting ready for your wedding—an event that will last a few hours and may mortgage your life for years to come if you are not very careful. To be sure, you will want to invest in excellent premarital or

pre-engagement counseling to get you ready for what really counts, your marriage. Also plan a memorable honeymoon immediately after the wedding, and if possible use what money you have as down payment on a house. So, begin with the end in mind.

As part of a serious conversation with yourself and your future mate, ask yourselves: “Do we want a wedding that will give us great memories because we had close friends and family present who are part of our ‘village’ and who will continue to support us emotionally for years to come?” “Do we want a wedding with no financial regrets and stress because

we kept things rather simple and within our means?” “Do we want a wedding that is more about the marriage to come than about living it up for a single day?”

As a Christian you will want to follow the counsel of 1 Corinthians 10:31: *“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*

You and your husband-to-be are in our prayers as you carefully ponder our counsel and choose to honor God, and do what will bring the most peace and endurance to your marriage in the years to come.

# Fatherless Child

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Q - I was raised in a single parent home. In fact, I never met my father and I have often wondered if my two sisters and I were simply not good enough for him that he never bothered to stay with our family or visit us after taking off. My mother never talked about the issue, so I really did not think much of it until I got to school and realized there were children who had fathers that showed up for school events, and were otherwise involved with their lives. I am now a father of two young children and want to do all I can to give them and my wife what my siblings and I, and my mother, never had. Sometimes I am unsure of what to do since I had no one to show me by example what good fathers and husbands do. Any suggestions?

A - Thank you for being so transparent and willing to share your experience. You are obviously blessed with a mother that did many things right to help you get to this point relatively healthy, despite your growing-up experiences. The truth is, there are no perfect families—even the ones with fathers who stay and are responsible—because there are no perfect people.

It is true that a large number of scientific studies conducted on families suggest that

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children who are raised by two biological parents who have stayed together, do better—on average—than peers who were raised by a single parent, regardless of whether it was because their parents’ divorced or never married. The way to get the most out of these studies is to concentrate on the concept of “on average,” which means this may not be true for everyone who went through such an experience. And at the same time, be mindful of how these realities might impact your life as an adult.

We applaud your intentional desire to change the course of history for your family tree by getting married, having children, and trying to provide a stable, healthy, and nurturing environment for your children and wife. This is already a measure of success you can be proud of. And when we say proud, we mean it in the healthiest way possible as an indicator of moving your family in the right direction, which is important for everyone who wants to have a family.

The concern you raised at the end of your question is very normal and expected if you were never fathered. To be sure, the other side of that coin is also true—you would not have been exposed to negative ways of relating to your children as a father. The point we are trying to make is to avoid stereotyping people as coming from a broken or whole family, when all families experience brokenness; some simply more than others.

A healthy way to approach your concerns about knowing how to be an effective father and husband is to have a few sessions with a good Christian counselor, preferably a male. This is the kind of safe environment needed to confront your insecurities, and perhaps even come to terms with how the absence of your father may have affected your upbringing and concept of family. The better you understand your feelings, the easier it will be to relate to your children and your wife in a positive, wholesome and nurturing way.

An additional advantage at your disposal is your faith and relationship with God who promises in Psalm 46:1 to be “our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” So, regardless of your shortcomings, you can trust God to give you the strength and capacity to be the very present and positively involved father and husband you are determined to be.

May God continue to bless your efforts with your children and your wife, so the next generation will have a stronger and healthier legacy to share with the world.

# Marriage Material

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

**Q** - What should you do before you accept a man's proposal for marriage?

**A** - There are several things you should and should not do before you accept a proposal for marriage. Since your premarital relationship sets the tone for your marriage, you must engage in habits and patterns that will lead to a healthy and happy marriage.

First, there are things you should not do if you really want a successful marriage, and this is not to judge or marginalize anyone. Nevertheless, if you find yourself already engaged in any of these practices before marriage, we would strongly encourage you to remove them as options to give yourself the best chance at success. Among these are activities or practices that join your lives together before marriage, such as living together and/or buying big-ticket items together—house, car, or even a pet. Once you engage in any of these things, it becomes much more difficult to break off the relationship, should things not work out.<sup>1</sup>

Second, here are some things should do before accepting a marriage proposal. Get to know yourself. Read a number of good Christian self-help and relationship books to get a good

understanding of who you are as a person, the type of spouse you would like to be, and the type of spouse with whom you envision spending the rest of your life. If the budget permits, you may even want to explore these issues with a qualified Christian counselor. Many ignore this vital step to their detriment later. They make a decision based solely on physical attraction, only to later realize that there were other important factors involved in selecting a future marriage partner that they completely missed.

Third, carefully get to know the person you are contemplating marrying. Give attention to what his personality is like at different times of the day or under stressful circumstances. What are his core beliefs and values? Does He believe in God in the same way that you do? Does he share your religious traditions and wants similar things out of life as you do? What is his family of origin like? Did he grow up in a home where people were loving and nurturing, or distant, cold, and spiteful? What is his financial situation? Does he have marketable skills and meaningful employment to provide the necessary financial resources for the type of life you have envisioned? How does he handle money or debt, and what kind of debt does he have, if any? These issues raised by these questions may not seem like much right now, but wait until after the wedding, and when you start thinking about having children. As such, we strongly recommend having several sessions of pre-engagement counseling/education with

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

a qualified professional who comes highly recommended by people you trust.

Taking the time to get to know someone after the “love cocktail” of incredible attraction when has worn off and your emotions are more balanced is the best thing you can do to prepare yourself for a marriage proposal. While what we have said may not sound romantic, if followed carefully this advice will save you a world of hurt by giving you an opportunity to go into marriage with your eyes wide open.

To be sure, there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. And while it is true that you don’t want to look for perfection, you want to be as sober and discriminating in this endeavor—as if you were taking your driver’s test.

If you are a Christian, you must be sure that God can approve every decision you make. This means that you must make choices that honor and glorify God. The Bible says in Philippians 4:19: “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” This means there is no need to get desperate and make a hasty decision, especially concerning marriage. Since God owns everything and there isn’t any thing too hard for Him to do on your behalf, trust God to lead you to the right person at the right time. For you to know when God has answered, you will need to know God intimately to recognize His voice when He speaks. Trust Him. We will keep you in our prayers.

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<sup>1</sup> See [family.adventist.org](http://family.adventist.org), Real Answers—Premarital Issues

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# BOOK SHELF

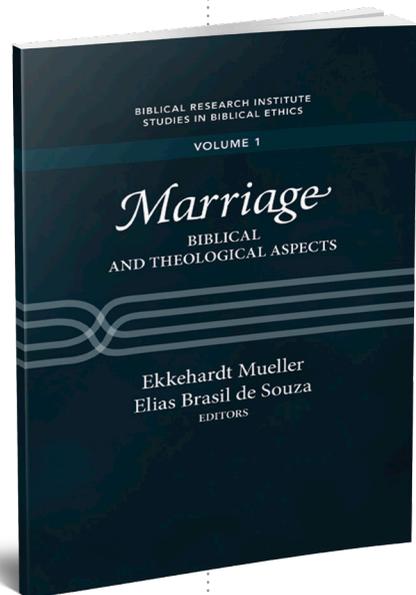
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# Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects, Vol. 1

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.



Reviewed by:

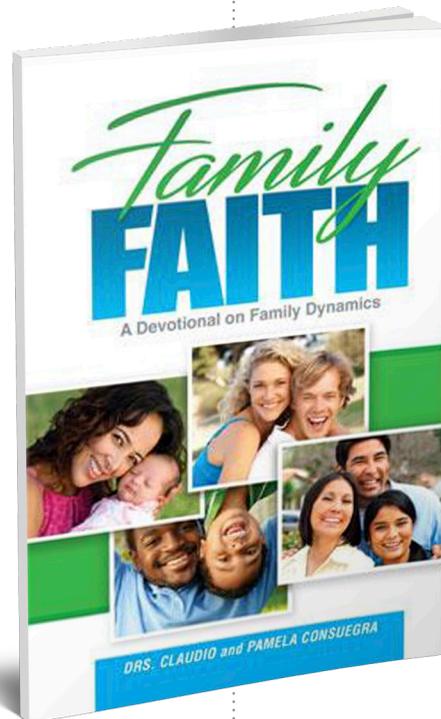
**Rosemay Cangy**, is Editorial Assistant for the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

# Family Faith

## A Devotional on Family Dynamics

DRS. CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA  
Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016  
400 pages

Here is a devotional that will encourage parents and teach children about the importance of God's gemlike truths in His Word. Families face challenges and issues in their daily lives that sometimes seem overwhelming. Furthermore, today's crazy schedules and demands make it more difficult for family members to come together around God's Word. This devotional can help each family member find inspiration and divine guidance through the Bible stories of ordinary people who experienced similar challenges and triumphs. Such a journey through God's Word can only bind the family in unity as they seek to honor God in their home.



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Reviewed by:

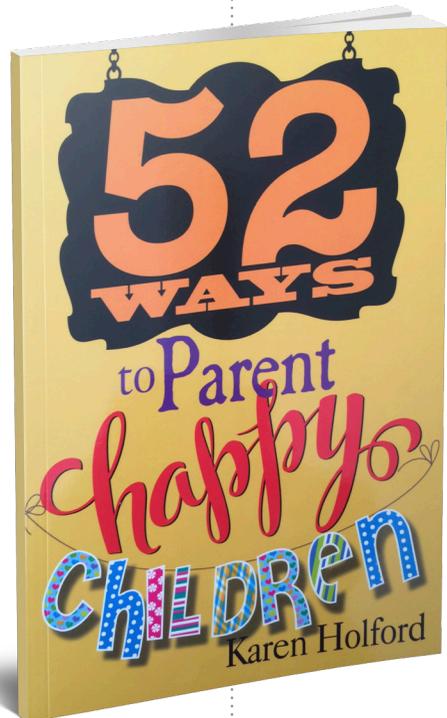
**Ayakha Mokgwane**, is Special Assistant for the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

# 52 Ways to Parent Happy Children

KAREN HOLFORD  
Pacific Press Publishing, 2016  
280 pages

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The author's practical approach provides an interesting way for parents to enhance the lives of their children through fun-filled activities and suggestions. No matter what age group your child belongs to or what level of parenting experience you have, this book will guide you into creative ways and ideas to make your parenting experience more effective as you lead your children into fun and exciting activities.



Reviewed by:

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# APPENDIX A

# FAMILY MINISTRIES

# IMPLEMENTATION

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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/planbook2017>

# A Family Ministries Policy and Purpose Statement

The congregation and staff of the

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

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

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

- All NAD employees and NAD volunteers who regularly work with children must complete an application form (see NAD’s Children’s Ministries website: <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.

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Reprinted from Family Ministries Handbook: The complete how-to guide for local church leaders. (2003).  
Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. Used with permission

# What is a Family?

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

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

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

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

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

# Committee and Planning Guidelines

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

- Select a small number of persons with similar concerns for families. They should represent the variety of families found in the congregation. This committee might have a single parent, married couple, divorced, retired or widowed persons, and reflect the gender and ethnic profile of the church.
- The committee should not be too large—five to seven persons are ideal. Individuals may represent more than one family category.
- Especially for the first meeting, gather in an informal setting—perhaps at someone's home or a comfortable room at the church. Begin with prayer for God's blessing.
- Provide light refreshments that include water or hot or cold drinks, something light too much on like fresh fruit, cookies, or nuts. Make it attractive, but not fussy or involving great effort.

- For the first meeting, spend time telling each other your story. This is not a therapy session so let people know that they should tell only what is comfortable. A few guidelines will help: confidentiality is to be respected and seen as a gift to one another. It might be good for the leader to begin—starting with sentences like, “I was born in..., raised in a (Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic or whatever) home.” Include other things like where you went to school, children's names or other pertinent information. Include how you became a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist or a pleasant or funny story from childhood. This may seem like a waste of time. But you may be surprised to hear the story of someone you thought you knew for a long time. The telling of our stories is how we connect and bond with each other. It will make your work together go more smoothly. It will also make it easier for committee members to be sensitive to the needs of one another.
- For all subsequent meetings, spend a portion of time—perhaps 10 or 20 minutes in re-connecting with your committee members. One might be rejoicing over an important event. Another may need support with a special need. Here are some questions you could ask to start your meetings:
  - Who are the people you consider to be your close family?
  - How do you live your faith together as a family?
  - What do you think the church could do to help your family?

- What do you like best about your family?

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

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

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

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

# A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things

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

## Handouts

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.
- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

## Introduction

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

# The Ten Commandments of Presentations

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

# Family Life Profile Survey

Name ..... Date of Birth .....

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

Gender:  M  F (c)

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 .....

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

### Inactive 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 +

### Married—Spouse is a Non-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 +

### 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:

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

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Suggested guest speakers/presenters: .....

Name .....

Address ..... Telephone .....

Area(s) of specialty .....

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

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

# Community Family Life Education Survey

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?

.....

2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area? (Select as many as you wish.)

- How to Handle Conflict
- Communication in Marriage
- Marriage Enrichment or Encounter
- Understanding Children
- Self-Esteem
- Parenting Skills
- Dealing with Teenagers
- Childbirth Preparation Class
- Other (Please specify) .....
- Divorce Recovery
- Stress Management
- Overcoming Loneliness Weekend
- Family Finances
- Grief Recovery
- Time Management and Life Priorities
- Planning Retirement

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

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

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

Sex:  M  F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

17 or under  19-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  61-70  71+

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

Are you:

- 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.

- |                           |                          |                         |                         |                         |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 1   | <input type="radio"/> 2  | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Generally<br>Dissatisfied | Somewhat<br>Dissatisfied | Somewhat<br>Satisfied   | Generally<br>Satisfied  | Very<br>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?

.....years      .....months

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

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# APPENDIX B

# VOTED STATEMENTS

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# 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.

# 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.

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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.

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*Growing 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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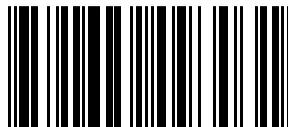
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