

2021
RESOURCE
BOOK



Adventist[®]
Family Ministries

I WILL GO WITH MY FAMILY:

UNITY IN COMMUNITY

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



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Adventist® Family Ministries

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PREFACE

Living in the middle of a pandemic is no laughing matter.

Dictionary.com defines a pandemic as: “(of a disease) prevalent throughout an entire country, continent, or the whole world.” While the memory of 2020 includes dark moments for most of us, good things also emerged from the presence of COVID-19. For many, it was an opportunity to slow down, enjoy more family time, and an occasion to take stock of where we were in our relationship with God. Still, for millions around the world, it meant higher levels of family abuse, being infected with this horrible virus causing excruciating pain and despair, including the agonizing sorrow of the death of more than a million people at the writing of this piece.

As horrible calamities filled 2020, a dreadful and appalling tragedy took place on May 25 when George Floyd, a Black man, was killed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, by Derek Chauvin, a White police officer. With Chauvin’s knee on Floyd’s neck for 7 minutes, 46 seconds, while he pleaded and gasped for air, a 17-year-old passerby—Darnella Frazier—recorded the ghastly scene including three words uttered by the dying man—*I can’t breathe*. These words became the collective catchphrase for angry protesters of all ethnicities around the globe, assembling in large numbers to call for justice against police brutality in the USA aimed principally at Black Americans.

In the midst of these incredibly distressing and harrowing realities, the people of God are even now being called to share the good news of salvation with a dying world in need of a Savior. Yet, an integral part of the call is to show concern for the temporal needs of those we serve. The obligation to weigh-in against injustice, inequality, and oppression of people groups—because of their race, social class, caste, tribe, or gender—not only in society but also in church institutions where we live, work, and worship.

To profess to be disciples of Jesus and to attempt to speak for Him without a distinct understanding of the requirement to show care, compassion and concern in our daily lives is to receive the indictment of Matthew 25:42-45 that testifies:

“For I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me. Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?’ Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, You did not do it to Me.’”

To diminish the malaise of this kind of reality in the Church, Ellen White offers a road map for effective ministry to people—modeled after the behavior of Jesus—when she says: “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

To follow Jesus, then—to be His heart, hands, and feet to a world perishing in despair—we must live by the words of Isaiah 1:17 that insist: “Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.”

When our hearts are filled with love for humanity because we are saturated with the Spirit of Jesus, we will be able to hear the voice of Jesus clearly and embrace the call to discipleship like Isaiah did when he declared: “Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying: ‘Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me’” (Isaiah 6:8).

With unequivocal confidence, Isaiah responds to God’s call by declaring with an assurance only possible when filled with God’s Spirit: “I Will Go!”

The Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Strategic Focus for the 2020-2025 quinquennium is “*I Will Go!*” The theme for the 2021 newly rebranded Family Ministries **Resource Book** is “*I Will Go with My Family*”, which is also Adventist Family Ministries’ emphasis for the 2020-2025 quinquennium. It is our hope that the contents of this manuscript will bring pastors, church members, and leaders in Family Ministries to sense a new calling from God on your lives. And, that this calling will include your family and their involvement in the primary mission of the Church of being light and salt to those who are in darkness, in desperate need of the Savior; while also being mindful of people’s need for food, clothing, shelter, security, friendship and a sense of wellbeing.

May the *signs of the times* help us sense the urgency of the hour and, like Isaiah be able to also declare with conviction, “I WILL GO!!!”

Maranatha!

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors

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General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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HOW TO USE THIS **RESOURCE BOOK**

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

CHRISTIAN HOME AND MARRIAGE WEEK: FEBRUARY 13-20

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 (EMPHASIZES MARRIAGE): SABBATH, FEBRUARY 13

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

CHRISTIAN HOME DAY (EMPHASIZES PARENTING): SABBATH, FEBRUARY 20

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

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK:
SEPTEMBER 5-11**

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 of Prayer. Family Togetherness Week and Family Togetherness Day of Prayer highlight celebrating the church as a family.

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS DAY OF PRAYER
(FOR MARRIAGES, FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS):
SABBATH, SEPTEMBER 11**

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

Within this Resource Book you will find sermon ideas, seminars, children's stories as well as leadership resources, reprinted 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 a presentation please visit: **family.adventist.org/2021RB**

SERMON IDEAS

— These *Sermon Ideas* are meant to be an inspiration, the beginning of your own sermon. Pray to be guided by the Holy Spirit. May your words be an extension of God's love for each heart and family.

WHO WILL GO?

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

“²⁸ What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of the father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.’” Matthew 21:28-32

I. INTRODUCTION

Raymond Loewy was an immigrant who disembarked in Manhattan in 1919, imagining New York City would be a stylish and classy place. When he disembarked, he was disenchanted. What Loewy found was an untidy product of the industrial age—massive, loud and complex. Loewy went on to become a prominent industrial designer who grasped an essential norm about human aspiration and drive. So, what was Loewy’s top secret? He perceived that consumers are of two minds between two divergent forces: a curiosity about new things and concern about anything *too new*. As a result, *they*

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are attracted to products that are bold but also immediately understandable. Raymond Loewy believed that people want things that are “*Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable*,” a phrase that can be shortened to **MAYA**.

Loewy believed that people often vacillate between curiosity about new things and anxiety about anything too new. So did Jesus. In the temple in Jerusalem, he asks the chief priests and the elders, “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” (v. 25). The people love John because his baptism is new and thrilling. In the eyes of Jesus and the people, John’s baptism is clearly Most Advanced. People are at ease with John because he comes out of a long line of Hebrew prophets, and his baptism is embedded in religious tradition. John is *Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable*. Because of this, the priests and elders are unable to come to a conclusion, and they say, “We do not know” (v. 27).¹

In today’s text, Jesus appears to understand this same idea.

Our topic today is titled, *Who Will Go?* Let us pray.

II. EXPLICATION AND APPLICATION

The context of this narrative finds Jesus at His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, at the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, and with a fig tree He cursed because it had leaves but no fruit. The storyline continues with the chief priests and elders of the temple challenging the authority of Jesus to teach and questioning the audacious social situations in which He participated. In vss. 24-27, Jesus engages the leaders in a conversation about where the baptism of John came from, which immediately becomes a trap for them.

While the clashes between Jesus and the religious leaders increase, He presents a number of parables meaning to revile their narcissism, materialism and self-satisfaction. These thought-provoking parables are meant to explain the remarkable swap taking place in response to the coming of Messiah. Essentially, Jesus is rejected by the leaders of Israel, while at the same time being accepted by the untouchables and the underclass of His day. The unfortunate theme running through the narratives of the Gospels, though, is that those assumed to be among the saved are lost, even as *sinner*s who accept Messiah are saved. And in that vein, we can hear the desperate existential cry of the thief on the cross: “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” (Luke 23:42)

In the middle of this Ancient Near East dialectic, we find the parable of the man who had two sons. By making use of parables, Jesus allows His hearers to reprove themselves without being aware of how they got there. It is a lot like when Nathan, the Old Testament prophet, who got David, the King of Israel, to become outraged with his own behavior before knowing whom the prophet was speaking about. A parable made it much easier for King David to be outraged by the behavior of the perpetrator in the story (2 Samuel 12:1-15), only to have the Prophet Nathan say to him: “You are the man” (vs. 7).

It is this genre of storytelling that Jesus employs with the leaders of Israel when he tells them the parable of the man who had two sons. *What do you think?* Jesus asks. He begins his conversation with them by employing the Socratic method—“a form of a cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to

draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions.”² Effectively, the story is about the two sons the father sends to work in his vineyard. Yet, Jesus means to show these church leaders who did not believe John’s baptism was from God, how they discredited themselves when the publicans and prostitutes not only believed in John’s baptism but embraced it for themselves.³

Ellen White sheds light on this incident by sharing (DA, p. 594-595):

“In His contest with the rabbis, it was not Christ’s purpose to humiliate His opponents. He was not glad to see them in a hard place. He had an important lesson to teach. He had mortified His enemies by allowing them to be entangled in the net they had spread for Him. Their acknowledged ignorance in regard to the character of John’s baptism gave Him an opportunity to speak, and He improved the opportunity by presenting before them their real position, adding another warning to the many already given.”⁴

So, the father goes to the first son and says: “... ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard *today*.’ And he answered, ‘I will not,’ but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you’” (vss. 28-31).

The parable—of course—symbolizes two kinds of people: the kind that does better than they promised—represented by the first son; and the kind that promises more than they deliver—exemplified by the second son. To be sure, both sons had the same father, demonstrating that God is the Father of all humankind. Yet, there are considerable differences among human beings, including among those who belong to the community of believers.⁵ Some are faithful; others, unfaithful. Some are kind; others, unkind. Some are patient; others, impatient. Some are agreeable; others, miserable. Some are generous; others, stingy. Some are loving; others, indifferent. Some love the truth; others, falsehood. Some are givers; others, takers. Some live to smile; others to frown. Some love unconditionally; others, are haters. Some are optimists; others, pessimists. Some love righteousness; others, unrighteousness. Some live in the sunshine; others, in the shadows. Some love Jesus; others, Satan. Some are heaven-bound; others, hell-bound. Yes, indeed! There is only one Father, but huge differences among His children.

Both sons received the same command to *go and work in the vineyard today*. It is the same command we all are still receiving from the Father today. One command comes from Exodus 20:9 that says, “Six days you shall labor, and do all your work.” The other command is found in Matthew 28:19 that states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” God means for His children to be industrious, to make a good living in some worthy enterprise that makes a difference in the temporal lives of people to help build up His kingdom. God also intends for His children to *work* in His vineyard for the salvation of souls. The call to work in the *vineyard* requires present obedience. The directive

today carries urgency with it. The Father doesn't say go to the vineyard when you get a chance. The Father doesn't say go to the vineyard when it is convenient. The Father doesn't say go to the vineyard next week or next month. The Father says, *go and work in the vineyard today!* There is authority and affection in the command of the Father. The Psalmist affirms in Psalm 10:13, 14, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." The command is urgent and at once benevolent and filled with love.⁶ The command is not meant to harm us. Rather, to involve us intimately in His mission of saving humankind.

Ellen White describes the story of Jesus' piercing question to the rabbis and their subsequent answer by disclosing (DA, p. 595):

"The priests and rulers could not give a correct answer to Christ's question, and thus He obtained their opinion in favor of the first son. This son represented the publicans, those who were despised and hated by the Pharisees. The publicans had been grossly immoral. They had indeed been transgressors of the law of God, showing in their lives an absolute resistance to His requirements. They had been unthankful and unholy; when told to go and work in the Lord's vineyard, they had given a contemptuous refusal. But when John came, preaching repentance and baptism, the publicans received his message and were baptized."⁷

As already noted, the two sons behaved very differently. One son did better than he indicated. His response was bad, but his deeds were good. At first, he inappropriately answered his father by saying *I will not*, to the command of his father to *go and work in the vineyard today*. Who speaks to his father in that way? While excuses are bad blatant denials are worse. Yet, such hasty rejections are not unusual when responding to the call of the gospel. Refusing the call of the gospel is not uncommon, because we were "born in sin and shaped in iniquity" (Ps. 51:5).

These individuals don't mind coming to church but find it difficult to share the good news with their neighbors, coworkers, or friends. They believe that communicating the good news is not their spiritual gift. Working for the Lord is very difficult for them. They are afraid to be seen as religious fanatics or freaks. They don't mind going to potluck after church. They will even bring a vegetarian meatloaf or a vegan casserole to share with the group. But don't ask them to share a track with someone on the street or pray for a neighbor in need. No sir! It's not what they do. This is outside their comfort zone.

Still, it is truly exceptional and magnificent when a person allows the Spirit of God to fill them with a vision for mission and transforms their hearts from fear to holy boldness. It is what the Apostle Paul is referencing when he states: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The truth is, we can all be changed if we allow God to do so. This was the experience of the first son. This was his 'better late than never' kind of involvement. The first

son repented and immediately went to work in his father's vineyard. To be sure, the only evidence of repentance is obedience. This is why the first son who said no, eventually answered his father's command and went to work in the vineyard. It is the benevolent heart of the father who could have disinherited the son for his wrongheaded behavior. But, the Father—God—waits on the son to be remorseful for his past conduct and is ready to forgive, ready to bless, ready to accept the son in a new relationship with Him.⁸

Ellen White goes on to describe the response of the second son by saying (DA, p. 595-596):

“The second son represented the leading men of the Jewish nation. Some of the Pharisees had repented and received the baptism of John; but the leaders would not acknowledge that he came from God. His warnings and denunciations did not lead them to reformation. They ‘rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him.’ Luke 7:30. They treated his message with disdain. Like the second son, who, when called, said, ‘I go, sir,’ but went not, the priest and rulers professed obedience, but acted disobedience. They made great professions of piety, they claimed to be obeying the law of God, but they rendered only a false obedience. The publicans were denounced and cursed by the Pharisees as infidels; but they showed by their faith and works that they were going into the kingdom of heaven before those self-righteous men who had been given great light, but whose works did not correspond to their profession of godliness.”⁹

The second son's initial response to his father was positive, respectful, and even showed great esteem for him. His answer was good, but his actions were bad. Like the two sons, we all receive the call to go, although the specifics of the call are not the same for everyone, yet we are all given the privilege to respond.

The second son is what we would call a schmoozer—a fast talker—someone who always wants to leave a good impression. This is a person who has a lot of style but no substance. He gives his father a title of respect, recognition, and regard. “I go, sir,” he responded to the command of *son, go and work in the vineyard today*. While it is appropriate for children to speak respectfully to their parents—a part of the requirements of the fifth commandment in Exodus 20:12 that affirms, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Obedience is even better. The second son gave an answer that seemed from the heart. It is the kind of answer we should always give when we receive a request from God.¹⁰ Yet, we must go beyond simply being polite. We must do as He commands His power and grace.

The conundrum in this segment of the narrative, however, is the contradiction between what the second son said he would do and what he actually did. *He did not go*. This is like so many in intimate relationships, even in marriage. They promise to do great things but often fall short. They promise to love, honor, and cherish in sickness and in health but don't quite get there. They promise

to be kind and patient but are unkind and impatient instead. They promise to do anything for you but won't make the commitment to get the children from school because they are simply too busy, they say. Like the second son, many of us show piety and dedication to God by praying lavish and articulate prayers in public but find it very challenging to do something in private. We have good intentions to venture out of our timidity, but something always comes up. Much like the people in the story of Luke 14: 16-20:

“¹⁶ But he said to him, ‘A man once gave a great banquet and invited many.’¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’¹⁸ But they all began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.’¹⁹ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.’²⁰ And another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’”

These people are like the fig tree Jesus ran into in Matthew 21:19; they have lots of leaves but no fruit. You cannot say yes, then do nothing. You cannot hear the command and not respond. We can't just have lots of leaves but no fruit. There is a reason we are children of the Father. 1 Corinthians 6:20 says: “For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Additionally, the Apostle Paul declares in Ephesians 4:1: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” 1 Peter 1:15 submits: “but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.” The Old Testament prophet offers in Jeremiah 29:13: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.” Hebrews 10:36 proclaims: “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” And in 1 Corinthians 15:58 the Apostle Paul enunciates: “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” Don't be afraid! Say yes to His command. *Go and work in the vineyard today!*

III. CONCLUSION

Unlike the two brothers who seemed somewhat schizophrenic in their responses to the father's command to *go and work in the vineyard today*, when we think of an exceptional and vigorous answer to the father's directive, what instantly comes to mind is the compelling and exuberant response given by Isaiah in his dialog with God recorded in Isaiah 6:8 that states: “And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here I am! Send me.’” God asks: “Who will go?” Isaiah answers: “I will go!”

In the process of Isaiah's reflection on his unfitness for the work God is calling him to perform, one of the seraphim of God flies towards him and touches his mouth with a live coal from the altar, not to scorch him, but to purify him and expunge his sin. Cleansed by God's grace, empowered by God's authority, made ready by God's promise, Isaiah becomes aware of the reality that he has been

given the aptitude, capacity and competence to worship the God of heaven in spirit and in truth. Isaiah becomes cognizant of the ability, facility and power he has received to become one of God's extraordinary emissaries. This is the point at which Isaiah announces with conviction, "Here I am! Send me." "I will go!!!" With unmistakable assurance Isaiah responds with all of his being, with all of his conviction, with all of his strength to the order given by the father in Matthew 21:28-30 to his two sons. Without equivocation, without hesitation, without saying one thing and doing another; Isaiah responds, "I Will Go!!!"

A similar invitation is being made today by the God of the universe who made you and me. The call is no ordinary call. The call is not for the halting or hesitating. The call is not for the faltering or tentative. The call is not for the uncertain or stumbling. The call is an extraordinary, exceptional, remarkable call. The call is for everyone who believes in Him to *go and work in the vineyard today*. As the time of the end draws near, the call for workers takes on new urgency.

The call is to develop better relationships with one another, so that energized by loving those closest to you, God may use you with power and joy to reach those who don't know Him yet. This is the reason John 13:35 declares: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." To be husbands or wives who love this way; to be fathers or mothers who love this way; to be sons and daughters who love this way; to be aunts and uncles, grandparents and cousins who love this way, you have to do what the Apostle Paul counsels in Colossians 3:12-14, where he says:

"¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."

When we learn to love like this in our marriage and family relationships; in fact, when we learn to love like this in all of our relationships; when the call comes from the father, *who will go work in my vineyard today?* We can all be ready and willing to say, *I will go!*

Brothers and sisters, God our Creator who authorized, certified and qualified Isaiah is longing to do the same for anyone who is humble enough and willing enough to be used by Him to call sinners to repentance and to become a part of His kingdom of grace. If you are going to be like one of the two brothers of Matthew 21, be like the first brother, change your mind, and allow the God of the harvest to use you mightily to share the good news of salvation with anyone who would hear, so you may help hasten His coming.

Illustration:

For decades, the Nissan auto company exported cars to the USA under the Datsun name. One of the hot cars of the 1970s was the Datsun 240Z, a sleek and graceful coupe with a powerful 2.4-liter, single-overhead-cam engine. But over time, the Nissan people decided that they needed

to strengthen their global image. People in America were buying Datsuns, not realizing they were truly Nissans. So, they decided to rebrand. Beginning with a major ad campaign called “The Name Is Nissan,” they made their company name as familiar as their rivals Honda and Toyota.¹¹

Today, Jesus wants to rebrand you from being ambivalent to being certain; from being lukewarm to being hot. From having a mediocre marriage to building a great one. From not being sure you want to respond to His call, to knowing there is no better way to live each day for Him. As you allow Jesus to rebrand you today, may you find yourself as a MAYA (Most Advance, Yet Acceptable) specimen and be able to declare like the transformed father of Mark 9:24, “I believe; help my unbelief!” And by so doing be able to respond to the command of the father, “I will go!” Yes, “I will go!!!”

May God bless you to this end is our prayer.

NOTES

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BARRIERS TO FAMILY WELLNESS

BY LINDA KOH

THE TEXTS

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6

“⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. ⁷ 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. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” Deuteronomy 6:4-8

In the beginning, God instituted the family when He created Adam and Eve. He told them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1:28). It is through the family that we are to pass on our faith; that we are to teach our children the word of God (Deut. 6:4-8). Unfortunately, many families today are facing challenges in accomplishing this goal. In fact, families face many barriers.

Some barriers that threaten family wellness are obvious—violence, drugs, alcohol, pornography, and abuse. But our world today also put other roadblocks that are not so easily

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recognized. Families may escape the obvious barriers yet never realize they have succumbed to other less obvious barriers to their family that are equally damaging. This morning we will look at three major barriers that undermine our family health and wellness.

BARRIER #1: TOO BUSY WITH LIFE

Life today is one mad rush, thus eating up our time with our spouse and our children. For many families, with both parents working and building their careers, it is no wonder that we lost the essence of what makes family life work—being loved and sharing the love. Can you imagine back in 1996 (over two decades ago) when Tom Eisenman wrote his book, *Temptations Families Face*,¹ life was already too busy. Hence, he urged us to recover in our families the meaningful community experience the Bible describes as *koinonia*.

Koinonia from the Greek word *κοινωνία* means fellowship, communion, sharing, and participating. That means in our family we are sharing life at the most intimate levels. It is participating in each other's lives in a wholesome and nurturing way, learning to support and care for one another.

A. WHAT ARE THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BUSYNESS IN LIFE?

- The indiscriminate pursuit of money and material things
- Job security as an outward sign of productivity and company loyalty
- Acquiring material things for our kids to make them happy
- The necessity of work at multiple jobs to make ends meet
- Finding self-fulfilment by doing many things
- Being a super-mom to everyone around
- Showing our importance, value, or self-worth

Busyness intrudes on all of us because we want everything – and more. We have become slaves to what we want, not what we need. We have become possessed by our activities – our getting and spending and doing. Isn't that part of the disease that infects many families? That we live beyond our means, getting caught up with materialism and greed. That we have become so busy and involved with things outside of the home. Don't you think we need to re-set our priorities and follow them?

STORY

Paul worked for the largest bank firm in the world. He was an executive on the way up, fast. Over a 5-year period he moved his family 7 times. Each move brought Paul a higher salary, greater prestige, more power and acclaim. And each move also brought more of the things he felt would make his family happy—fancier cars, bigger and more attractive homes, and an abundance of life's accessories.

The 7th move was to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The family arrived on Monday and met the moving van outside their new home. Tuesday morning, Paul immerses himself in his new job. But on Thursday afternoon, he was called home from work immediately. The neighbor heard the car running in their closed garage and called the police. The garage was thick with fumes and exhaust. Paul's wife had committed suicide. Paul realized that he had been getting messages from every direction, but he had refused to listen. He was a man on a mission. And it cost him the most important thing in life to himself and his four children.

After his wife committed suicide, Paul refused further promotions. He spent more time with his family. After 5 years he married again, quit his work as an executive and dedicated his life to leading marriage enrichment seminars. Now he devotes himself to preventing young men and women from making the same mistakes he made.²

B. COUNSELS AND WARNINGS

The Bible has given us a strong warning about the love of money in Ecclesiastes 5:10:

“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.”

The wise king Solomon also adds his counsel about money in Proverbs 23: 4, 5:

“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; Have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.”

The Bible is not against money. It warns us against the love of money and covetousness. Solomon, the richest man on earth, also warns us against coveting riches. Riches are fleeting and elusive. You bank on them, and suddenly, they are gone.

Ellen G. White gives similar warning in Manuscript 40, 1898:

“Those who have a competence are in continual danger of thinking that money and position will ensure them respect and they need not be so particular. But self-exaltation is but a bubble. When God gives people prosperity, they are to beware of following the imaginations of their own hearts, lest they endanger the simplicity of their faith and deteriorate in religious experience.”

Ellen White counsels explicitly against fathers acquiring wealth at the expense of their children:

“The father's duty to his children should be one of his first interests. It should not be set aside for the sake of acquiring a fortune, or of gaining a high position in the

world. In fact, those very conditions of affluence and honor frequently separate a man from his family and cut off his influence from them more than anything else.”³

Let’s look at what the Bible teaches us about how to slow down and concentrate on the health of our family. The Bible ranks healthy relationships as the most important thing in life. A Jewish religious lawyer asked Jesus (Matt. 22:36), “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied (Matt. 22:37-40):

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

A loving relationship with God is of first importance, but loving relationships with others is second. The Bible is all about these two important relationships. Yes, you can make a pile of money, but if family relationships are broken, your life will be empty. A poor man with a loving family and good friends is far richer than a rich man who is poor relationally.

So how do you get your head above the water of busyness? Parents may have to say “No” to heading the church’s fundraising committee or leading choir practice on a weekday. You can’t afford to be too busy with work or personal interests to the neglect of spending time with your children. Do you realize your daughter has become a teenager and wants to talk about girl-boy relationships? Is your son isolating himself most of the time with his PlayStation game? Your children need you; they don’t need all the material things you lavish on them!

“Train up a child in the way he should go; And when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

BARRIER #2: EXCESSIVE USE OF TECHNOLOGICAL GADGETS

Technology is everywhere, and it is not going away. Children, teenagers, and adults are keeping their eyes glued to a smartphone, tablet, or notebook. In fact, dependency on social media, gaming, or other platforms to function can **become** the new and unhealthy «norm.» The greatest concern parents have is that their children and teens are getting addicted to all these gadgets—they just can’t spend a day without them!

FCD Prevention Works, an international Non-Profit Substance Abuse Prevention Organization gives a good definition: “Technology addiction can be defined as frequent and obsessive technology-related behavior increasingly practiced despite negative consequences to the user of the technology.”⁴

The Barna Research Group completed a study about the influence of technology in families, releasing the findings in a new digital report, *Family & Kids*. The use of technology has shaped parent-child relationships in striking new ways. Commenting on the findings, David Kinnaman, president of Barna Group expressed that:

“Technology is shaping family interactions in unprecedented ways, but we seem to lack a strategic commitment to the stewardship of technology. The Christian community needs a better, more holistic understanding of how to manage existing and coming technological advances. Parents, tweens and teens need more coaching and input in order to face the countless choices they make regarding how technology affects their attention, interests, talents and resources.”⁵

According to many parents, the key challenges of technology in the family are:⁶

- Balancing our family’s physical activity with online activity
- Limiting my children’s time with the use of technology
- Filtering what kinds of content my child watches, reads or plays
- What my child is exposed to by their friends
- Finding time for our family to be together without technology

Such challenges require that parents take action to teach their children how to balance their time in the use of electronic devices by limiting screen time each day, removing all gadgets at bedtime, etc. Moreover, parents need to exercise wisdom and firmness in teaching children how to make wise choices concerning the type of video games and entertainment they get involved in, as well as who they chat with on social media. With such a deluge of negative pictures and messages on the internet these days, it is imperative that parents foster in their children good self-control to practice Psalm 101:3: “I will set nothing wicked before my eyes.”

BARRIER #3: DIMINISHING FAMILY TIME

In his new book, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place*, Andy Crouch explores the important role of the family in shaping young people’s values and character for the long-term. Drawing from the research the Barna Group conducted for his book, it shows clearly that the family plays a significant role and continues to be the institution that is central to shaping an individual’s identity, values, religious faith, ethnicity, and career.⁷

Another study reported in the *International Journal of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, September-December 2015, pages 128-135 that parents who are highly involved with their adolescents play a critical role in preventing and reducing youth-at-risk behaviors.

If the family plays such a pivotal role in a child's life, families more than ever need to be proactive in enriching family time and family togetherness. Carve out family time for worship and prayer. Spend time in fun and meaningful communication. Go on a hike, a bike ride, or ice-cream night! Participate in community service and outreach together. When families spend time together and get connected (gadgets off), it keeps the relationship alive between parents and their children and teens.

Giving your children the attention they need also means that you are willing to sacrifice pleasures and personal conveniences for the sake of your children's well-being. The Bible says: "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" (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

Ellen White also strongly urges parents to do the same in *Adventist Home*, p. 192: "Give some of your leisure hours to your children; associate with them in their work and in their sports and win their confidence. Cultivate their friendship."

On a similar note, Ellen White advises parents to have a good parent-child relationship as found in *Child Guidance*, p. 496:

"With *loving interest*, they should teach them day by day what it means to be children of God and to yield the will in obedience to Him. Teach them that obedience to God involves obedience to their parents. This must be a daily, hourly work. Parents, watch and pray, and make your children your *companions*."

Jochebed knew she only had a few years to raise Moses before he would return to Pharaoh's palace as the grandson of Pharaoh. She spent every moment they have together, teaching Moses to love and obey God. Her time spent together with young Moses resulted in raising a spiritual champion whom Hebrews 11:24-26 clearly identifies:

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasure of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward."

CONCLUSION

God is in the business of building families for his glory. Families are important to God. In the midst of our chaotic, busy lives in this world frequently interrupted with electronic devices and gadgets, we need to *stop* and take time to connect with our family and with the Lord. We need to follow the advice of Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God." With the power of the Holy Spirit, the Scriptures to remind us, and determination, we can break patterns and barriers that keep us apart from our families.

We must regularly put our lives on *pause* to rebuild family closeness and to spend time with our children (with gadgets off). However, the devil wants us to be so busy with our careers, ministries, social media, and extracurricular activities that we miss the precious moments of bonding with our children and family. Pray for power and determination to make a change! Jesus has promised: “My Grace is Sufficient for You, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

NOTES

- ¹ Eisenman, T. (1996). *Temptations Families Face: Breaking patterns that keep us apart*. InterVarsity Press.
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GRANDPARENTS' LEGACY

BY CLAUDIO & PAMELA CONSUEGRA

THE TEXT

“¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! ¹⁵ And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.’ ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. ¹⁷ Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, ‘There is a son born to Naomi.’ And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”
Ruth 4:13-17

[The following story is personal to one of the authors. You may choose to read it as his story, or tell a story about your own grandparent’s legacy to you].

In 1920, the Seventh-day Adventist church sent a missionary to Colombia, South America. He was put in charge of the evangelistic outreach, particularly through literature evangelists, or colporteurs, as we used to call them.

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The missionary was Pastor Max Trummer, of German descent. He traveled throughout that beautiful South American country teaching, training, and baptizing new converts. Many times, he was miraculously delivered from fanatical mobs that were bent on killing him.

You can read about him and his experiences in the book, "Heretic at Large."

After the Trummers had carried on the work in Medellin, the second-largest city in Colombia, and the outlying districts for several years, the mission board asked them to start similar work in the department or state of Santander.

Accordingly, they moved to the capital city of Bucaramanga, where they began holding Bible studies.

As soon as they had the Afanador family well established in the Bible truths and faithfully keeping the seventh-day Sabbath, the Trummer family walked an hour each Sabbath morning to attend Sabbath school in this family's home.

Don Fernando Afanador, and his wife, Catalina Perez, were the first converts into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in the city of Bucaramanga, in the predominantly Catholic country of Colombia, South America.

It was in their home where the first church met until the group outgrew their humble home and moved to the first church location in the 1930's.

In 1934, Sister Catalina Perez was taken to the only hospital in the city because of complications with her pregnancy.

At the time, the hospital chaplains were Catholic priests, and most nurses were nuns.

She was told she needed to have a cesarean section but first, she would have to have confession with a priest and receive communion from his hand before she could have surgery.

When she refused to do so, they hung a large crucifix from her back until she would do so, and for three days she was denied all medical care until she, and the baby she was carrying, passed away.

Catalina Perez was the first Seventh-day Adventist martyr in the city of Bucaramanga, Colombia.

I don't share this horrible story with anger or criticism of the Catholic church.

At the time, people of other faiths, in a predominantly Catholic country, were considered apostates and even heretics.

I share her story of uncompromising faith because, as a result of her commitment to the God she had given her life to, members of her family learned to believe, serve, and love Him.

And today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to grow with every baptism and reach many people who inherit Sister Catalina Perez's faith in God.

I recently learned this story about Sister Perez.

I have wondered what would have happened to the newly established Seventh-day Adventist Church in Bucaramanga if she had given in to their demands and had given up her faith.

She and the baby she was carrying might have survived, but what about her own faith?

And what about her husband, Brother Fernando Afanador, and their other children?

What about their faith?

Brother Fernando Afanador and Sister Catalina Perez had two sons and three daughters. Fernando Jr. died of tuberculosis as a teenager...but he died with his faith in God intact.

Their other son, Enrique Afanador, passed away just several years ago, in his seventies, of Parkinson's disease...but he died with his faith in God intact.

One of Brother Fernando Afanador and Catalina Perez's daughters was a beautiful young lady, Cecilia Afanador...she was my mother.

You see, Catalina Perez, the first Seventh-day Adventist martyr in Bucaramanga, Colombia, was my grandmother.

I never met her since I was born a couple of decades later.

But her decision marked my mother's life, and my life, forever.

My mother's generation, my generation, my children's generation, and the next generation are the beneficiaries of my grandmother's faith and her sacrifice.

Her example of faith, her endurance to the end, and her love of God give us an undying GRAND view of God.

I am humbled to live under my grandmother's shadow and look forward to meeting her in eternity.

[End of story]

The impact of grandpas and grandmas in history is impossible to calculate.

Their legacy for generations to come has no price.

The Bible tells us about grandparents who played a key role not just on their own grandchildren's lives, but over entire nations.

King Hezekiah was one of the best kings Israel ever had.

Of him, it is written:

³ And he did *what was* right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done. ⁴ He removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan. ⁵ He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. ⁶ For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses. ⁷ The LORD was with him; he prospered wherever he went. And he rebelled against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 2 Kings 18:3-7

King Hezekiah was one of the best kings Israel ever had.

Sadly, his father, King Ahaz, was one of the worst kings Israel ever had.

But his grandfather was Jotham.

The Bible tells us two very important things about Jotham:

³⁴ And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD; he did according to all that his father Uzziah had done. 2 Kings 15:34

⁶ So Jotham became mighty because he ordered his ways before the LORD his God. 2 Chronicles 27:6 (NASB)

King Hezekiah took after his grandfather Jotham rather than his father Ahaz.

And the result was victory for the kingdom of God.

Because of the powerful influence of grandparents, there is always hope!

Your legacy has no equal!

Even if one generation goes astray, the influence of godly grandparents can bring the next generation back to God.

Your legacy goes for generations to come, starting with your own grandchildren.

GRANDFATHERS

Let's think for a moment what a grandfather can do to bless his grandchildren.

Genesis 48:1-22

Jacob is about to die, so Joseph took his children, Jacob's grandchildren, to him.

You remember the story.

Manasseh was the oldest and Ephraim the youngest, and Jacob was supposed to place his right hand on Manasseh, and his left hand on Ephraim – at least that's how Joseph placed them in front of Jacob – but instead, Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh.

I. From this story, we can learn

four things grandfather Jacob said to his grandchildren:

1. *Jacob told them his testimony (vs.3)*

“God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me.”

In verse 16 he goes on to tell them about his own personal encounter with God (vs.16)

“The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil”

He told them about the God who had sustained him all those years (vs.15)

“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day.”

Have you told your grandchildren your testimony?

Have you told them about your encounter with God?

Have you told them how God has sustained you all these years?

2. *Jacob told them about God Himself.* (vv.15-16)

¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,
¹⁶ The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil... Genesis 48:15-16

He told them God’s name.

He told them how God had provided for his needs.

He told them about God’s promises and how they were fulfilled.

3. *Jacob told them the four-fold promise of God* (v.4).

⁴ Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession. Genesis 48:4

a. *God promised them Prosperity.*

“Behold, I will make you fruitful.”

b. *God promised them Growth.*

“I will multiply you.”

c. *God promised them they would be a great Nation.*

“I will make of you a multitude of people.”

d. *God promised them they would have their own country, their own land.*

“I will give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.”

4. *Jacob told them about their grandmother* (v.7).

⁷ But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Genesis 48:7

Jacob wanted his grandchildren to know about their grandmother.

Even though she had passed away, he did not want them to forget about her.

He wanted them to know her and love her through him.

II. From this story, we can also learn

four things grandfather Jacob did for his grandchildren:

1. *Jacob adopted them* (vs.5)

“Now these two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh . . . are mine.”

You see, Joseph's sons were half Hebrew and half Egyptian, but by this act, Jacob made them completely members of Israel, and heirs to the promises.

2. *Jacob kissed and hugged them* (v.10).

Jacob showed his affection, his love for them.

3. *Jacob laid his hands on them* (vs.14).

Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid *it* on Ephraim's head, who *was* the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands **knowingly**, for Manasseh *was* the firstborn. Genesis 48:14

The word "knowingly" means Jacob knew what he was doing; he did it on purpose. And by laying hands on them, he was passing God's blessings through him on to them. He was God's instrument, God's conduit.

4. *Jacob blessed his grandchildren.* (Heb. 11:21)

"By faith Jacob when he was dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph."

III. From this story, we can also learn

four things grandfather Jacob gave vhis grandchildren:

1. *When Jacob adopted them, he gave them his name* (vs.16).

"Let my name be upon them, and the name of my father, Abraham, and Isaac."

2. *Jacob gave them God's promise for their future* (vs.16)

"Let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (v.16).

So, he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" (v. 20).

3. *Jacob gave them his love.*

4. *Jacob gave them an example of worship.* (Heb. 11:21)

"Jacob . . . worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff."

IV. From this story, we can also learn

four lessons for grandparents:

1. Grandparents should be concerned about the spiritual condition of their grandchildren.
2. Grandparents shall be a spiritual example.
3. Grandparents should give their testimony.
4. Grandparents should bless (naturally and spiritually).

GRANDMOTHERS

The Bible speaks of the role Jacob played and that Jotham played.

But the bible also speaks of the role godly grandmothers play in the life of their grandchildren.

An 8-year-old wrote,

“A grandmother is a lady who has no children of her own, so she likes other people’s boys and girls. Grandmas don’t have anything to do except be there. If they take us for walks, they slow down past pretty leaves and caterpillars. They never say ‘Hurry up.’ Usually, they are fat but not too fat to tie shoes. They wear glasses, and sometimes they can take their teeth out. They can answer questions like why dogs hate cats and why God isn’t married. They don’t talk like visitors do, which is hard to understand. When they read to us, they don’t skip words or mind if it is the same story again. Everybody should try to have a grandma, especially if you don’t have television, because grandmas are the only grownups who always have time.” Unknown

The Book of Ruth comes to a happy ending with Grandma Naomi holding grandson Obed in her lap, and everybody singing her praises.

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed *be* the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! ¹⁵ And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. ¹⁷ Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, “There is a son born to Naomi.” And they called his name Obed. He *is* the father of Jesse, the father of David. Ruth 4:13-17

From the life and experience of Ruth, we can learn several lessons too.

1. First of all, we can learn that grandchildren bring renewal. (Ruth 4:15)

Please remember that Naomi had lost her husband and her two sons – very painful experiences!

When she returned to Israel, she was in so much pain that she asked her friends to stop calling her Naomi, which means “pleasant,” but rather to call her Mara, which means “bitter.”

But when she held that healthy, kicking, screaming little boy – baby Obed – her bitterness was changed back to pleasure.

The women said about little Obed:

¹⁵ And may he be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him. Ruth 4:15

This little guy was the energy booster to old Naomi.

There is something about a grandchild that can change the whole outlook on life and bring hope and joy.

Listen to Proverbs 17:6:

⁶ Children's children *are* the crown of old men... Proverbs 17:6

The Contemporary English Version captures this sentiment better when it states:

⁶ Grandparents are proud of their grandchildren...Proverbs 17:6 (CEV)

Isn't that the truth?

Your children may have kept you poor...but their children will make you rich.

They renew your spirit!

They give you a whole new role in loving and serving.

Until this scene where Naomi becomes a grandmother...her life has been one trial after another.

Life had become a real burden!

She had seen her family suffer in a drought.

She had to leave her home and move to a strange land.

She had suffered the loss of her husband and both sons.

She had to endure the life of poverty and despair.

She had to bear the responsibility of caring for Ruth...trying to get her established in a home of her own.

Naomi had had very little joy in this story!

But it all changed when she became a grandmother.

All tears are wiped away!

There is a spirit of praise and joy!

Now her whole future looks bright!

Why?

Because she has a grandson.

Becoming a grandmother has changed her mind.

She is in a state of renewal.

Dr. Lewis A. Coffin in his book *The Grandmother Conspiracy* wrote,

“As soon as a person becomes a grandparent he or she undergoes a radical personality change -- stern fathers become cooing grandfathers: crabby mothers melt and crawl on the floor, sing lullabies, and cram cookies and cookies and cookies down their sweet little grandchildren’s throats, take them to the ice-cream store, bake cakes and pies for them, and stand back admiringly as the little ones swell, tweet their obese little checks approvingly, and raise a terrible hue and cry if anyone tries to interfere.”

In fact, grandparents often become a problem to their children because they allow the grandchildren to do what they forbid their own children to do.

Grandparents have changed from when they were parents.

They now value a relationship with a child higher than things!

The reason grandparents tend to spoil grandchildren is because of this renewal in the minds of the grandparents.

They are so grateful for the new joy and pleasure of life that they say thanks by being overindulgent.

The Grandparent-grandchild relationship is dominated by having fun together.

The fun is mutual.

Most grandparents get more laughs from their grandchildren than they do from comedians.

One of the reasons grandparents are often more fun than parents is because they have more time.

Parents are so loaded down with responsibility that they don’t have the time for fun with their children.

Time is one of the treasures of life.

Grandparents have learned to use it more wisely.

Time together with grandchildren is one of the most fun experiences of life.

But notice how suddenly the story of Ruth and Boaz comes to an end.

Their romance has dominated the stage for most of the book.

But when Ruth gave birth to that baby boy, she and Boaz left the stage.

Now the spotlight focuses on Grandma Naomi.

There is not one more scene about the parents!

The star now is Grandma Naomi.

All the praise and rejoicing now revolve around her.

Naomi has a comfort for her old age.

Naomi has a grandson, and they say she has a son.

This is a powerful revelation of just how vital a role grandparents play in the life of a child.

2. Secondly, we can learn that grandparents are the roots.

I’d like you to notice how the book of Ruth ends – (4:18-22)

¹⁸ Now this *is* the genealogy of Perez: Perez begot Hezron; ¹⁹ Hezron begot Ram, and Ram begot Amminadab; ²⁰ Amminadab begot Nahshon, and Nahshon begot Salmon; ²¹ Salmon begot Boaz, and Boaz begot Obed; ²² Obed begot Jesse, and Jesse begot David. Ruth 4:18-22

Do you know where else in the Bible you find these people mentioned?

Matthew, Chapter 1.

In the genealogy of Jesus.

Every person in the bloodline from Abraham to Jesus was a grandparent.

The genealogy that comes at the end of the book of Ruth is a list of people, all of whom became grandparents.

Obed, Ruth's baby boy, became the grandfather of King David.

And you may say, who cares?

Who cares about the grandparents of George Washington, or Abraham Lincoln, or Martin Luther King, Jr., or any other famous man or woman?

Apparently, God cares!

Because the book of Ruth tells us that all these people were grandparents and great grandparents of David, the greatest king of God's people.

God cares about genealogies and roots.

And so, God cares about grandparents.

God has designed human life in such a way that grandparents play a major role on what happens in history.

It's because of their special love and influence on grandchildren.

Even parents who fail their children can become such successful grandparents that the family tree is healed and restored, as one that bears fruit for God's kingdom.

The book of Ruth traces the roots of David, the king of Israel.

And we know that he had a special relationship with God!

Where did David's faith in God come from?

David's Grandpa was Obed.

And his Great Grandma was Naomi!

We don't know if Naomi was still alive when David was a little boy.

But can't you imagine that little David was told about Ruth's story and the faith of his Great Grandma Naomi?

Don't you think he was told about how God took care of her through all the trials and troubles she faced?

I think David's faith came from his roots!

One of the things we know about young pastor Timothy is that his Christian faith had its roots in his grandmother.

² I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

What grandparents are can make a big difference in many lives.

You...Grandpa and Grandma...can make a difference!

SO...Grandparents take time to teach your Grandkids about Jesus!

Give them roots of faith!

Teach them about God and spiritual things.

Guide them toward good marriages by modeling a good one.

Be consistent and follow through on things.

Play with them.

Tell them that you love them often.

Don't pressure them too much to excel.

Believe them and believe in them.

Share your life, the good and the bad, that they might learn from you.

Let them see how Christ has worked in your life and how He continues to work, even though you may have failed miserably as a younger person.

Point them towards heaven as your time on earth is most likely shorter than theirs, let them know how the family can all live together forever.

If I may paraphrase today Paul's words to Timothy, I'd say to your grandchildren:

² I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandfather and grandmother and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. 2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

Do you want that said about your grandchildren?

If you are a Grandparent...please stand!

[Close with a special prayer for the grandparents in the congregation and for their legacy]

REFERENCES

Coffin, L. A. (1976). *The grandmother conspiracy exposed*. New York: Bantam.

CHILDREN'S STORIES

— Use *Children's Stories* as part of Adventist Family Ministries special emphasis weeks. Please adjust the use of props and materials with what you have at hand. The key is to engage with the children in your church family.

FAYEZA'S STORY

BY MICHAEL ROHM

THE TEXT

“Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! I have fled to you for refuge.” Psalms 143:9 ESV

PROPS

Picture of a refugee camp, and Fayeza to show children as you describe the camp and tell the story.

It was HOT. Everyone was sweating. In the dim lighting of the single room, faces could barely be seen. The air was heavy under the black tarp roof stretched across bamboo poles, and only the small electrical fan planted in the dirt floor, its wires split and frayed, moved the hot, still air. That room and the one adjoining it, a bare kitchen separated by a piece of plastic, was all that belonged to Fayeza and her family in the refugee camp where they lived.

This wasn't always where Fayeza lived. Just three months before, Fayeza's family of four owned a spacious wood house with separate rooms for the children and two bathrooms for the six-member household. But now they lived in a refugee camp. The whole family sleeping on the floor in the same room, sharing two latrines, or toilets, with 70 other families.

Fayeza remembers comfortable nights in her own bed. She remembers her families' farm – the cows, goats, and chickens grazing among the ripe fields, ready for harvest. She was feeling very sad that her family had to leave their home. Because of the current unrest, it was no longer safe to



stay on their family farm. They had to flee before the enemy army came through their village, and they had to keep moving as the military moved from village to village.

Fayeza and her family made it to the banks of a river that was on the border with the neighboring country. With the army close behind, they joined other families, already at the river, each desperate to cross the river to safety. Fayeza's father told the family they would be safe if they could just get across the river, but the river was much too big to swim across.

Miraculously, Fayeza's father secured a boat passage for the family. Despite the fast-approaching army, the terrified family crossed the river to safety. They met some people on the other side of the river who told them how to get to the refugee camp where they could stay. Many families had fled their country and ended up here. It was not that nice, but at least they had shelter, access to food, and most importantly, safety and freedom from persecution.

ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency) and other aid agencies are helping families like Fayeza's. ADRA helps to provide food and shelter to many families. They are so grateful to ADRA for helping them. Although they are thankful for a place to stay and food to eat, Fayeza wants to go to school, and Fayeza's father wants a job. This is the biggest challenge in the refugee camp. Children miss their old schools and friends. ADRA understands this and is why they started a campaign called, *"Every Child, Everywhere, In School"*. Every child should have the opportunity to an education. Some of our offerings go to help families like Fayeza's family. We hope that one day soon, Fayeza will be able to attend school, and her father will have a job to support his family.

Let's pray for refugee families like Fayeza's family and thank God for keeping them safe. That they can learn about the God who delivered them because He loves them. Just like it says in Psalms 143:9, "Deliver me from my enemies, Oh Lord! I have fled to You for refuge."

Close with prayer.

WHO CREATED THE DINOSAURS?

BY BENJAMIN STREIT AND STEPHANIE MOLINA

THE TEXT

“¹⁵ Look at Behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. ¹⁶ What strength it has in its loins, what power in the muscles of its belly! ¹⁷ Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit. ¹⁸ Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron. ¹⁹ It ranks first among the works of God, yet its Maker can approach it with his sword.” Job 40:15-19 NIV

PROPS

Pictures of Dinosaurs

“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.” Everything you see around you, from the twinkling stars in the night sky to the fireflies winking merrily in your backyard. From the mountains looming still and solemn in the distance, to the tiny yellow wildflowers nodding bravely in the field. All of it was created by God, the same God that created you and me and everything else. He created the grass and the trees, the rivers and lakes, the clouds and moon and sun, and the very rocks under your feet. He spoke, and they appeared. But the things we can see around us today were not the only things he made. Because you see, someone a very long time ago decided not to

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obey God's commandments, and because of that choice, God's beautiful creation began to fall apart. What we can see today, no matter how beautiful, is just a tiny shadow of what once was.

Dear friend, if only you could have seen it! Forests the like of which our world has never seen. Deserts green and vibrant with life. Stars, so numerous the sky itself seemed to be glowing. And the animals! The animals that lived back then were completely unlike anything we have alive today. A lot of them were much bigger; there were more of them, and more different kinds, too. If you saw them today, you might be afraid of them, because they were so big and so strange. But God didn't make them to scare people – He made them because they were beautiful. God wanted us to see just how amazing He is through the amazing things He created. It was only man's sin corrupting God's handiwork that made some of them fierce and dangerous and scary. So, God let them fade away – because they were *too* big, *too* marvelous for humanity's wretched, sinful mind to appreciate.

I ask you – if they're all gone, how do we know they existed? How do we know what they were like? We know because they left pieces of themselves behind – memories hidden in the rocks themselves that tell a story of a time when incredible creatures roamed the earth. If you were to explore the wild places of the world, where the rocks tell the stories of the past more surely than any historian with a pen, you might find bits of their bones sticking out of the ground. Or, you might find their crumbling footprints set in a rock that was once mud. People have found the bones of these ancient creatures for centuries. In China, they were called “dragon bones,” and people thought they could cure diseases if ground up and eaten. In Europe, people thought they were the bones of giants, like Goliath. But they were actually the remains of animals unlike anything alive today – what we call “Dinosaurs.”

There were hundreds of different kinds of dinosaurs that lived all over the world. Some were large, some were small. Some walked on two legs, some on four. Some ate meat, some ate plants, and some ate both or something else entirely. The biggest ones were enormous – they could look into the upper window of a six-story building. *Argentinosaurus* (Ar-jen-teen-oh-sore-us) was one such dinosaur. It was more than a hundred feet long from the tip of its nose to the tip of its tail and weighed as much as ten elephants! It ate leaves from the tops of trees with its very long neck and lived in what is today called South America. It must have been incredible to see something that huge when it was alive! It must have looked like a mountain just got up and went for a stroll. It was so big that all the other dinosaurs it lived with look small, even though many of them were still bigger than a pickup truck.

Other dinosaurs were less enormous but just as strange. The *Spinosaurus* (Spy-no-sore-us) was as long as a semi-truck, lived in rivers and hunted for fish, otters, or crocodiles. It had an enormous sail on its back and long, toothy jaws to snag slippery prey. The *Parasaurolophus* (Pah-ruh-sore-oh-low-fuss) had a hollow crest on its head through which it could blow air like a trumpet. It ate plants and could chew its food very well; It could even eat tough things like wood and bark. The *Ambopteryx* (Am-bop-tare-icks) was a tiny dinosaur the size of a pigeon that lived in trees and ate bugs and berries. It had wings made of skin, like a bat or a real-life dragon, to glide from tree to tree like a flying squirrel. And there were many others, some even weirder than these. And the other

animals they lived with were no less bizarre – lizards the size of school buses that cruised the oceans hunting sharks, giant short-necked giraffes with horns like moose antlers, lizard-like creatures that flew with their feet, and dragonflies as big as seagulls.

Sadly, none of these creatures are alive today. But if you'll listen, if you'll wander in the wild places of the world and watch for the signs, you might find memories of these incredible creatures that still whisper of the majesties of God and of the magnificent world He created. Although sin separated us from the best parts of God's creation, He wouldn't allow them to disappear completely. When you read the Bible, you'll find God Himself tells us about them in the book of Job 40:15-19 NIV:

“Look now at Behemoth, which I made along with you, and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength it has in its loins, what power in the muscles of its belly! Its tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of its thighs are close-knit. Its bones are tubes of bronze, its limbs like rods of iron. **It ranks first among the works of God.**”

That sounds a whole lot like an *Argentinosaurus* to me!

FORGIVENESS STORY

BY DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

THE TEXT

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9

PROPS

Laundry basket with a few clothes, including a child-size sweater at the bottom.

Raise your hand if you have helped your family do laundry? I can see we have lots of helpers here today. Maybe you help put your dirty clothes in the hamper (*hold up laundry basket*). Perhaps you help sort the clothes to be washed, help wash the clothes, put them in the dryer, or hang out on a clothesline to dry. Maybe you help fold the clothes and put them away.

There are many steps involved in having nice, clean clothes to wear. Look at what you are wearing right now. You are looking pretty good to me! I want you to tell your parents with a big smile on your face, “*thank you for the nice clean clothes.*” OK?

Today, I want to tell you a story about a lesson learned while doing the laundry.

Mrs. Venn had been washing clothes for many years, and she was pretty good at that job. You might already know this, but some clothes are exceptional, and you must wash them by hand, and layout to dry. Other special outfits, like fancy dresses and suits, must be sent to the dry cleaners.

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How do you know what clothes need special treatment? (let them answer.....) Well, there is usually a tag on the clothes that gives you instructions on how to care for it (*show a label on a shirt in your laundry basket*).

One day, Mrs. Venn was rushing to get a load of laundry done before she had to leave for an appointment. The clothes finished washing in the washing machine, so she quickly tossed the wet clothes into the dryer, and while they were drying, she finished getting ready.

Before she left for her appointment, she went to the dryer to pull out the clothes and quickly fold them. She began pulling them out of the dryer, one by one (*pull out pieces of clothing from the basket, one by one*). Suddenly she noticed something...and gasped...her husband's wool sweater was in the dryer! She was in such a hurry that she mistakenly put her husband's wool sweater in the dryer instead of laying it out to dry! A wool sweater must be washed by hand, and it should NEVER be put in a dryer! What do you think happened to her husband's sweater? (*Let children answer then pull the small sweater out of the laundry basket*) Does this sweater look like it would fit a grown man? NO! "OH, DEAR," Mrs. Venn thought, "What will my husband think when he sees that his favorite sweater is ruined?" How do you think Mrs. Venn was feeling? (*Let children answer*) Yes, she was sad that she had ruined the sweater and mad at herself for making such a careless mistake. After all, she knew better! She had been doing laundry for many years.

Mrs. Venn knew she needed to go to her husband and let him know what happened and how sorry she was about shrinking his favorite sweater. How do you think Mr. Venn felt? (*Let children answer*) I certainly know how I would feel if someone had ruined my favorite sweater...I would be VERY UPSET, and it would be hard for me to forgive them. But you know what? When she showed him the sweater, told him how sorry she was, and asked for forgiveness, do you know what happened? Mr. Venn looked at his sweater, then he looked at his wife, and he smiled. He told Mrs. Venn that he forgave her. He also said to her that he loved her more than the sweater. WOW! Do you think that Jesus was in Mr. Venn's heart? Yes! I think so too!!!

That experience helped Mrs. Venn to understand better what it truly means to forgive and what it feels like to be forgiven. It also helped her to understand the Bible text in 1 John 1:9 "*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

Because I love Jesus, I confess my sins to Him---and because HE loves me, HE forgives me!
Love is a powerful thing!

Let's pray

SEMINARS

— The *Seminars* are designed to be used during Adventist Family Ministries emphasis weeks. Please read them thoroughly to get familiar with the content and vocabulary. To download a PowerPoint® presentation file visit:
family.adventist.org/2021RB

WHAT EVERY PERSON NEEDS TO KNOW BEFORE GETTING MARRIED

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXTS

“And the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.’” Genesis 2:18

“²⁷ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them.” Genesis 1:27, 28a

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:24

“So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.” Matthew 19:6

“⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails.”
1 Corinthians 13:4-8b,

“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what [a]fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”
2 Corinthians 6:14

“²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” Galatians 5:22, 23

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To explore what Christian marriage is and how it differs from societal norms and myths. To give an overview of factors that contribute to marital success or distress. The target audience is single adults, dating couples, engaged couples.

MATERIAL NEEDED

Computer, Projector, PowerPoint (PC) or Keynote (Mac).

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of shows such as *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *Married at First Sight*, and *Love is Blind*, and many others around the world may give the impression that marriage is still one of the highest held values in our society. However, upon closer scrutiny of these shows, one can quickly assess that the focus is more on the engagement and future wedding as if marriage is synonymous with having a wedding. These “Hollywood” productions, along with old fairytales and contemporary romantic movies and novels, place great emphasis on the individual’s wish fulfillment. The first wish being to have a wedding of one’s dreams. Will he or she meet all my needs? Do they have the right hair or eye color, physique, or finances that will fulfill all that I have been dreaming of? Will I find my true soulmate to complete me? Then sadly, the storyline ends where the reality of a relationship begins—where two people have to spend the rest of their lives figuring out how to merge both of their wishes into one new bucket called marriage.

Preparing for a wedding may seem daunting but it is not nearly as challenging as trying to be in a marriage that is happy and lasts a lifetime. After a beautiful wedding and exotic honeymoon, the mundane matters of life are waiting to confront the newlyweds. It is in the resolution of these ordinary matters of life—which direction to turn the toilet paper, where to squeeze the toothpaste tube, or at which spouse’s family to spend the holidays—that a couple builds love and trust in marriage. Unfortunately, many couples panic at the first signs of these differences and disagreements and find themselves unprepared for the serious realities of married life every day.

The good news is that most marriages can thrive and be happy. Many marriage researchers over the past three decades have identified specific ingredients that make for a happy and successful marriage. The best news, however, is that these research findings highlight sound principles already

revealed to us in scripture about marriage and relationships. To be sure, God has provided sound guidelines on how to have a successful and satisfying marriage.

This seminar will explore aspects of Christian marriage and how it differs significantly from societal norms and myths about marriage. The seminar will also share some ingredients for a healthy, long-lasting and happy marriage based on scripture and bolstered by research findings and practical strategies.

GOD CREATED MARRIAGE

As God was creating the heavens and the earth, separating light from darkness, calling the waters into one place and the dry land to appear, trees, fish, birds, and all kinds of animals, He declared everything to be good except He said, “It is not good for the man to be alone, I will make a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). Thus, the creation story provides the foundational teachings on marriage that is found throughout scripture. Furthermore, the way in which God created Adam and Eve reveals that in marriage male and female are to reflect the full image of God. As we note in the Bible, God created marriage before all other social conventions and presents marriage as the foundational structure of community for human beings (Hasel, 2015). God created us to be in relationship with Him first, then in marriage and the family, and then with others.

God initiated and performed the first marriage ceremony in Eden (Matthew 19:6). Imagine, a marriage covenant between two equal partners being executed in the presence of God, under his supervision, with His blessing (Genesis 1:28a). Marriage is designed by God not by humans—it is God’s gift to humankind. As the covenant is made, priorities shift from one’s parents to one’s spouse (Genesis 2:24) and a new permanent bond is formed between husband and wife. Consequently, the marriage ceremony is not solely a private commitment to another person nor just a festive party. Rather, it is a public statement before witnesses (God and community) that testifies to the significance, permanence and sacred nature of marriage.

GROUP DISCUSSION

In small groups of 4-6 or all participants:

1. Read and reflect on the scripture texts below and the passage above.

- a. Genesis 2:18, NKJV: “And the Lord God said, it is not good that man should be alone; I will make a helper comparable to him.”
- b. Genesis 1:27-28a, NKJV: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them.”
- c. Genesis 2:24, NKJV: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh.”

- d. Matthew 19:6, NKJV: “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

5. How do these passages of scripture shape or redefine your understanding of God’s intent for marriage?

- a. How does God’s intent differ from society’s notions or values about marriage?
b. God designed marriage to reflect His image. How does this idea conflict with the prevailing idea that marriage is a matter of self-fulfillment or to “complete me?”
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THE ILLUSION OF LOVE

While God designed marriage to be a permanent covenant relationship, nearly 40-50% of all first-time marriages will end in divorce. For many couples, the “for better, for worse” statement is now “for better” only. Notwithstanding, in marriages where abuse and violence are present, many couples report having serious marital problems before the end of their first year of marriage. The truth is, too many couples are spending more time preparing for the wedding day than preparing for marriage.

Of course, wedding planning is usually an exciting and delightful time. Despite some of the challenges and stresses that come with weddings, it is still far easier to prepare for a one-day wedding event than it is to prepare for a marriage that is intended to last a lifetime. Yet, not even the most expensive, well-orchestrated wedding will guarantee a lasting and happy marriage. Too often, people think about marriage through very rose-colored lenses—the “wedding of my dreams.” Their sense of reality is distorted by idealism, romanticism and fantasy. It’s an illusion of love; a calculated snapshot of bliss parading as love that is presented in fairytales, novels, and social media. But this is not real love!

Love is not a feeling and it is definitely not just a fleeting story on Facebook or Instagram. True love is a decision that you make every day to persevere despite the challenges and stressors daily life brings. When marriage is built on unrealistic dreams instead of reality it does not take into account that disappointments, personal changes, and other pressures are inevitable in every relationship. Participating in a comprehensive premarital education program which includes relationship assessments will help those who are considering marriage become better aware of and prepared for future challenges in marriage.

GROUP DISCUSSION

In small groups of 4-6 or all participants:

1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8b: “⁴Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

⁶it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. ⁷Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸Love never ends.”

2. Compare and contrast the biblical understanding of love with contemporary views of “love.”
 3. Consider how the terms “falling in love” and “not in love” relate to the Biblical definition of love? Based on this passage, is it possible to fall out of love? If so, was that really love, or just a natural chemical reaction where dopamine and serotonin were being dumped into the limbic system of the brain, giving one a euphoric experience described as “love”? How does this passage of scripture help us better understand true love and commitment in marriage?
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Marriage is designed by God not human beings. Marriage is to teach us how to love as God loves. Husbands and wives come together as one to reflect God’s image. Christian marriage is a sacred institution and goes beyond the individual needs of each partner or a commitment to the social institution of marriage. True love is a commitment where both partners consider what’s best for the other and the good of the relationship as well as for themselves. Christian marriage is not to make you happy—necessarily—rather, it is designed to make you more like God, where happiness comes from. Anything less than this understanding is just an illusion. Everyone who is considering marriage at any point in life needs to consider the holy calling of marriage and ask themselves if they are prepared to be Godlike.

PREDICTING MARRIAGE FAILURE OR SUCCESS

Is it possible to predict whether or not a marriage will be “happily-ever-after” or headed for disaster? Even if you could predict the outcome, would the couple headed for distress or divorce have changed their course of action? While no one can truly predict if a couple will end up happy, unhappy or divorced, there are some premarital factors that contribute to future marital stability and satisfaction (Holman, 2001).

The field of family science has long studied predictors of marital quality or marital stability from premarital factors (Holman, 2001; Olson, Larson, & Olson-Sigg, 2009; S. M. Stanley, Trathen, McCain, & Bryan, 2013). There are four broad premarital factors that contribute to marriage quality and satisfaction and marital distress: family background, individual characteristics, social contexts, and couple interactional processes. In other words, these four areas can help individuals better understand what makes some marriages happy and others distressed.

FAMILY HISTORY

We first develop our relational skills in our families of origin, and we are all products of our upbringing. Our birth order, interactions with parents, siblings, and other family members, genetics, and

neurological structure all contribute to how we relate to others. The atmosphere of the home, the quality of interactions, whether positive or negative and the level of closeness versus flexibility all contribute to who we become as adults. Understanding this factor is critical to understanding yourself and how you respond in all relationships and is especially critical for marriage. Before entering into any intimate relationship it would be wise for individuals to do some self-assessment and begin a process of breaking free from past hurts, allowing the grace of God to set you free (Wright, 1992). It may be beneficial to be guided through this process with a qualified Christian counselor.

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS

So often we hear premarital couples gleefully say how different they are from each other—but the truth is that while before marriage opposites attract, it is also accurate that after marriage, opposites tend to repel. The more things you have in common with your spouse the easier it will be to get along and resolve conflict. Individual characteristics refer to personality features, temperament, attitudes, beliefs and values.

Some personality types and temperaments lean towards happiness while others may tend to be more pessimistic. In therapeutic terms, people tend to be neurotic, depressed, sociable or shy. These traits will impact how you relate to others in relationship and the mentally and emotionally healthier individuals are more likely to enjoy greater satisfaction in marriage. In fact, some research studies show that personality, attitudes, beliefs and values have a greater impact on marital success than family background.

Hence, mate selection is one of the most critical aspects of getting married. As we said earlier, romance and physical attraction is not enough to make a marriage successful. Choosing a mate should be a very thoughtful and purposeful process. Ultimately, people usually choose people who they perceive as being able to meet their needs at a particular point in time. In many ways they look for someone to *complete me* with little regard to the fact that the other person is also looking to have their needs met. Also, couples often choose mates that they believe will help them grow into their best selves. In many ways, marriage is supposed to be a place of growth and can provide healing. However, if childhood traumas or other poor ways of communicating learned in one's family of origin or previous relationships have not been resolved, they can lead to a "complete" mess.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Spend 5-7 minutes thinking about the characteristics you would want in a mate. Now think about this mate wanting the same things in you. Do you have the same or similar traits that you are seeking in a mate? Are you ready to meet these same needs in the other person? In what ways do you see yourself dependent on the other person? Are you expecting your future spouse to build or enhance your self-esteem? Are you prepared to build or enhance theirs?

SOCIAL CONTEXTS

There are several socio-cultural factors that impact marital success or distress. These include previous marriage, parents' divorce, cohabitation, and religious dissimilarity (Holman, 2001; Larson, Blick, Jackson, & Holman, 2010; S. M. Stanley et al., 2013). Those who marry, divorce and remarry have higher levels of marital distress. Mostly due to the fact that most people do not process what happened in their previous marriage before moving on and thus take the same issues into their new marriage. When conflict arises, they project the issues with their previous partner onto the new partner.

Parents' divorce has also been shown to result in lower levels of relationship commitment and confidence, especially for women. For this and other reasons, many couples are opting to cohabit instead of getting married. However, research studies show that couples who cohabit before marriage (especially before deciding to get married shortly afterwards) begin to see marriage as something less than special (S. Stanley & Rhoades, 2018). These attitudes and beliefs could lead to future distress and conflict in marriage.

Religious dissimilarity refers to couples where each spouse has a different religious belief. While the Bible has long counseled that those who marry should not be unequally yoked with nonbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14), marriage researchers also align with this counsel. Since religion is a very closely held belief, marital quality is impacted when there are differing beliefs and values. Most of us know someone whose spouse is of a different faith and has had a great marriage. However, a larger percentage of couples who are from different faiths have lower levels of marital satisfaction and stability (W. H. Oliver, 2008). Those couples who have similar attitudes, values, and beliefs about religion have greater marital quality than those who do not share the same beliefs.

COUPLE INTERACTIONAL PROCESSES

Couple interactional processes refers to how a couple communicates, relates to another and resolves conflict. This is the most critical factor of all the four premarital factors that predict marital success or distress. Couples who learn to share ideas in a criticism free, non-judgmental, and kind way enjoy higher levels of marital satisfaction and stability. These couples learn to disagree without destroying their relationship. They learn to listen for understanding and to speak each other's language thus creating a more intimate bond. They learn to repair and forgive hurts quickly and give each other the benefit of the doubt. These successful couples have a positive attitude about their spouse and their marriage.

This factor is so important that if couples can learn to communicate well and resolve conflict constructively, then even when the three previous factors are present, they can transcend these issues and have a successful marriage. The first three factors, family history, personality characteristics, and social contexts cannot be changed or are not easily changed. Still, couple interactional processes can be changed. You can change the way you communicate and resolve conflict by learning new ways or unlearning recurring bad habits. It is very possible and highly probable for someone to become

a better listener, to learn new conflict resolution skills, and to practice being nicer. Galatians 5:22, 23 says it beautifully, “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Here again, we see that scripture is fortified with research and couples who exhibit these characteristics in their relationship will enjoy higher levels of marital quality and success.

MARRIAGE: GOD’S IDEA

In today’s society, weddings are becoming synonymous with marriage. Many are interested in having a grand party, but few understand the meaning and significance of marriage. In reality, fewer couples are getting married and more couples are choosing to cohabit. It is interesting to note that even in social scientific research, those who cohabit, especially with more than one partner, put themselves at risk for future marital instability and divorce (S. Stanley & Rhoades, 2018).

These alternatives to marriage should not be alarming as society becomes more secular. However, those who are interested in a Christian view of marriage need to consider that God is the Creator of marriage. As such, if we are to be successful in marriage, we need to first consider the divine nature of marriage. We sum it up this way, “The Bible opens and closes with marriage. Genesis presents marriage as the first institution established by God at creation while the last chapters of Revelation use marriage as a metaphor to portray the relationship between Christ and His people” (W. Oliver & Oliver, 2015).

Marriage is a wonderful gift from God and an exciting adventure. However, individuals and couples need to be prepared adequately and understand what it takes to be successful. Equally as important is understanding the factors that lead to future distress and be intentional about eliminating or minimizing those factors. Of greatest importance, though, is grasping that all who enter into marriage are called to glorify God and reflect His image.

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Read this passage from the Adventist Home. Based on what has been presented in this seminar, how is this passage still relevant in contemporary society?

“Examine carefully to see if your married life would be happy or inharmonious and wretched. Let the questions be raised, Will this union help me heavenward? Will it increase my love for God? And will it enlarge my sphere of usefulness in this life? If these reflections present no drawback, then in the fear of God move forward.” Adventist Home 45.2

NOTE

For additional reading—The Adventist Home, chapter 6.

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THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST: SUPPORTING FAMILIES IN CRISIS

BY L. ANN HAMEL

THE TEXT

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” 1 Corinthians 12:27

QUESTION

What are the privileges and responsibilities that one has as a member of the church and the Body of Christ?

Most Mondays I have lunch with a dear friend and colleague— that is, most Mondays that we’re both in town. Beverly is a psychiatric nurse practitioner and I am a psychologist and we work together in a primary care medical office as therapists. We both consider the work we do to be ministry. While we use the skills of our professions in our effort to help people, our goal is to bring hurting individuals into the presence of Jesus, the ultimate source of all healing.

L. Ann Hamel, PhD, DMin is a Psychologist for the International Service Employee Support Team of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and resides in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

Neither Beverly nor I work full-time at the medical center. Beverly and her husband David do seminars all over the country where they bring groups of people into the healing presence of Jesus. I work eighty percent time for the General Conference providing mental health care and crisis intervention for the missionaries.

I first began working at the medical center after completing a masters in Community Mental Health Counseling in 1994. Four years prior to that I had returned to the United States from mission service in Africa. My husband and I had received a call to serve as missionaries during my senior year in college. The weekend I graduated we were packing for Africa. We left the states on our second wedding anniversary and spent the next three years in Bujumbura, the capital of the small central African country of Burundi. Our first son was born during our time there. We were then asked to move to the neighboring country of Rwanda to help with the building and development of the Adventist University of Central Africa. Over the next eight years we were able to not only open the doors of the university to its first students, but to see them graduate and take roles within the church across Africa. During this same period of time, we were blessed to have two more sons.

My interest in the field of psychology is the result of my own personal experience as a missionary. In 1990, my husband, our three sons and I were returning to our home in Rwanda when we had a head-on-collision with a truck. Four days later I awakened in a hospital bed in Belgium not knowing where I was or how I'd gotten there. I learned that my husband been killed instantly and had already been buried in Rwanda. I also learned that my six- and eight-year-old sons were the only two family members at their father's funeral. My three-year-old son, Andrew, was four floors above me in the pediatrics unit. His skull was fractured, his leg was crushed, and two toes were missing. He was still unconscious. After spending two weeks in the hospital in Belgium, Andrew and I were transferred to a hospital in the United States where we remained in the hospital two more weeks.

Returning to the United States was not easy. I had a college degree, but I had never held a full-time job. I had no idea where I would live or how I would manage life in the United States as a widow and single mother of three growing and active boys. The challenges ahead of me seemed overwhelming.

Psychologists who specialize in the treatment of trauma understand how vital an individual's support system is in making a successful recovery from the impact of trauma. Missionaries are particularly vulnerable to the impact of trauma because they leave their social support systems behind and it takes time and effort to build a new support system. Many individuals today lack strong social support systems even in their homelands. That was certainly my case.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Has there been a time in your life when you needed support? What kind of support did you need? Who provided what you needed? What did you find helpful? If you have not personally found yourself in a position where you needed support, do you know anyone who has faced a crisis and has needed support to face that crisis?

The concern that most occupied my thoughts and prayers during the month that I spent in the hospital was related to where I would live once I got out. There was no obvious answer to that question. At the time of our return to the United States, my mother was in the beginning stages of Alzheimer's and my father had developed a serious drinking problem. My in-laws were serving as missionaries themselves and would return to their mission assignment shortly after our release from the hospital. Once I was out of the hospital, I knew it would still be weeks before I was physically able to care for myself and for my sons. Just like God provided oil for the widow of Zarephath, a place of safety for Martin Luther, and an upper room for Jesus and his disciples to share the Passover meal, he provided a place for my sons and me to live and someone to care for us until I was able to do so. While still in the hospital, a friend called and offered to have us come and live with her and her family.

Spending our first two months in my friend's home after being released from the hospital was ideal for us. My friend taught in a one-room church school. My sons were able to ride to school with her every morning and come back with her every afternoon. We ate our meals together every day. My husband's brother and his wife lived nearby so they would pick us up on the weekends. God provided a safe place for us to begin to heal. After I had recovered enough so that I was able to take care of myself and my sons I began to pray about where I should set up a home for my boys and myself.

Andrews University is named after the first Seventh-day Adventist missionary. The Seventh-day Adventist Institute of World Mission was located on the campus of Andrews University for many years. This is where my husband and I attended mission institute (our pre-mission field training seminar). The members of Pioneer Memorial Church on the campus of Andrews University prayed for our family when they heard the news of what had happened. After weeks of asking God for a sign and seeking His guidance, I called the principle of the elementary school there and talked to her about my concern for my son's adjustment in light of what they had experienced. My heart was touched when this woman, whom I had never met, told me that she had been praying for me and my boys since she first heard about our accident.

This woman's prayers were a big factor in my decision to move to Andrews University. I was deeply touched that a stranger hundreds of miles away was praying for us. I made the long trip to Berrien Springs because I believed that I would find a loving Christian community there that my sons and I could become a part of. When we arrived in Berrien Springs, my heart was overwhelmed when I walked into the apartment and found each of our beds made, dishes and food in the cupboards, even Bible Story books on the bookshelves, as well as fresh food in the refrigerator. We came from Africa with suitcases that someone else had packed for us. I moved to Berrien Springs with nothing to set up a home with. Members of the Pioneer Memorial Church and the School of Education at Andrews University furnished our apartment. God had, through these loving and generous people, provided everything that we needed. There were even stuffed animals on my sons' beds and winter coats in the closet for each of them.

GROUP DISCUSSION

How is your church providing for the needs of the various members of your church? As you consider the time in your life that you needed support, what role did the church play in providing that support?

As Beverly and I were having lunch I shared with her that my oldest son would be leaving that week to go back to Rwanda to visit his father's grave. The East Central Africa Division was building a medical school in Rwanda and planned to name the main academic building after my late husband. Paul felt that he still had unresolved grief that he needed to process before he could freely share in the celebration of naming a building after his father. I shared with Beverly that I had posted on Facebook that he would be going and had asked for prayers on his behalf. Paul was eight-years old when his father was killed in Rwanda. He was not in the car with us at the time of the accident but was in a friend's car just ahead of us. Paul has vivid memories of coming back to the accident site and finding his father dead behind the wheel of the car. He remembers searching in and around the car for his little brother's toes. He remembers the small African hospital that we had been transported to. He remembers the screams and blood and twisted metal of our family car.

In the 3rd edition of the diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, the manual used by mental health professionals to diagnose mental health problems, trauma was defined as an event outside the range of usual human experience. A tragic motor vehicle accident fits that definition. Fortunately, most of us will never be in a serious motor vehicle accident so in that sense it is outside the range of *usual* human experience. Yet according to the World Health Organization, motor vehicle accidents cause close to a 1.3 million deaths worldwide each year. That means someone is killed somewhere in the world every 25 seconds due to a motor vehicle accident.

Unfortunately, trauma is pervasive in the world we live in, and has been throughout history. The risk of exposure to trauma has been a part of the human condition since Cain murdered Abel.

Research has shown that of those who have experienced a traumatic event, 20% of women and 8% of men will develop PTSD with 30% of those going on to develop life-long symptoms. That is only 6% of women and 2.4% of men who go on to develop life-long problems.

While human beings are amazingly resilient, and the vast majority of people are able to recover emotionally and psychologically when they experience traumatic events, not everyone does. Children are the most vulnerable when it comes to the impact of trauma.

Research has documented the impact of childhood trauma on later life functioning. Strong, frequent or prolonged activation of a child's stress response system, particularly in the absence of a supportive adult, can interfere with healthy brain development and increase the risks of developing physical and mental health problems later in life. It also increases the risks of academic and behavioral problems in school aged children as well as occupational, legal, financial, relational, and substance abuse problems in adults.

Until the work of Dr. Vincent Felitti, the mental health field had no idea of the extent of childhood trauma, it's pervasive in our society, or of its impact on brain development.

Between 1995 and 1997, the largest investigation of childhood abuse and neglect and later-life health and well-being ever done was conducted in the United States. More than 17,000 people completed surveys regarding their childhood experiences and their current health status and life-style behaviors.

The researchers were surprised to find only 1 in 3 respondents had no adverse childhood experiences, only a third had grown up in healthy families with no abuse or neglect.

- 2 in 3 had at least 1 adverse childhood experience
- 2 in 5 had at least 2
- 2 in 9 had at least 3
- 1 in 8 had at least 4

In addition to the impact of trauma on early brain development, the World Health Organization has identified social disruption as the greatest risk factor to mental health in people of all ages. We had lived in a close-knit missionary community on the campus of the Adventist University of Central Africa in the mountains of northwestern Rwanda. My sons had known the love and friendship of the Rwandan people as well as the love and support of other missionaries serving there with us. This gave them a very strong sense of identity and belonging. Not only did they lose their father and experience the physical and emotional trauma of a tragic motor vehicle accident, they lost their home and the community they loved and belonged to.

The journey has not been easy for any of my sons. Most returning missionaries struggle to find their place when they return to their homelands. Missionary children develop what is known as a third culture identity, not belonging fully to either their parent's home culture or the culture of the host country. Those who are not able to find a peer group who can understand their life experiences are often left with feelings of social alienation. In a similar manner, individuals who have experienced childhood abuse frequently feel that no one can understand them and also experience feelings of social and emotional alienation. When trauma is added to a cross-cultural transition the challenges are intensified.

I often share with others how these wonderful people in the little town of Berrien Springs were used by our heavenly Father to show my sons and me His love. As Beverly and I were having lunch I told her that one of the women who had helped furnish our apartment identified herself to me for the very first time after she read my Facebook post requesting prayers on behalf of Paul. She had been one of the women who had brought things and helped set up our apartment. She committed to praying for Paul. Beverly seemed puzzled and questioned me. I shared that I never known any of the people who had helped my aunt furnish our apartment. "None of them?" Beverly asked. "No, none of them." Beverly was more than puzzled. We had arrived in Berrien Springs in late October, a week or so after Paul's 9th birthday. I shared that at Christmas, someone had bought new sweaters for each of my sons with specific instructions to my aunt to keep their identity anonymous. I was grateful for the sweaters. They were

beautiful. It was nice to have something warm and new for my sons. That first Christmas was the very worst in our lives. It felt so incredibly lonely. Beverly just looked at me. Tears began to flow down my cheeks. I had never considered any response to this story except gratitude.

Research shows that the single most important factor in recovering from a traumatic experience is social support. Beverly pointed out that what I received was material support, not social support. The tears continued to flow. I shared that I had always been grateful to be in Berrien Springs. I had felt like I was surrounded by loving and caring people. But I did acknowledge that my sons and I spent most Sabbaths alone. We never missed church or Sabbath School. Never. But each Sabbath we came back to our little apartment and ate alone and spent most afternoons alone. Sabbath was the hardest day of the week. My depression seemed to deepen on Sabbaths. I would often have a nap because I could not bear the loneliness. My little boys were angels. They didn't sleep but they let me sleep. They tried to be caring and loving toward me. My tears continued to flow as Beverly and I talked. It's still difficult to think about three active little boys in a tiny apartment in the depths of a Michigan winter with a seriously depressed mother who only minimally engaged them. How were they feeling? What emotions were they experiencing? They were good boys. They would color or draw or play with Lego. But they were also grieving. They had lost their father, their home, their friends and their way of life in Rwanda. In some sense, they had also lost their mother. But they all tried to be strong. Paul in particular. He was the oldest and he wasn't in the car at the time of the accident. In his own childish and limited way, he tried to carry the emotional burden of our family – to be strong for all of us.

- The ACE questionnaire asks about various types of adverse childhood experiences.
- The first three ask about physical, emotional and sexual abuse followed by physical and emotional neglect.
- The last five ask about various types of family dysfunction.

This scale includes stressors found commonly among the mostly college-educated, mostly white, middle-classed Americans, who were all employed and had good health insurance that the survey studied.

The scale doesn't include the death of a parent, discrimination, bullying, poverty, community violence, war, famine, or dislocation. Nor does it include traumatic experiences caused by natural or manmade disasters or various types of accidents. Motor vehicle accidents are one of the leading causes of death in people around the world. All of these things impact the developing brain of a child.

ADMINISTER THE ACE TO PEOPLE IN THE CONGREGATION

Research has shown that facing difficulties in life with the help and support of a caring adult actually builds resilience. With support, one is able to grow rather than be damaged by challenging or even traumatic experiences. One of the challenges of growing up in a single parent home is that

many single parents struggle to find the time and energy they need to provide the support and nurture their children need. Many single parents lack a strong family support system or supportive community to help them raise their children. In Africa there is a saying that it takes a village to raise a child. Cultures that are group and family oriented are more likely to provide the support and care a child needs when a parent dies or is absent from the home. Rarely are children able to get the support and care they need from one adult alone.

GROUP DISCUSSION

As you consider the challenging experiences of your childhood, was there someone in your life that you could depend to help you cope with what was happening? Share who that was and how their support helped you.

In answer to my prayers, I believed God provided a place for us to live on the campus of Andrews University. Our neighbors were mostly international students, so my sons felt at home among them and were able to make friends quickly. Nonetheless, becoming a part of the community took a long time. I struggled as a single parent. I was deeply depressed, incapable of reaching out to others and making friends. Although I clung to God, I didn't understand what He was doing or what His plans were for my life. Six months after our accident, I enrolled in my first class toward a doctoral degree in counseling psychology. Taking one class at a time, I began focusing on school and parenting. I also saw a Christian psychologist weekly for almost two years.

The five years that I spent as a single parent were very challenging for my sons and me. We were all grieving the death of my husband and their father and the loss of the community that we had belonged to *at the same time* that we were also trying to adapt to a new life in the United States. My sons did this without adult support other than what I was able to provide as a severely depressed and grieving mother. Becoming a part of a large university church had both benefits and risks. I deeply appreciated the student pastor in the seminary who took a personal interest in my oldest son and his group of friends. He was willing to spend time with them and mentor them in their walk with Christ. But as is true of any student population, this young seminary student graduated and moved away.

Three years after our accident, God brought a Christ-centered man into my life, a single father of four children. Recognizing the challenges of blending seven children into one family, I choose marital satisfaction within a remarried family as the topic of my doctoral dissertation. Two years later, after completing all the classes toward my doctorate, we married and blended our seven children into a family of nine. In spite of the challenges, my husband and I both believed that we could parent our children better together than either of us could alone. We were both committed to being the best parents we could be to all seven of our children. Nonetheless, probably none of them felt they got the all attention they wanted or needed.

Generally speaking, children are adaptable and resilient. They are born with an inherent capacity to deal with the inevitable challenges of life. Their stress response system develops and matures as attentive adults provide support and care for them as they face these challenges. As a mother soothes her distressed infant, the child's developing brain learns the process of self-regulation. As children face the increasing challenges of maturation with the support of a caring adult, their capacity to deal with challenges increases and they become increasingly resilient. When psychological trauma overwhelms the child's underdeveloped stress response system, it damages the developing brain, limiting the child's ability to deal with stress.

The effects of childhood trauma first become evident in school. More than half of those with ACE scores of four or higher reported having learning or behavioral problems, compared with 3% of those with a score of 0.

Some families are not healthy or functional enough to provide appropriate support to their children. The ACE research has shown that many children are being raised in dysfunctional households that are abusive, neglectful or both. Many children are growing up in single parent homes and many of these home lack support from other caring adults.

The teenage years are particularly difficult. They are time of transition and change, even for healthy and well-adjusted teens. Many experience a wide range of strong and often confusing emotions. If there is unprocessed or repressed pain from the past, it often surfaces during the teenage years. Each of my sons experienced this and one after the other they began to act out their pain. Even though I was a practicing psychologist by that time, I failed to recognize the imprint of their childhood trauma in their behavior. Afterall, I would say to myself, God has restored our lives. He has given us a new family and home and a new sense of belonging. My husband had embraced my sons as his own and loved them with as only a father could. In my own life I believed it was wrong to use the pain of the past as an excuse for poor choices or behaviors in the present. It was not until the results of the Adverse Childhood Experiences study were published in 1998 that professionals began to understand the impact of early childhood trauma on brain development. It was many years later before this information became commonly understood and professionals understood the link between adverse childhood experiences and the later life functioning. Due to the teenager's natural desire to experiment, this is a period of time when many engage in various high-risk behaviors, including, for many, mood-altering substances. Those who have experienced trauma and adversity in childhood begin to use these substances to help regulate their emotions and are therefore at a far higher risk of becoming addicted.

The greater the mobility within any culture the greater the likelihood that children will grow up without adult support other than their parents. Mobility and social disruption go hand in hand, a risk factor that has been identified by the World Health Organization. Social support is essential to the health and well-being of every human being. Reliable and available adult support serves as a protective factor as children face the inevitable challenges of growing up. It takes time and intentional effort for families who are new to a community to build a support system that they can access in times of need. Many children do not have regular enough contact with grandparents,

aunts, uncles or other caring adults to develop a trusting and supportive relationship with them. Cultures that have the greatest mobility are also the cultures that have the greatest number of people living alone. Living alone was uncommon a century ago but has become increasingly common in many wealthy countries around the world today. The number has more than doubled in the US in the last 50 years. This reality presents new challenges to the church to truly function as the family of God and the body of Christ and to provide support for its members. That need is the most evident during times of crisis.

GROUP DISCUSSION

What support does your church offer to single people in your congregation, families with children, as well as couples who are in transition or in crisis? Does your church have programs available to mentor and support teenagers and young people in your church? Do you personally take an interest in the well-being of the children in your congregation?

Church members often call each other brother and sister. How can we take that role more seriously? Are we willing to take the role of aunt and uncle, grandma and grandpa to the children and teenagers among us?

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BIBLICAL PURPOSE OF GRANDPARENTING

BY CLAUDIO & PAMELA CONSUEGRA

THE TEXT

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter [b]dark sayings of old, ³ Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children, Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done. ⁵ For He established a testimony in Jacob, And appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That they should make them known to their children; ⁶ That the generation to come might know them, The children who would be born, That they may arise and declare them to their children.” Psalm 78:1-6

INTRODUCTION

I want to challenge you to take an informal survey of other grandparents:

Think about the last conversation you had with someone who was a grandparent. Did they pull out photos of their grandchildren to share with you? Recall their words. What did they tell you about their grandchild?

Now, survey social media and look at all the posts and photos of grandparents with their grandchildren. What are they doing? How are they interacting with each other?

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My guess is that you will readily find information about all the fun things grandparents do with their grandchild. You will not have to look far before you see photos depicting smiles at Disney World, faces smeared with ice-cream, clothes dirty from splashing through the mud puddles, sun-burned little bodies from too much time in the water park, and photos of snuggles with grandma and grandpa. How much fun and what wonderful memories are depicted in all those photos!

But, have you ever considered the possibility that we, as a society, have strayed from God's broader purpose of grandparenting? While we believe that God enjoys seeing the smiles and snuggles and the fun we can have together, is that all there is to it? Have we been so busy focusing on fun times that we have missed the larger picture?

We want to be clear from the very beginning: Parents are the primary influence on the lives of their children! They rightly hold the number one place that God has entrusted to them to raise their children in His image. At the same time, grandparents can play a very important supportive role we are called to help and backup, walk by them, and offer to assist them in the faith formation of their grandchildren. In most cases, we are not fully maximizing this support role in the lives of our grandchildren and in fact, we do not have a clear picture of what God has called us to do.

Think about the world of sports. Many teams have the starting players, the ones that have demonstrated with their skill that they are winners. They are usually the ones with the highest scores and tend to draw the crowds to the stadiums to see them play. But there are many other players who don't get top billing. Often, they sit quietly and patiently in the background until called upon to take the spot while the star players take a little rest or heal from an injury. The second-string quarterback, the backup player, the players who sit on the bench are just as important for the team's success as are the starters. Second place is a very powerful place to be in!

Or, consider a commercial airplane. As we travel throughout the world, often in flights that last many hours, we marvel at the fact two pilots, not just one, fly this multi-ton airplane full of passengers and cargo, over hundreds or even thousands of miles. One pilot is not enough; there is a need for two. While the captain has some responsibilities, the co-pilot has others. If the pilot needs a short break, or something happens to the pilot, the co-pilot, or first officer, are just as capable as the captain to pilot the plane to its destination. Second place is a very important role to play!

In the world of politics, the vice president plays a crucial role in the President's success. In a school, a vice president plays a significant role in the support of the principal. In a church, the associate pastors or the deacons or elders play a very important supporting role in the ministry of the lead or senior pastor.

Grandparents also play a prominent and crucial role in the lives and spiritual development of their grandchildren.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role did your grandparents play in your life?
2. What are some of your favorite memories of growing up with your grandparents?

3. While good memories shape us, so do the sad ones. Do you recall the day your grandparents died? What were your thoughts, and your feelings, of those days?
-

It may be easy to look at grandparenting as something that happens at the end of our lives. Yet studies indicate that “significantly longer life expectancies now project you will live over 30% of your life as a grandparent and up to 20% of your life as a great-grandparent” (Grands Matter, p. A10).

We stated in the introduction that the parents hold the rightful place as the number one influencer in their child’s life. This was God’s plan. At the same time, there are many homes where grandparents now have moved into that number one slot.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does contemporary society define the role of grandparenting?
 2. If you were to paint a picture of a grandparent and a grandchild today, what would it look like? What would they be doing?
-

CONTEMPORARY GRANDPARENTING

Let’s explore the role that grandparenting has in contemporary society. What defines the typical grandparent of today? The truth is that today’s grandma is more likely to go inline skating with grandkids than to bake cookies, and granddad might like video games better than fishing. Today’s typical grandparent is more active, on the go, and more willing and able to pack up the grandchild and go explore the world.

So, let’s change the portrait of the grandma that sits in her rocking chair all day, crocheting a scarf because today’s grandma is likely to be more educated, more traveled, and in better health than grandmas in previous generations. She may bake less, sew less, sit in her rocking chair less, and exchanged that landline telephone for a cell phone. It is quite possible that instead of using a walking cane, she is in such good physical health that she wears out her walking shoes and uses an electronic pedometer to count how many steps she walks or runs, on any given day. In fact, today’s grandparents represent the youngest older generation, which means they are still very active, travel more, understand and use technology more, and in many cases, are much more directly involved in the life of their grandchildren.

Grandpa is probably not sitting by the porch, whittling a piece of wood with his pocket knife, or watching football games on television all day long. Instead, you may find grandpa out water skiing, hiking, or camping with their grandchildren. He may be volunteering for a disaster relief organization, building houses for needy people, or fixing and restoring an old car, showing their grandchildren how to do it.

The question is, how do most grandparents today spend their time interacting with their grandchild, and how do they describe their role? [Ask the group for answers]

We challenge you to ask any grandparent this question, and our guess is that you would get responses such as:

- My job is to spoil my grandchild.
- I want to give them all the things I could not provide for my child.
- I have time now to have fun with them.
- I can play video or computer games with them.
- I can babysit them.
- I get to give them all the sweets they want and then send them back home.
- I want to be the first to take them to Disneyland.

It seems as if grandparenting today is defined by culture in one word—indulgence! Just scroll through the photographs and posts on social media and they will bear witness to this fact. Is there something missing in how we are interpreting this role? Are we missing out on the bigger picture? Are we too busy having “fun” that we have missed the main target?

Studies indicate that “significantly longer life expectancies now project you will live over 30% of your life as a grandparent and up to 20% of your life as a great-grandparent” (Grands Matter, p. A10).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Provide a Bible verse that defines the role of each of the various members of the family:

- Husband -
 - Wife -
 - Child -
 - Grandparent -
-

GOD’S PLAN FOR GRANDPARENTING

In the activity above, our guess is that it was easier for you to come up with a verse for all the family members except for that of the grandparent. We can rapidly recall that husbands are to love their wives, wives are to respect their husbands, and children are to obey their parents. However, the Bible is also very clear about the role that a grandparent must play.

If you ask individuals to name their family members, in many circles, they will readily list mom, dad, and children. And, if you ask children in pre-school to draw their family, most will not include a grandparent in their drawing, unless they live in the same home. In most cases, the grandparents will not be mentioned or drawn and, instead, are viewed as “extras” to the scene. God, however, does not see you as an insignificant member of the family; it is modern culture that paints a picture of family that is not aligned with God’s portrait. Grandparents are central to God’s family picture, and we must align our practices and interactions with our grandchildren to that which God designed.

The truth is that God has defined the role of grandparenting just as clearly as He has the role of other members of the family, but perhaps, we have read it in the Bible many times but have skipped over it. Most of us have read the text in Deuteronomy that has often been referred to as the premier scripture verse on parenting:

“Keep the commandments of the LORD your God... Teach them to your children AND your grandchildren.” Deuteronomy 4: 2,9

While these verses address parents, there is that one small three-letter word that we have all too often missed. Did you happen to notice the word “**AND**”? We have quoted this verse repeatedly as it relates to the role of parenting; however, the word “**AND**” also connects the same responsibility to grandparents. In other words, my responsibility for passing the torch of faith does not end with my parenting role, but rather, it extends into my role as a grandparent. I need to pass my faith on to my children **AND** to my grandchildren.

If you read the Bible clearly, you will discover that grandparents are not an “extra” thrown in the scene. Instead, they are an essential part of the picture of a family and, they have a very distinct God-ordained role that is not transferrable to any other member of the family.

God’s ideal for grandparents has been marred by a world filled with sin. That ideal has been pushed out of the picture and many have blurred the clarity of the role they have been called to fill. The culture’s distracting noise screams to grandparents, calling them to a life of indulgence with their grandchild while God has given them a much higher calling—that of being disciple-makers.

Deuteronomy 4 is not the only scriptural reference regarding a grandparent’s role as scripture is ripe with counsel. Consider these other texts:

- Deuteronomy 6:2-9 (NKJV) Read this entire passage but pay close attention to how it begins and to whom these words are addressed, “*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.***” Did you catch that? This passage talks to grandparents as it speaks to “you, and your son **and your grandson.**” This verse once again connects our responsibility as parents to our role as grandparents by reminding us that as the cycle of life continues, we have a God-ordained responsibility to pass on the torch of faith to the next generation.
- Psalm 78:1-8 (NKJV) This, our scriptural basis for this chapter, is rich in detail. Verses four through eight make it especially clear, [please read the texts].

This passage refers to the “generation to come” and “the children who would be born.” You see, our responsibility to show Jesus does not end with our children. Instead, it extends to the “generation to come.” Our grandchildren need Jesus more than a life of indulgence, they need Jesus over ice-cream cones and trips to Disneyland, and they need Jesus over the latest technological gadget or the latest toy craze. Walk with Jesus, talk about Jesus, meditate upon Jesus, and reflect Jesus! That is your highest calling to your grandchild.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does modern society define retirement?
 2. Now, read Psalm 92:12-15 and pay special attention to verse fourteen.
“They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing.”
-

How does modern society’s definition differ from God’s definition of old age as fresh, flourishing, and fruit-bearing?

You see, God sees these years as some of the most productive ones in our life. It is not time to sit in our rocking chairs or be a couch potato. Instead, God is calling you to a life of flourishing productivity and days spent bearing fruit by making an eternal difference in our grandchildren’s lives.

The scriptures embrace a multi-generational view of discipleship where faith is passed on from one generation to the next. There is no end-point, and you are a vital part of His plan of discipleship. “Let’s not let cultural ideas and expectations about grandparents push us to the back burner. Don’t follow the short-sighted idea that our retirement entitles us to just relax and enjoy what we have, and we’re relieved of the responsibilities of investing in our grandchildren. And, let’s not buy into the naïve notion that our adult children now have their own families and we are not needed, or we have nothing valuable to contribute. It may be natural to feel that way sometimes, but that’s clearly inconsistent with God’s plan” (Canfield, 2016, A7).

Today’s grandparents are historians, mentors, disciple-makers, and role models, just to name a few of their roles. All of these roles are significant and important as grandparents seek to love and nurture a new generation. Scripture does not downplay the role of a grandparent, and they are not seen as bystanders or as insignificant minor players in the family.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. If you have not been a good role model for your children or grandchildren, what can you do to change that? Should you confess, apologize, and ask for forgiveness?
 2. Read this verse: *“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1, NKJV)*. What are some practical ways that you can imitate or model Christ for your grandchildren?
 3. How far or how much should grandchildren imitate their grandparents?
-

IT’S MORE ABOUT SHOW THAN TELL

Perhaps the most important things grandparents can do to fulfill the scriptural mandate is to reflect Jesus! What you do is far more critical than what you say. Children are quick to see

through false pretenses and will instead focus on the life you live. They are watching you. Remember the adage: “More is caught than is taught!”

“Grandparents model values, showing their grandchildren by their lives what is important and what is not. Our verbalized values are meaningless, but lived-out values confirm our beliefs. James says, *“I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18). Grandparents’ actions present a strong message to thoughtful grandchildren who are always watching. When grandparents willingly give of themselves to serve God and others and reach out to those in need, grandchildren see altruistic, unselfish people who *“look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:4). When we invite our grandchildren into our lives, they may listen to our words, but be assured, they will observe our works” (Schreur, J. & J., 2011).

“Grandparents teach young people social morality and give them a sense of right and wrong, a set of absolutes upon which they can build their lives. In this day of relative truth, grandchildren need models of truth and biblical morality, models that don’t change with the times. They need to see integrity consistently displayed. Creative, involved grandparents provide grandchildren a model of morality to emulate” (Schreur, J. & J., 2011). Don’t miss the concept - “they need to see integrity displayed.” The need to see it more than they need to hear it!

Here are some specific ways in which your actions will speak far louder than your words:

- **Prayer**
- **Personal Bible Study**
- **Service Projects**
- **Healthy Lifestyle**
- **Technology Use:** Today’s grandparents engage with technology as no other generation of grandparents in the past; therefore, it’s very critical that you model responsible use of all screen time regarding quantity of time, sites viewed, movie choices, reading material, etc. Also, keep in mind that every minute of screen time is robbing you of face-to-face time with your grandchildren. Perhaps, when you have those precious moments with your grandchild, it would be better to omit all screens and opt for quality time together spent in other ways.
- **Marriage/Family:** You can tell your grandchildren that it is important who they marry, and that family needs to be a priority, but is that reflected in your life? What would they say if asked about the relationship between grandma and grandpa? In what specific ways do you show them that family is a priority in your own life? And remember, the relationship between their parents and you are also in the forefront of your grandchild’s vision. That parent/grandparent relationship is key in modeling the importance of family.

We would all be more successful in living out the Biblical purpose of grandparenting if we opened our mouths less and looked in the mirror more. Before we can reflect Jesus to our grandchild we must have

Him in our own hearts. We cannot reflect what we don't have. They need to see us living out our lives in a way that shows them what it is that we value most—a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

MORE PRACTICAL WAYS TO SHOW YOUR GRANDCHILD A GRAND VIEW OF GOD

We have reviewed the scriptural mandate, but what does this look like? How can we give our grandchildren a grand view of God? How can we put this into our daily interactions to be certain we are being true to God's calling?

- **Include Them** - Don't forget that the "and" in scripture includes them. Don't be so busy doing the work of God that you omit one of your most important responsibilities. Include them in your service and witnessing activities. For example, instead of taking them on an expensive cruise, take them on a mission trip to work side by side with you. Your money and time would be much better spent by allowing them to come alongside you on all your service projects and the payoffs will be "out of this world." Even very young grandchildren can participate with you in age-appropriate service-related projects. Remember, a Christian grandparent must be intentional by including them in your discipleship plan (Deuteronomy 4:9).
- **Tell Them** - You have a testimony. You have lived a life filled with God's interventions. Have you taken the time to give your testimony to your grandchild? Sometimes our personal testimony of Jesus is one of our best kept secrets when it should be the one thing we shout from the mountaintops. There are many moments throughout the day that lends itself to a glance back at ways God has led in your life.

Also, be vulnerable by telling them the mistakes you have made. "Helping your grandchildren grow in discernment can be accomplished by telling stories about good and bad choices you have made and how they have impacted your life" (Canfield, 2016, p. 24).

Tell them verbally, write them down, and record your stories so that it will last throughout generations to come. Have you shared with them the many ways in which God has blessed you through the years and the many answers to prayers you have received (Psalm 78:4)?

- **Lead Them** - Every part of your day should lead them closer to Jesus. It's very interesting that the book of Deuteronomy reminds us that God is to occupy our entire day; Speak of Him when you get up, when you lie down, when you walk, and when you talk (Deuteronomy 6:7-9). Do all your actions throughout the day, from morning to night, lead your grandchild closer to Him or farther away from Him? Don't miss out on those daily teachable moments to lead them to Him.

- **Show Them** - Keep bearing spiritual fruit. Your life's purpose of bearing spiritual fruit does not end at retirement. Nothing is farther from the truth as this can be one of the most productive and fruitful times in your life. Show your children the fruits of the spirit in your own life and reflect Jesus to them. Remember the old adage: "More is caught than is taught!" Your actions must mirror your words, otherwise, they are meaningless and will fall on deaf ears. It's true; your actions really do speak louder than your words in communicating with your grandchild, so continue to bear that fruit and continue to show them your and their best Friend, Jesus (Psalm 92:14).
-

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Make a list of ways in which you spend money on your grandchild. Be honest and list everything you can think of—big and small.
 - Now, review that list and put a star beside the things that will make an eternal impact.
 - What changes can you make in your life so that it will more clearly reveal to them the relationship you have with God?
-

A FINANCIAL INVESTMENT THAT MATTERS - CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

There is another practical way to show our grandchildren a Grandview of God, and that involves our financial investments. Statistics reveal that many grandparents today are better off financially than previous generations but, when asked to reveal their expenditures, they discover that money spent on their grandchildren involves buying them "stuff" that matters very little in the large scheme of things.

We often fail to remind ourselves that our grandchildren are witnessing the financial decisions we make. What lessons of stewardship are we teaching them by our frivolous spending habits? Lessons learned in childhood will be practiced when they become adults and have their own money. It has been said that our priorities are revealed as we balance our bank accounts. As we account for the way in which we have spent the funds we have, we can see a pattern emerge. Consider this verse in Matthew: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Matthew 6:21, NKJV). Your grandchildren will know where your priorities lie and where your heart is by how you invest your time, talents, and treasures (money).

So, instead of trips to Disneyland or filling their toy box with toys, what if you used that money to help finance Christian education? Christian education can be costly, but it is an eternal investment, and a grandparent's financial help could be what makes it possible. In so doing, you would be putting your money where it matters most as that day to day interaction with Christian teachers would reinforce the spiritual concepts that parents, and grandparents are attempting to transmit in the home.

That triad of home, church, and school working together is a powerful force, it is priceless, and the money spent goes much farther and lasts much longer than any Disney princess or superhero. Christian education is a gift that lasts the test of time and, in many cases, is more affordable than we think when we stop, do an audit, and count the ways in which we are investing all of our financial resources. The money spent here and there really does add up and is often more than we realize.

Some of you may be thinking that you can never afford to fund Christian education for your grandchild on your limited income. Do not despair because the purpose here is to help us ponder what our grandchild is learning about stewardship from us, regardless of how much or how little we have. Perhaps it's true, you cannot fund Christian education on your income and maybe partnering with the parent, church, or school family is an option as even a small amount, when combined with others, can make it a possibility.

I (Pamela) remember that as a young girl, I had always hoped to attend the Christian high school, but my parents were not able to afford the tuition all by themselves. I was sad when I realized I would not be able to go to the school that would prepare me best for the education ministry I felt called to. But I remember the day when some members of the church where we went every weekend came to our home to tell my parents that the church members had agreed that they would help my parents pay the annual tuition at the school. Many of these church members were older, retired, and on a fixed income. Their grandchildren had already grown up and were not in school, so they “adopted” me as their granddaughter so I could go to that Christian high school. Grandparents, together with their own children, with their church, and with the school, can partner to ensure that their grandchildren can receive a quality education in a godly atmosphere.

Please don't misunderstand. We would not presume to tell you you can't enjoy an ice cream cone, a vacation together, or even a trip to Disneyland. They all are fine and can be a nice experience, but that cannot be all there is. Have fun and enjoy the giggles, but the truth is that for most of today's grandparents will be happy to provide financial help for these activities but will fail in providing financial support to assist in our God-given role of discipling our grandchildren. Let's read the entire context of that verse in Matthew we mentioned above: [Please read *Matthew 6:19-21, NKJV*].

The gift of Christian education reflects your heart's desire for your grandchild and is a gift that will not be destroyed by moths nor rust. A godly teacher, who reflects Jesus in every lesson taught in the classroom, is one of the best ways to invest our finances. Let's face the fact—the more adults we have in our grandchild's life who reflect Jesus to them, the better! When your grandchild gets to be of school age, their classroom teacher will have more interactions with them throughout the day than you will as more waking hours are spent at school than at home. Consider Christian education as part of the inheritance you are leaving to your grandchild; it is one that epitomizes a lasting legacy! What lessons are your grandchildren currently learning about what you treasure by how you use your financial resources, regardless of how little they may seem?

More powerful and lasting than any toy you can give, any place you can visit, or any treat you can indulge your grandchild with is when you model a life for them that reflects Jesus. Give your grandchild a GRAND view of God!

CONCLUSION

Are you ready to answer the call and be a Christian grandparent who fulfills your God-given role? “Realize that becoming a grandparent isn’t just another season of your life; it’s a God-given calling. Take full advantage of the awesome opportunity to influence another generation of children in your family. Even though you likely have more freedom to live the lifestyle you want than your own grandparents of old did (better health, more money, etc.), you share the same responsibility to be committed grandparents. View your investment in your grandchildren as one of the best investment opportunities you’ll ever have, because it will pay off in significant ways that have eternal value. Don’t let the comforts and freedoms of an empty nest or retirement cause you to neglect your grandchildren. Don’t let other noble causes (like ministry work through your church) divert too much of your time and energy away from your grandchildren. Decide to stay connected, emotionally engaged, and personally involved in your children’s and grandchildren’s lives. Ask God to give you a clear understanding of the great potential good that could occur if you fully invested in your grandchildren’s lives” (Hopler, 2008).

The bottom line is this: At the very heart of Christian grandparenting’s role is the gospel commission! Don’t be so busy telling the gospel to “the whole world” that in the process, you skip over one of the most important treasures God has given you—your own grandchild. The gospel commission admonishes us to “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28, 19). Yet, most grandparents today are too busy making plans on how to have fun with their grandchild that they have no plan on how to disciple them. We must change this view of grandparenting and start being intentional about discipling our grandchild.

Isn’t it interesting that nowhere in the Bible does it say that the church has the primary responsibility to pass on our faith to the next generation? The scriptures make it clear that parents and grandparents are the principal conduit to instruct their children about God and His love for them. Yet, as a society we have parceled out this role to pastors, youth leaders, and others instead of taking up the mantle that was clearly given to us. It’s time! No, it’s past time that we stop relying on someone else to do what scripture says is in our job description as grandparents.

It takes an intentional and persistent effort that’s bathed in prayer. It’s time for you, as grandparents, to give your grandchild a GRAND VIEW OF GOD!

REMEMBER TO END WITH PRAYER

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HOW TO IMPROVE THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUR CHILDREN

BY ALINA BALTAZAR

THE TEXTS

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” John 14:27

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this seminar is to review the mental health challenges children, and adolescents are facing in modern times and what parents can do about it. This seminar is from a Biblical perspective and has an application of the Health Message.

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MATERIALS NEEDED

Laptop, Power Point software, and a projector. This seminar will probably take around 1.5 hours.

INTRODUCTION

Parents have so much to worry about these days. It is good you are concerned about your child's mental health. In addition, teachers and youth pastors are increasingly needing to address the mental health challenges of children in their work. Unfortunately, mental illness is increasing in our children/adolescents. In fact, 10-20% of children and adolescents have a diagnosable mental illness (CDC, 2019a). Half of all mental illness will begin before the age of 14 and 75% by the age of 25. Suicide rates have been increasing for more than a decade. You may think that Seventh-day Adventists are protected from these problems. However, in a recent survey of SDA college students, 24% (1 in 4) were experiencing moderate to severe depression, and 19% (1 in 5) were experiencing moderate to severe anxiety (Baltazar, Dessie, & Smith, 2019).

This may seem overwhelming, but mental illness is preventable, treatable, and manageable. It is best to catch it early and get intervention that fits the problem. There are multiple ways mental health can be improved. The most common methods are lifestyle changes, social support, counseling, and medication if needed. The biggest issue is to get past the stigma. The stigma is real and makes it hard to get the help your child needs. A majority of individuals dealing with mental health challenges don't get treatment. Parents play a vital role in recognizing when there is a problem, getting help, and helping in the recovery process.

This seminar will review the mental health challenges our children/adolescents are facing, why rates are increasing, the harm of social media, how the health message can be used to address these concerns, what role you play as a parent, and where to get help. There will be discussion and application exercises in order to help you better understand and apply what you are learning in this seminar. Where to find available resources will be shared at the end.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

What are your fears and concerns regarding mental health in children/adolescents (you don't need to share personal information)? Discuss in a group and then with the class.

SUICIDE

After holding steady or decreasing in the years 2000-2007, suicide rates have increased in children and young adults by 56% since then. Suicide is the second leading

cause of death for children and young adults aged 10-24 (CDC, 2019b). One out of five teens has thought about suicide.

Youth are experiencing more isolation and hopelessness than in previous generations. The role of social media will be explored in-depth later. Hopelessness is at the heart of suicide. Multiple issues trigger hopelessness in youth. Though the great recession is no longer an immediate crisis, our youth have concerns about their economic future and their ability to be financially independent and raise a family. Substance use is considered a risk factor that can trigger depression and anxiety and lower inhibition to commit suicide.

These issues are magnified by what is going on in the adolescent brain. Adolescents experience more intense emotions, have greater difficulty managing their emotions, are more impulsive, and have a harder time figuring out how to address their problems than adults (Pandey & Dwivedi, 2012).

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Are these statistics scary to you, or do you think it won't happen to your child?

DEPRESSION

Depression is a very common mental illness in all ages and is estimated to occur in 1 out of 5 teen girls per year and 7% of teens boys, according to Geiger and Davis (2019) of the Pew Research Center. These rates have increased about 60% (66% for girls and 44% in boys) over the past ten years (2007-2017). Girls are more likely to be diagnosed with depression than boys. Though boys who are depressed are more likely to show anger, and girls are more likely to exhibit sadness (Khesht-Masjedi, Shokrgozar, Abdollahi, Golshahi, & Sharif-Ghaziani, 2017). A boy's display of anger is often labeled as a behavioral problem, not a mental health problem. A vast majority of children/teens (60%) don't receive any treatment, though girls are more likely to get help than boys.

Experts cite academic and social pressures as contributing to these trends (Geiger & Davis, 2019). With an increasing expectation to complete a college degree in order to find financial security and the cost of college outpacing inflation, there is an expectation to get good grades (as reported by 60% of teens) in order to get into a good college and be able to secure scholarships.

This disorder can be frightening for parents due to its close relationship with suicide. It is often hard to know if the symptoms of depression are a phase or a serious problem that needs treatment. Look out for emotional and behavioral changes. If you aren't sure, tell your child about your observations and find out if it is more of a phase or something

serious. Don't be afraid to get professional help, even if your child is resistant. There are concerns about suicidal ideation increasing in teens who take anti-depressant medication. Though it is something to watch for, anti-depressants can be very helpful in decreasing depression symptoms.

ANXIETY

Though not as common as depression, anxiety starts earlier in young children due to the nature of their vulnerability in society and brain development. Anxiety takes many forms in children and teens (American Psychiatric Association, 2013):

- Separation anxiety – Excessive fear of being separated from the primary caregiver
- Phobias – Fear of a specific object or situation
- Social anxiety – Fear of certain social situations in which the child will be exposed to possible scrutiny by others
- Panic attacks – An abrupt surge of intense fear and intense physical discomfort that peaks within minutes.
- Generalized anxiety – Excessive worry that affects the body and ability to function.

These disorders can be frustrating for parents, but very real for children. It may be tempting to minimize or push your children to “get over” their fears. Exposure to what we are afraid of then finding out it isn't so bad does help, but it should be done in a gentle, understanding way.

Development also helps to address many childhood fears. Separation anxiety is very normal for children aged 9 months to 2 years. They don't completely understand that you will be back like you say you will. That comes in time. Staying until they feel more comfortable is the best approach for this situation. This may take time, but it decreases distress in your child. Children in the preschool years have very imaginative minds where any number of scary situations seem real. Eventually, they realize monsters don't exist, but until then, night lights and staying nearby while they fall asleep are good ways for parents to help manage these fears. Some children are more naturally shy and fearful of others. Being involved in extra-curricular activities your child enjoys can help address social fears. Still, your child should not be pushed too much because it could actually worsen their fears if they are ridiculed.

ADHD

Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder is one of the most common mental disorders affecting children. This condition can continue into adulthood. It affects 8.4% of children and 2.5% of adults. The symptoms are indicated in the name of the disorder;

inattention (difficulty maintaining focus), hyperactivity (excessive movement that isn't appropriate for the setting), and impulsivity (hasty actions that occur without thinking that lead to unintended consequences) (Parekh, 2017). Children can have more problems with inattention or hyperactivity or both.

Due to development, all children have difficulty paying attention and sitting still, but children with this condition have greater difficulties compared to their peers, and it hurts their functioning. The disorder is typically recognized when children start school and aren't able to sit still and concentrate on and complete their school work. It is a brain disorder where there is less activity in the part of the brain that manages these types of behaviors. ADHD has a tendency to run in families (Parekh, 2017).

This disorder is manageable, and the symptoms can improve with time. Children with this disorder need to learn organization and time management skills. It helps to structure the classroom and the home in such a way to decrease distractions and allow greater amounts of physical activity. Consistent and immediate rewards can increase motivation and concentration. Counseling may address the emotional side of having this disorder for the child and family. Behaviorally oriented therapy can specialize in behavioral adaptations that make the symptoms more manageable at home and school. Medications can address many of the symptoms associated with ADHD but may decrease appetite, make it more difficult to fall asleep, significantly reduce activity, and can cause depression.

Some research has found changing diet to decrease symptoms (Harvard Medical School, 2009). Avoiding certain artificial preservatives and food dyes, consuming more omega-3 fats, and taking specific vitamins and minerals can help some children. Though poor diet has not been found to be the cause nor a healthy diet a cure for ADHD except in a small percent of cases.

EATING DISORDERS

Eating disorders are another scary and frustrating disorder for parents to manage. Food is often a battleground between parents and children from day one. Some children are just pickier than others. Other children are so active they don't want to sit down to eat. Children also may get great joy out of eating, thus turn to food as a way to cope with life's stresses. As children reach the teen years and start worrying about what others think of them, there are increasing concerns about appearance and maintaining a slimmer figure. These tendencies can develop into disorders that can be deadly.

Anorexia nervosa is the most deadly of these disorders with up to 20% of those who don't get treatment dying from the disorder. Anorexia is characterized as severely restricting food intake, having an intense fear of gaining weight, and having a distorted view of body size and weight (APA, 2013). This leads to severe weight loss and malnutrition that harms the body. Individuals with this disorder may also binge then purge out of fear or guilt so

may be closer to a normal weight. Individuals with this disorder need a team approach of a doctor, nutritionist, and counselor who specializes in treating anorexia. Medication can help, but should not be the only treatment.

Those with bulimia nervosa are out of control with binge eating, then purge or use laxatives to lose weight they gained. There is an exaggerated view of themselves based on his/her size (APA, 2013). The purging and use of laxatives can cause permanent damage to the body. Healthy eating and working through underlying emotional issues is the best approach in treating this disorder. Medication can also be helpful.

Binge-eating is now recognized as a disorder. Children/teens are diagnosed with this disorder who binge out of control and are embarrassed about their behavior but don't purge or use laxatives to eliminate the food quickly (APA, 2013). These children/teens are likely to gain an excessive amount of weight and are drawn to sweet or salty foods to binge on thus this disorder is harmful to the body. Medication to address the compulsiveness and underlying emotional disorder and/or counseling to improve coping without food are the best treatment options.

AUTISM

Autism spectrum disorder has a major impact on families. Those with autism have two main characteristics: deficits in social communication and interactions and restricted, repetitive behavior, interests, or activities that have been present since early childhood (APA, 2013). This disorder ranges from severe to mild. Rates have been increasing either due to better detection or more parents having children later in life (a known risk factor). In 2004 1 in 166 children were diagnosed. In 2018 1 in 59 were diagnosed (Autism Speaks, 2019). Boys are 4.5 times more likely than girls to be diagnosed.

Diagnosis and intervention need to begin as early as possible. Children with this disorder struggle socially and often academically. They need to learn how to develop social skills and function in a society that thinks differently than they do. There is no known cure, but there are treatments that can minimize the symptoms and maximize abilities. Most people with autism respond best to highly structured and specialized programs (National Institute of Mental Health, 2011). Intervention options include behavior therapy, school-based interventions, medication, nutrition, occupational, speech, and physical therapy, and social skills training (National Institute of Health, 2017). The families also require support and encouragement from extended family and the community.

TRAUMA

Many children are exposed to traumatic life events. Traumatic events include sexual, physical, and verbal abuse, domestic violence, parental divorce or abandonment,

neglect, community and school violence, medical trauma, motor vehicle accidents, acts of terrorism, war, natural and man-made disorders, suicide, and others. These events take a negative emotional and physical toll on children. The more traumatic events children experience before the age of 18, the more physical and psychological harm that will occur long into adulthood (Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, Edwards, Kloss, & Marks, 1998).

Parents frequently have difficulty helping children who have experienced trauma in their lives. This is especially true for parents who foster or adopt children with trauma histories. Exposure to trauma changes the structure of a child's brain; thus it impacts a child's behavior. This can frustrate parents and lead to problematic parent/child interactions (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014). See Role of Parents for more information on parenting a child who has experienced trauma.

EXERCISE

How many of you or someone you know has a child who has dealt with these issues? What are some of the struggles you or someone you know have experienced in relation to mental illness in children/adolescents?

Remind participants that confidentiality is not guaranteed, but is requested.

HARM OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This generation, known as Generation Z or iGen (those born 1995-2010) is the first generation to spend their entire adolescence in the age of the smartphone (Twenge, 2017). Social media and texting are replacing time with friends in-person. We don't know for sure the rise in smartphone use is the actual cause of the increasing depression and suicide rates, but we do know that depressive symptoms increased by 33% and suicide rates for girls increased by 65% between 2010 and 2015 (Twenge, Joiner, Rogers, 2017). Smartphones were introduced in 2007, and by 2015 92% of teens and young adults owned a smartphone. This is a strong correlation.

Social media does allow individuals to keep in touch better with friends throughout the day, connect with others when you don't feel like you fit in, and with friends who have moved away. Still, it also has a tendency to replace in-person, which is much more emotionally satisfying. As a result, this generation is more socially isolated than ever before. In addition, when teens compare themselves to their peers' social media posts, they find themselves not measuring up. Those who use social media at higher rates report feeling anxiety, depression, and worry about their body image (Geiger & Davis, 2019).

EXERCISE

Where in your body do you feel the following emotions: Anger, Fear, Stress, and Happiness? How can you be more aware of when you are feeling those emotions in your body?

APPLYING THE HEALTH MESSAGE TO MENTAL HEALTH

REST

Our bodies were not meant to push ourselves in ways modern society demands. Mental illness is telling us something has to change. There are many ways to rest the body that improve our mental health.

- Sleep isn't just for the physical body, but also the mind. Children with ADHD like symptoms may actually not be getting enough sleep. Turn off those screens at least one hour before bed and have a consistent nighttime routine.
- Breathing slowly and intentionally is a powerful tool when emotionally distressed. Take a few minutes to slowly breathe in through your nose, hold your breath for a few seconds, then slowly breathe out through your mouth like blowing through a straw. An easy way for kids to remember is to pretend they are smelling a piece of pizza in their hand and then blow on it because it's too hot! It's called Pizza Breathing.
- Relax your muscles when you notice them tightening from emotional distress. Focus on the area of tension and feel it relax when you breathe out. A fun activity for kids is to pretend they are a wet noodle to relax their muscles.

DIET AND EXERCISE

We all know a healthy diet and exercise are good for our physical health, but it is also essential for our mental health. Though diet and exercise alone aren't a cure, they are vital in improving and maintaining emotional health. Eating a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, healthy fats, low-fat protein, and high in fiber, as well as avoiding sweets and highly processed food makes the body and the mind feel good. Having regular family meals together improves everybody's nutrition and they have a powerful impact on your child's overall mental health.

Exercise should be a regular part of our lives. Regular exercise is as powerful as anti-depressant medication in some people (Harvard Medical School, 2013). Going for brisk walks gives you fresh air and sunlight, a change of scenery, a chance to connect with your Creator, and opportunities to talk with those you walk by. Get your kid outside to play basketball, toss the ball or a Frisbee, or go for a walk together. It is a great way to improve the parent/child bond as well.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Modern society is increasingly isolating. We were created as social beings. Arrange play dates for your kids when young, invite their friends over, get to know your kids friends, get your child involved in church youth activities, encourage extra-curricular activities to build self-confidence and meet like-minded individuals, and urge your kids to connect with adult mentors who have similar interests (make sure there are appropriate boundaries).

SPIRITUALITY

Even Christians suffer from mental illness. It is often when we are at our lowest we feel disconnected from God and think He doesn't care. That is when we need Him the most. Trusting that God loves us unconditionally can help us through difficult times that will inevitably come into our lives. There are multiple Bible verses and promises that can help sustain us. Prayer is a powerful way to unburden our concerns and connect with an all-powerful Creator. Though He may not answer our prayers the way we want, we can trust His way is best, and He will be there for us in our struggles.

There are things you can do to encourage your child's spiritual development. Take him/her to Sabbath school and church, encourage personal devotional time when older, have regular family worship and be a good role model yourself. Be willing to discuss your child's spiritual struggles in an open way. They are going to have questions along the way.

EXERCISE

How do you and your child cope with emotional distress? What new activity that you learned about today can you implement for yourself and your child?

ROLE OF PARENTS

As children age into adolescence and peers become more important, you may think you are no longer an important part of your child's life. That couldn't be farther from the truth! Developmentally teens have a greater awareness of what you have been teaching them and how it applies to their current and future lives. They will still struggle and argue with what you have to say, but they are listening more than you realize. Here are some tips that you can follow in order to help improve the emotional health of your children and yourself.

- Increase awareness. Do some research on the warning signs of mental distress and when to get professional help. Educate yourself on the unique struggles your child/ adolescent is facing in today's society.

- Monitor and limit social media usage. Research has found that kids who spend more time with non-screen activities (in-person social interaction, sports/exercise, homework, print media, and attending religious services) had lower rates of depression, so get them out there (Twenge, et al., 2017). Though you don't want to overschedule their lives, which can be just as destructive. Make sure there is enough time for play.
- Support. Listen and avoid lecturing. Look for opportunities when your child is more willing to open up. Put your screen away when your child comes to you with a problem. Your child will come to you with the big stuff if you are there for the little things.
- Stay calm. If you stay calm, your child will stay calmer during discipline. If you notice you are about to lose it, take an adult time out until your heart rate has returned to normal and you can think more rationally.
- Spend time together and have fun! It is normal for them to want to be with their peers more as they age. Look for service activities you can do together. You may have to be creative in looking for opportunities to connect, but don't give up!
- Be a good role model. Your kids are watching how you handle emotional distress. Demonstrate healthy coping and turning to God when you are suffering.
- Take care of yourself. Raising a child is the most difficult thing you will do in your life. You can't take care of your children if you aren't taking care of yourself.
- Single parenting has unique challenges. Try to be civil with your child's other parent. Counseling can help the two of you learn how to co-parent together. If there isn't another parent involved, look for an adult mentor who can give your child a different perspective and another adult who cares for him/her.
- Get help! You don't have to do this alone. In modern times we have lost our extended families. We were never meant to raise our children on our own. Connect with other parents or those who are retired and don't have family nearby.

For those who are raising children who have experienced trauma in the past, research has found ways to help heal the brain (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2014):

- Meet physical needs
- Provide stability
- Be consistent and predictable
- Identify trauma triggers
- Stay calm! When you notice your child becoming distressed, take a break, and relax using the tools mentioned before.
- Give your child choices and control as appropriate
- Spend quality time where you provide encouragement, make eye contact, mirror what your child is doing to build attachments, and give frequent affectionate touch (as your child is able to tolerate it).

There are special parenting courses for those who are raising a child who has experienced significant trauma in his/her life. Contact your local department of child and family services to find one in your area.

EXERCISE

What have you found that you do that helps your child's mental health?

GETTING HELP

All children and adolescents go through periods of emotional distress. When that distress lasts more than a few weeks and affects his/her functioning (academics, socially, or hygiene), it is time to get professional help. If there is any talk about not wanting to live and if your child mentions how he wants to end his life, call your child's doctor right away or take her to your local emergency room for an evaluation. It is okay to ask if your child is suicidal if you aren't sure, you won't be putting the idea in her head.

Professionals are needed to treat mental illness. To find a local counselor, ask your child's doctor or pastor. Check out websites in your area, meet with the counselor first, and be willing to try different ones that you and your child are comfortable with. Some mental health disorders are best treated with medication or in combination with counseling. Your child's doctor is the best judge of that, but do your own research as well. You don't have to do this alone!

EXERCISE

How can we get past the stigma of mental illness within the Christian/SDA community?

RESOURCES

GENERAL

- Kids Health <https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/eat-disorder.html>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness <https://www.nami.org>
- National Institute on Mental Health <https://nimh.nih.gov>

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

- Anxiety and Depression Disorder Association of America <https://adaa.org>

ATTENTION-DEFICIT/HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER

- Attention Deficit Disorder Association <https://add.org/>

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

- Autism Speaks <https://www.Autismspeaks.org>
- National Autism Association <https://nationalautismassociation.org/>

EATING DISORDERS

- National Eating Disorders Association <https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>

SUICIDE

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/> or 1-800-273-8255

TRAUMA

- Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/preventingACES-508.pdf>

COUNSELORS

- Substance abuse and/or mental health professionals <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>.

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LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

— The *Leadership Resources* are carefully selected to prepare you to address current and relevant topics as the Adventist Family Ministries leader in your local church.

INVOLVING CHILDREN IN SERVICE DEVELOPS GOOD CHARACTER

BY MAY-ELLEN COLÓN

EXAMPLE FROM SINGAPORE...

Kindergarten children from a local Seventh-day Adventist Kindergarten in Singapore—SDA K, are included in visitation in the homes of aged low-income residents who have been “adopted” for regular loving care by the Jurong Adventist Church.

“Pay It Forward” (PIF) day was first launched in 2009 in Yuhua Constituency in Singapore. Since then, other PIF Centers have been launched out of various Adventist Churches in other sections of Singapore. The idea behind PIF is to forward the blessings the givers have received to someone else, and then encourage them to further forward the blessings to another person. Each year on Pay It Forward Day, low-income recipients have been invited to lunch and a free health screening. They are provided with shopping vouchers or a sponsored shopping trip, and healthy food “hamper” (goodie bag).

In 2012 “Pay it Forward+” was introduced. In this program, Adventist Community Services volunteers and Wellness Ambassadors trained in health and nutrition bring systematic wholistic assistance to low-income aging residents one day/ month each. During the monthly visits the “Wellness Ambassadors” do health checks on the recipients and their families to be sure that they continue to make healthy choices. They also take time to talk to the recipients and their families to promote their emotional health and assisting however else they can.

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In 2014 “Pay it Forward+ Headstart” was added to PIF+ so that children can have a more meaningful and relevant experience in community service. That year, families with children from a Seventh-day Adventist Kindergarten (SDA K) followed various teams of Wellness Ambassadors. In SDA K, the children were taught simple exercises that can be done indoors. Then these children showed the recipient families how to do these exercises in the comfort of their own home. The same SDA K families went through a healthy food lesson and the children helped to share with their “adopted” families how to make simple and healthy food. The children in the serving families also helped choose healthy food for the healthy food hampers (goodie bags) that they give to their recipient families. The children presented the baskets to their recipients, with some personalized photo frames. The recipients of the services were especially happy to have cute and giving children visiting them.

Also, two SDA K classes were also involved during school hours in packing healthy food hampers for the Annual Pay It Forward Day.

The Pay It Forward+ Headstart Program continues to include children who help expedite loving, systematic services to those in need. Each year new service activities are added for the children to do. For example, one year, they did the following:

Kids did some household chores at home to fundraise to purchase wish list items for the recipients (wish list items include simple household items such as fans, induction cooker, etc.) Then they went to the homes to ask the recipients which wish list items they prefer, followed by going with adults to department stores to purchase those items.

Another year the focus was on mental wellness and reducing the risk of depression. The children were involved as recipients were brought on excursions to gardens and other places of interest. This was to get lonely people out of their homes so they wouldn't be so isolated.

OTHER CHILD INVOLVEMENT IDEAS

What other ideas do you have for involving children in community service? Here are a few that others have tried:

1. Aim to involve your children in at least one intentional act of kindness each week. If you are intentional about this, you will find yourselves doing many more than once per week, for giving brings joy and meaning in life to givers and receivers.
2. Go on mission trips as a family.
3. Make cards for nursing home residents, children of prisoners, sick children, and visit them.
4. Have a book/school supplies drive for children's books to give to children in hospitals or shelters.
5. Bake and decorate cookies for a community organization of the children's choosing.
6. Clean yards or shovel snow for the elderly or disabled.
7. Serve food to the homeless at a shelter.

8. Organize and play games with children who need after-school activities.
9. Pass out free inspirational literature at parks, bus stops, etc.
10. Do outdoor work, such as pick up litter at a park or beach, plant trees or flowers in the community, etc.
11. Help raise funds for refugee children/Choose an item in the ADRA Gift Catalog to fund, etc.
12. Do a puppet show in your neighborhood to teach about healthful living.

SERVICE AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

How do service activities help develop positive character traits in the lives of the involved children? Below are just a few:

1. The children become more aware of children who are less fortunate than they, and of pressing issues in today's society, instilling a sense of civic responsibility, and desire to be change agents.
2. When children see the huge needs and challenges others face, they will learn to appreciate what they have, and will likely show appreciation more readily.
3. They learn that every kind action can impact someone else's life (and so can unkind or irresponsible actions or lack of necessary actions). This teaches accountability, commitment, responsibility.
4. They learn to respect and care for the elderly, and to honor them. This inter-generation interaction bridges the generation gap and forms bonds of compassion and passion to help others.
5. In Pay It Forward+ Headstart, children learn to make healthy lifestyle choices because of what they taught the families they visited.
6. The parents of involved children are influenced to be more involved in the community through their children. (Character development for parents too-- "A little child shall lead them," Isaiah 11:6).
7. Service involving children develops courage, confidence, and self-worth, as they go out and meet and serve new people outside their comfort zones and see that they are tangibly making a difference.
8. When children share with others, they will likely want to know the stories of the people they help, and why they are needy. Then they put themselves in the shoes of these people and develop a capacity for empathy.
9. As children share their time and possessions with others, they learn the privilege and honor of being generous.
10. Service puts children's growing faith into action. Sometimes children will not be able to see the difference their kind acts make in people's lives, but they will learn to have faith that their kind acts will make a difference.

11. It provides an opportunity to use their gifts and talents to serve others, develop new skills, such as collaboration, leadership, and problem-solving skills.
12. When serving others, sometimes children are faced with a choice: themselves or others. Even though our children have needs too, offering them opportunities to sometimes choose others over themselves develops selflessness instead of self-centeredness, helping them understand that Christ calls us to a life of servanthood.

CONCLUSION

The Bible stories of a little maid in Naaman's home (2 Kings 5) and of the little boy who shared his little lunch with Jesus to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children (John 6), illustrate that involving children in service can make a big impact on others, and on their own characters. "Never repulse the desire of children to do something for Jesus. Never quench their ardor for working in some way for the Master" (Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 42). "Getting young people involved in mission and service is not an option for Christian growth and maturity—it is a necessity" (Jim Burns, *The Youthbuilder: Today's Resource for Relational Youth Ministry*).

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MINISTERING TO A BEREAVED SPOUSE

BY AUDREY ANDERSSON

As individuals, we are created to live in relationship with God and each other. Marriage is one of the closest and most beautiful expressions of relationship. When that bond is broken by death, life changes irrevocably for the surviving spouse. Death may occur after a long and happy life, following an illness, or suddenly, without any warning. However, it comes, people are rarely prepared for it.

Unfortunately, there is no grief manual, which teaches us the right way to grieve, or what to say and do in times of significant loss. The fact is that everyone relates differently to death and grieves in their own way. Some of this will be determined by culture, circumstances and when death occurs.

In June 2020, Adventist Possibility Ministries set up a new resource unit: Taskforce for the Bereaved for Spousal Loss, reflecting the biblical mandate to look after the widowed. The majority of the widowed are women. Men, too, experience spousal loss, and they should not be forgotten when considering how to care for the bereaved. They have quite distinct and separate needs from widows. The aim of the taskforce is to provide resources for local churches wanting to minister more effectively to people who have experienced spousal loss. Although the resources apply to this group, many will be relevant to people who have experienced other kinds of significant loss and bereavement. These resources may be accessed at <https://www.possibilityministries.org/>.

Knowing how to support the bereaved spouse as they respond to their loss and move forward is difficult. The feeling of powerlessness when confronting death is common. Comforters often feel uncomfortable as they do not know what to say or how to interact. There are simple steps that can be helpful. The following pointers are shared from the perspective of spousal loss.

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BEING PRESENT

Depending on a person's life circumstances, there may be family members who will be physically present immediately following a death. Contacting the person and letting them know that you are available is important. If they do not have family, make sure that they know there are people who can be with them as needed. This is not a one-time activity, rather something that should be repeated at regular intervals, so that the person knows that they are not alone. Many may think of this after death and before the funeral, but it is equally, if not more important, after the funeral.

It is also important to remember that the bereaved person may need time alone. Providing space can also be as important as being present.

LISTENING

Some cultures have a tradition of sitting with the bereaved spouse, and letting them tell the story of the person, their life and death. The Western world seems to have lost this art, listening to the bereaved talking of the person who died, their loss, their fears, their future. The list can be extensive. It is easy to feel that we, who are thinking more clearly and outside the grief bubble, know what is best for the bereaved. We don't! Resist the temptation to nudge, push or guide, just listen and support them. The art of listening can be healing to the bereaved.

PRACTICAL HELP

In the short term, following a bereavement, cooking meals, driving the person to the funeral home, helping with filling out forms, may be necessary. There are many small practical tasks that the person normally could do, but they may need help completing those tasks with the numbness of loss and grief.

When one dies, there may be tasks that someone is capable of but does not know how to perform them. In the mid to long term, find people who can help them learn what needs to be done. Equally, there will be tasks they cannot do. Find someone who can help. Three areas that are commonly identified are finances, technology, and security.

BUILDING BRIDGES

The loss of a spouse requires a period of adjustment and support. Suddenly they are single and alone. One thing that is particularly difficult for many is going to church without their spouse. A church family can ease that transition, with some simple steps.

- Offering to bring the person to church
- Inviting them in advance to sit with you
- In smaller churches where everyone knows each other, deacons can sensitively suggest or lead the person to sit with someone

- A creative idea adopted by the Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church in Takoma Park, Maryland, is giving a pin to bereaved people and inviting them to wear it to church. This is a discrete way of letting the deacons know that this person may require some extra care.¹

SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Family traditions vary. Some families have large birthday celebrations; for others, it is Name Days, Thanksgiving or Christmas. Find out what the family traditions were, write down the anniversary of the person's death, their birthday, and make contact at these milestones. Though the remaining spouse may be very sensitive on these occasions, knowing that they are not alone in remembering their loved one will ease the sense of loss.

SHARE THE MEMORIES AND USE THEIR NAME

When someone dies, there is a tendency not to mention them by name, saying, "your wife," or "your husband." Often this is done out respect or fear of causing pain. If the spouse mentions their name, there can be an awkward silence, as others are unsure how to react. Referring to them by name, affirms that they were real and their life mattered. Sharing memories can provide unimagined comfort.

None of the above are complicated or costly. When put into action, they can ease the pain of loss, encourage the bereaved, and help them transition into a new life phase.

NOTES

¹ The Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed a ministry for those who have lost a spouse through bereavement, divorce, or dementia, which can be replicated in other churches. More details may be found at: <https://heartlifters.org/>

MINISTERING TO GRIEVING CHILDREN: JESUS' EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF AND RESTORATION

BY S. JOSEPH KIDDER AND NATALIE DORLAND

When children experience grief, they display various emotions, becoming sad, scared, anxious, embarrassed, and even depressed. Traumatic losses leave children emotionally wounded, and some go through an identity crisis—all the while exhibiting normal parts of the agonizing grief process.¹ This is where the church plays a crucial role in the healing of a child who is grieving. Learning from the example of Jesus, church pastors, and members alike can aid in the healing and long-term spiritual health of a child who has experienced a significant loss.

REVEALING GOD'S LOVE

Professional counselors are the most qualified individuals to help children deal with grief and trauma after a significant loss. However, too often church members and pastors alike assume that the counselor will take care of the problem, so they don't need to worry about it. Yet a child's

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grief does not end after one hour of counseling per week. They still grieve at home, school, and church. This gives the pastor a unique opportunity to introduce Jesus as a personal Savior and Friend, as One who comforts them through the sad moments of life. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are- yet he did not sin.” Hebrews 4:15, NIV

As a spiritual leader, you *must* teach the children in your church about God’s power, His love, forgiveness, strength and that He alone is the Source they should turn to when they are sad. Teach them how to pray when they feel depressed or scared. Reveal God’s love in how you treat them and help them recognize that Jesus is the Safe Place they can turn to when they feel sad.

JESUS’ OWN GRIEF

While on earth, Jesus confronted grief in a variety of ways. By looking at examples from His ministry, we can learn how Jesus dealt with pain and heartache, as well as ways to guide children through their own grief.

Jesus, like most of us, experienced multiple losses during His life on earth. He witnessed how strict Roman rule affected families around Him. He felt pain seeing the tormented life of individuals filled with demons. Jesus likely lost His earthly father, Joseph, while he was a young man. His cousin, John the Baptist, was killed tragically as well. Jesus’ tears were significant enough to be recorded at Lazarus’ death.

Jesus was not afraid to show emotion when he received tragic news. He cried, took time to be alone, and spent hours in prayer.² By crying visibly in front of others, Jesus showed that expressing sadness is normal and an important part of the grieving process. His expression of grief permitted others to show their sadness as well. Sharing your own grief in calm, responsible, appropriate ways shows a child that expressing grief is a normal and acceptable response to what has happened.³

Let children know that it is okay for them to cry when they are sad and miss the person who is now absent from their life.⁴ “God wants people to be honest with Him about their feelings.”⁵ Do not try to stifle them, tell them to be quiet, or ask them not to cry. Instead, give them a hug, tell them you are sad too, sit with them while they cry, offer a stuffed animal for them to squeeze, and tissue for them to dry their face with.⁶ Share with them this story and tell them how Jesus cried when His friend died. But also remind them that Jesus raised Lazarus from death, and that we have hope that someday Jesus will raise all our friends from death as well.

While not as obvious as the death of a loved one, children often experience grief when a huge life change happens, such as moving to a new city. They naturally miss their old playmates, are scared of attending a new school and making new friends, and struggle with the loss of stability that comes with a big move. For a child struggling with an upcoming move, or one who has recently moved to your church or school and misses their old home, remind them that Jesus moved as a child too! Not only did he move from one city to another, but from one country to another! He was born in Bethlehem, spent time as a young child in Egypt (Matthew 2), and then was raised in Nazareth- three completely different cultural communities. One near a big city, one in a

foreign country, and the last in a country village. Take time to introduce a new child in your church to other children, invite their families and others to your home for a Sabbath meal. Be intentional about making new connections possible.

If you know anyone in the town they are moving to, contact them and ask them to welcome the new family, helping introduce them to a new school or church in the area. Ask the child to tell you what upcoming change they are excited about and rejoice with them over their new circumstances. Help them look for the positive parts of change in their lives and make a list or draw a picture of what that will be like!

THE HEALING MINISTRY OF JESUS

Jesus' ministry to children and His own response to grief while on earth gives the best example of how to treat children who are grieving.

1. HIS MINISTRY OF CARE AND LOVE

“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.” Psalm 56:8 (NLT)

By metaphorically keeping our tears in a bottle God remembers the pain and sorrows we have been through. Remind children that God knows every loss they have experienced, and He has seen each tear on their cheek. Explain to children that God is there to comfort them and bring them to happiness again.

Our tears are not forgotten by God. Revelation 21:4 reminds us that through His power, there will one day be no more death, crying, mourning or pain, for the old order of things will pass away. This heavenly promise is also a reminder that healing can be experienced on earth as well, and with Jesus' healing power, children will experience joy again on this earth too.⁷

2. HIS MINISTRY OF HELPING AND HEALING

“The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to *the* poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted...” Luke 4:18-19 (Christian Standard Bible)

Jesus, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, was able to heal others both physically and spiritually while on earth. Today Jesus still empowers church members as they minister to the brokenhearted and works with Him to heal those who are grieving.⁸

3. HIS MINISTRY OF FAITH AND HOPE

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” John 10:10

Helping children understand that they aren't alone in their spiritual journey is essential. Jesus is present with them, the Holy Spirit will continue to guide them, and the Father always loves them. And though they have suffered a great loss, God wants them to have an abundant life even after experiencing deep pain. God's intention is for children to move from just surviving pain and disappointment to living a thriving, fulfilling and meaningful life.

Young people are often pushed aside when a major loss takes place and their emotional experience is forgotten by the grieving adults around them. Pastors have a responsibility to care for the needs of grieving children just as much as for the adults in their church. There are many examples from the life of Jesus that are helpful in learning how to effectively minister to children.

JESUS TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

Jesus treated children with as much respect as any adult He encountered. He didn't talk to them as if they could not understand. There is no better standard of how to treat children than Jesus' example of compassion, kindness and love. Jesus knew the tender heart of a child and was inclusive of them. When the disciples pushed the children away Jesus famously said in Mark 10:13-15:

“And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belong the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’”

The disciples' rejection of the children likely caused them pain. No one likes feeling rejected or pushed away. Jesus noticed the children's sadness and accepted them, scolding the disciples for sending them away. “And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them” Mark 10:16, ESV. In this moment Jesus showed attentiveness, care, affection, love, and protection as He showed the children that they were valuable to Him.

The Greek word for “bringing children” to Jesus is *prosphero*. It suggests they brought the children to Jesus for a dedication or special blessing from Him. The disciples, however, did not want this. They felt Jesus had more important things to do with His time than attending to children!

To show a contrast between the disciples' attitudes and Jesus' perspective, Mark uses an intense word for Jesus' blessing. The Greek indicates that Jesus “fervently/passionately blessed them.” This word shows that Jesus was making a powerful statement, as if to say: “This *is* an important part of my work: paying attention to children.”⁹

When children grieve, they often show their emotions in dramatic ways, such as crying. Adults instinctively want to calm these outward displays of emotion, but Jesus taught us that going through the process of grieving is normal. After Lazarus' death, Jesus is found weeping in John 11. Even though the Creator of the universe knew in a few moments Lazarus would be raised from death, He still felt the emotions of grief. He gave permission for those around Him to grieve, and they saw how much He cared because He let himself cry.

After John the Baptist, Jesus' own relative, was beheaded while in prison, Jesus needed to be alone to grieve. Matthew 14:13 (ESV) says, "...he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself..." Even Jesus felt the pangs of loss and needed to grieve the loss of his relative. But what Jesus does next reveals one key to grief recovery that can be used to help children navigate the grief process and move on from a devastating loss.

What does Jesus do after taking time away? He ministers. He helps others. He healed people and fed the 5000! One healthy part of recovery is serving others and finding a purpose in life. Guiding children to do something meaningful helps them move on and find joy again.

FROM PAIN TO PEACE

Megan, a young girl in my (Natalie's) previous church, had gone through significant childhood trauma and experienced multiple types of loss. No matter how many times she saw her counselor, she still needed God's presence to help her cope. She wanted to trust God but was scared. Through the help of spiritual mentors like her Pathfinder leaders, grade schoolteacher, and pastors, she began to read the Bible for herself and discovered that Jesus also experienced grief and pain in His life. Megan learned that she could trust Him with her pain because she knew He could relate to what she was going through.

During one of our many meetings, she opened up about feeling pain from the lack of her father's presence in her life, the grief from recently losing her grandfather, and the trauma she experienced as a result of abuse in early childhood. After we prayed together, she started sharing about her growing relationship with God and how He was helping her heal. She had learned to look to Jesus as her source of Comfort. He helped her grow out of a place of constant pain into a life of joy and hope for the future.

Whenever she was scared or sad, she learned to pray and claim God's promises. Then she felt Jesus' hugs and the presence of angels all around her. She learned to memorize scriptures like the Psalms, and hearing God's voice through His Word speaking to her heart comforting her. I watched as her desire for God grew and rejoiced when she gave her heart to Jesus in baptism. God's presence in her life transformed her from the inside out, and she now lives in the freedom God gave her from her grief, pain and trauma. She went on to minister to others by handing out books about Jesus to friends, neighbors and anyone she meets! She has dreams of being a missionary and sharing Jesus' love and message of healing around the world.

CONCLUSION

Pastors have a responsibility to care for the needs of grieving children just as much as for the adults in their church. The church plays a crucial role in the healing of a child who has suffered loss. As we follow to the example of Jesus, church pastors and members are able to aid in the healing and long-term spiritual health of a child who is grieving.

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LEADERSHIP RESOURCES FOR GREATER CULTURAL AND RACIAL UNDERSTANDING

— This new section is meant to raise your awareness level on the issue of racial and cultural inequality, that as Christian leaders we must grasp clearly in order to take a decisive stand. After all, if God is our Father, then we are all brothers and sisters, members of the same family.

PARENTING CHILDREN FOR CHRISTIAN INTERRACIAL FRIENDSHIPS

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT RACISM

The traumatic killing of George Floyd—a Black man—by a White police officer—Derek Chauvin—in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020, prompted angry protests around the world and dominated conversations about race and racism in private and public spaces everywhere. While much of this conversation is often uncomfortable, Christian parents have at once the responsibility and an exceptional opportunity to teach their children how to appreciate the beautiful diversity of all God’s children.

Discussions about race are difficult for most adults and even more difficult to talk about with children. Yet, Christian parents must find ways to discuss this important topic with their children as they’re growing up, because they will learn from their spoken and unspoken messages. For what parents say is as important as what they don’t say; just as what they do is as significant as what they don’t do, communicating what is highly valued in their homes.

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TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT RACIAL BIAS

To be sure, the tragic and racially charged event referenced above left many parents—especially parents of color—wrestling with their own emotions, their hopes for their children’s future, and the challenge to help them blossom in a world rife with racial discrimination. Yet, if parents had a better understanding of how racial bias impacts children and had strategies in place to assist them in dealing with and reacting to racial differences, they would manage with greater ease the unrest experienced during the past several weeks.

HOW CHILDREN LEARN RACIAL BIAS

From a very early age, children tend to learn about racial differences and racial bias from their first teachers—their parents—and how to deal with and react to these differences. Learning about racial bias is similar to learning a new language. For example, we know that children raised in a bilingual setting learn their second language more easily than a monolingual speaker who begins to learn a second language in junior high. A critical early learning period is determined by biology. And in some equivalent way, learning well about racial bias becomes much harder if that learning takes place at a later time.

As early as 6 months, a baby’s brain is able to detect race-based differences.

By ages 2 to 4, children are able to internalize racial bias.

By age 12, many children become set in their beliefs—giving parents a decade to shape the learning process so that it diminishes racial bias and increases cultural understanding.

In much the same manner as learning a new language is easier when one is immersed in the environment where the language is spoken, children exposed to society will gain fluency in racial bias even if their parents do nothing.

STRATEGIES TO HELP CHILDREN DEAL WITH RACIAL BIAS

Three highly important strategies parents may employ to help their children deal with racial bias are:

1. **Talk to your children** and acknowledge that racial distinctions and bias exist.
2. **Confront your own bias** and model how you want your children to behave in response to others who may be different from they are.
3. **Encourage your children to challenge racial stereotypes and racial bias** by being kind and compassionate when communicating with people of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.¹

When parents model empathy, compassion, and kindness to others—regardless of their race, ethnicity, caste, or tribe—they send a powerful and character-developing message to their children against the powerful evil they cannot help seeing. On May 25, 2020, something terrible and evil happened on the streets of Minneapolis, Minnesota. It was all caught on camera for the world, including the world’s kids, to see again and again in nonstop cable news broadcasts around the world. Our kids saw a man abused in public and die at the hands of an authority figure whose job it was to protect the citizenry and foster peace. At such times, kids need to be able to reference some awesome good—empathy, compassion, and kindness at least as powerful as the evil they’ve witnessed.

CHILDREN ARE LISTENING

Musing about multiple racially charged incidents that fueled a recent global outcry, Ella Smith Simmons challenges the response to such atrocities by some professed Christians. She exclaims: “How can this be? I ask this of all of us who consider ourselves converted and reasonably mature spiritually. How can we claim justification and sanctification in Jesus Christ and turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to racism and its ravages in any form?”²

And Ellen White reflects: “The Lord Jesus came to our world to save men and women of all nationalities. He died just as much for the colored people as for the white race. Jesus came to shed light over the whole world. . . . He loves them all, and makes no difference between white and black.”³

Considering these thought-provoking realities, Christian parents are aptly positioned to seize this historically significant moment that has met us. As compassionate Christian parents we can guide our children to a preferred future in interracial relationships. We know full well that our children of almost every age are hearing about what is taking place in the society around them. Chances are they are overhearing adult conversations, watching footage of a video on YouTube, or watching news coverage of peaceful and violent protests. It’s safe to assume they may feel afraid for their own safety or their family’s safety. They might have questions about what the protests mean, why people have been killed by police, and whether they are safe.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND

If at all possible you should talk with your children in ways they’re able to understand, before waiting for them to hear about what’s happening from other people or other sources. When you talk to your children, keep the following points in mind:

Check in with your child. You may want to ask your children what they know, what they’ve seen, and how they’re feeling. Tell them you understand how they may be feeling and validate the feelings and emotions they may be experiencing. You know your child/children best and what information they can handle. When dealing with younger children, take the time to

patiently share with them what you're doing to keep your family safe. When dealing with pre-teens and older children, ask if they've ever experienced ill-treatment or racism, or if they've experienced it happening to someone else.

Watch for changes in your child's behavior. Some children may become more hostile, while others may become inhibited or fearful. If you're concerned that your child may be having a difficult time with anxiety, fear, or distress, call your pediatrician or mental health provider for added support.

Limit what your child sees in the media. Avoid leaving the TV on in the background. With older children and teens, you should watch with them and talk together about what you're seeing. Give careful attention to their observations, and share your own perspective on what's taking place. Use commercial breaks or pause the video to have brief discussions about what you're watching or have just witnessed on TV. With younger children, limit TV watching and smartphone or tablet use, especially when the news is on. Make sure that whatever media they are consuming is occurring in the common areas of your home where you can easily and readily check on them.

Be aware of your own emotions. As an adult it's vital to tune into how you're feeling and ensure that you're OK. If you're not doing well or are unable to cope, ask for help to deal with the trauma and emotional shock the events and images may be having on you. Also, make a list of your own coping strategies, and when you need to employ them, check with your list.

Use this teachable moment. This is a good opportunity for families of every race to discuss the history of racism and discrimination in the country they're living in and decide as a family how they may get involved to be agents of change in their society.

Take advantage of the right resources—good resources can help. If you find yourself having difficulty finding the right words to share with your children during these times, don't be afraid to use good books or other resources that might help you communicate effectively about this topic with your children. The tips shared above may also be helpful. This is a good time to remind your children that no one is perfect. Also discuss what you've learned during this time of unrest and what you can do as a family to step up your efforts to not only say you're not racist but to be anti-racist.

TALK AND ACT

It's OK to admit that people are treated differently based on the color of their skin, their ethnicity, their caste, their tribe, their gender, or where they might live, and give examples of where this is currently happening, if you know. This is also a prime opportunity to show your children how to make a positive difference. For example, your family may decide to be proactive by pursuing how your church or other institution deals with differences. You may also decide to call your city council person or superintendent of schools or some other local politician to advocate for issues faced by communities of color or people groups marginalized because of their ethnicity, caste, or

tribe. Challenge your own biases, and share with your children how you would like them to treat people who are from a different country, culture, race, tribe, or social class.

REMEMBER

These are the kinds of conversations many Black American families have had for years. Nevertheless, if this isn't something your family has discussed as yet, recent racial unrest around the world may be used as a teachable moment. The truth is, if there's going to be progress anywhere in the world where racial, ethnic, caste, or tribal inequality prevails—even if that place is our church or school—it will be because we help our children, adolescents, and young adults learn not just that racism and inequality exist, but that all of us can work together to dismantle them.⁴ This is especially important for people who represent Jesus Christ.

As Jesus declares: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35, NKJV).⁵ Christian parents working through the power and grace of God to raise their children for healthy interracial relationships may become the catalyst for transformation in our homes, churches, and institutions. Such a reality will create spaces filled with harmony, reconciliation, and peace branded by the inestimable and unshakable love of God.

This is our prayer for every family who sincerely wants to represent Jesus Christ.

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GET OFF THE BANK

BY JEFFREY BROWN

We used to play a game at church socials called “In the River, on the Bank.” One side of a dividing line was the “river” and the other side was the “bank.” When the leader shouted, “In the river,” we would jump forward into the river. When the leader shouted, “On the bank,” we would jump backward to the bank.

What disturbed your flow was when the leader shouted, “On the bank,” then, “On the bank.” If you jumped when you should stay—or stayed when you should jump—you were disqualified. The key was to listen to the voice of the leader and be in the right spot at the right time.

LEARNING ON THE BANK

Much has happened while we were on the bank. Millions have been affected by the deaths from an unknown disease, and millions have been impacted by the deaths of unarmed African Americans. Our leaders, civic and religious, have alternated between staying on the bank for personal health and jumping into the river for community healing. Should we be in the river or on the bank?

Sometimes it’s difficult to discern the voice of the Leader. The disciples stayed on the bank, obeying the voice of the Leader (Acts 1:4). David stayed on the bank, disobeying the voice of the Leader (2 Sam. 11:1). Neither the river nor the bank is intrinsically bad. The key is to do the right thing at the right time.

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On the bank, there will be condemnation. The Adventist Development and Relief Agency stated, “George Floyd did not deserve to die. Ahmaud Arbery did not deserve to die. Breonna Taylor did not deserve to die. The United States was founded on Christian beliefs but built on the backs of slaves. That paradox disgraces us to this day and shames all who do not speak out on behalf of equality and justice.”¹

On the bank, there will be confrontation. The National Council on Family Relations acknowledge, “Now is a time to listen—to actively listen—and reflect. We must listen and learn from our Black, Brown, and other racial minoritized colleagues, students, and families we serve. And with listening and learning, we must strive to more deeply understand the complex issues of racism and inequality that systematically prevent racially minoritized families from enjoying the same freedoms and opportunities as other families.”²

LEAVING FOR THE RIVER

When the Spirit comes—when learning has taken root—it’s time to get off the bank. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18, NKJV).

In the river, there will be compensation. Ellen White stated, “The American nation owes a debt of love to the colored race, and God has ordained that they should make restitution for the wrong they have done them in the past. Those who have taken no active part in enforcing slavery upon the colored people are not relieved from the responsibility of making special efforts to remove, as far as possible, the sure result of their enslavement.”³

AdventHealth declared, “We must be humble enough to learn how to best equip our organization, and change our behavior, in order to meet needs. This morning, we started... listening to some of our organization’s African American leaders... It is no longer good enough to personally acknowledge that we are not racist. We must become anti-racist advocates. Let us loose the chains of injustice, together.”⁴ They acknowledged it was a beginning.

Paul testified, “I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27, NKJV). You can be disqualified by oppressive conduct in the river. You can also be disqualified by inactive conduct on the bank.

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LOVE IS AN ACTION WORD

BY ELLA SMITH SIMMONS

It is positively amazing: this rare blend of voices throughout the world denouncing racism in word and deed through their supportive responses to the public protests in the United States. Surely this movement is more than human. I am convinced and encouraged that God is working in supernatural ways in aligning conditions for these final days of earth's history.

With this I am compelled to an even greater degree to address the fact that after the shock and outrage at painful atrocities, such as the heinous killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and most recently, Rayshard Brooks, some seem ready to return to an unhealthy, inhumane business and ministry as usual, only praying and hoping for that better day of change somewhere in a nebulous future. Some meekly acquiesce to a misguided inertia that forbids responsibility to address these sins in this life and relegates harmonious human relationships to heaven and the new earth.

HOW CAN THIS BE?

How can this be? I ask this of all of us who consider ourselves converted and reasonably mature spiritually. How can we claim justification and sanctification in Jesus Christ and turn a deaf ear and a blind eye to racism and its ravages in any form? How can we proclaim the gospel to all the world if we will not live it properly? Has the power of systemic racism rendered us numb? Do we just try to fly under society's radar to avoid its ire? Have we fallen into a spirit of fear?

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Yes, there have been improvements in our society over time. But there have been too many setbacks, and victory over the sin of racism is still very far away. Langston Hughes captures the journey for some of us in his poem, “Mother to Son,” in which he declares through the cadence and dialect of old southern vernacular, that however difficult the journey, we must continue to climb. God is calling us to new heights:

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.
But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners,
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you finds it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin',
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

Hughes' poem is illustrative of Paul's observation: “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body” (2 Cor. 4:8-10).

A FEARLESS STAND?

This unequivocal statement articulates both our firm belief and our obligatory responsibility to each other and to all humankind. Racism, classifying groups of people as either inferior or superior inclusive of its related practices, is clearly antithetical to our stated beliefs. Indeed, it violates all elements of biblical injunctions and models for human relationships. Jesus said that all people will know that we are His if we love one another as He loves us.

The converse is obvious: if we do not live this love for and with all human beings, it casts doubt on any claimed relationship with Jesus. Salvation is impossible without that relationship.

We people of the Book know the origin of racism. As with all other schemes of the enemy, we must reject it, call it out wherever it exists, and actively oppose it within the church and throughout society. We must be on guard to discern all of its cunning deceptions and must respond fearlessly in the spirit, authority, and power of Jesus, who calls us into His service “to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts” (Isa. 58:6, Message).¹

We recognize racist myths and deceptions for what they are—slurs on the character of God, our common Father. Creationists by the millions have bought into Darwinian mendacity about ethnic differences ascribed to fictional stages of evolutionary development from animal to human. Even many who declare the equal value of all people sometimes act as if they believe God created different races or ethnic groups for different purposes, some for leadership or management, some for the performing arts, or athletics, or slavery, etc. Surely, we people of the Book do not ascribe any credence to these.

So what is the problem? Fear, pride, desire for power, and control?

I wonder about our theology: are we waiting for some supernatural power to impose a new relational order in which we as a body actually model our fundamental beliefs? While many individuals are faithful, should not a great majority of Seventh-day Adventist Christians exemplify the character of Christ? Who can say we should not lead society’s search for common justice?

We love Micah’s call to act justly, love mercy, and live humbly under God, not taking ourselves too seriously, but taking God seriously (see Micah 6:8, Message). We are called to act justly, not just think and preach about justice.

In avoiding this responsibility, many shrink behind admonitions to refrain from involvement in politics. But if secular society is pursuing and achieving constructs and dynamics congruent with God’s will and plan for human relationships, why would Christians resist their emulation? God has used secular powers repeatedly to do His will (see Isa. 45:1; Jer. 25:9; Dan. 2:21; 4:17).

Unfortunately, we have gone along with unsavory elements of public policy and the practice of oppression at times. We have held to divisive practices far beyond the need to preserve our church’s unique witness. Those postures cannot continue. A pervasive change has to come among the people of God if we truly aspire to the blessed hope.

Whether laws change hearts or not, we need to be held to correct behaviors. Moreover, correct behavior must sometimes precede the internalization and ownership of laws and values. If we take to heart our fourteenth fundamental belief, toleration and facilitation of injustice among or around us is inconceivable or a function of hypocrisy.

TIME FOR ACTION

The United States is under the world’s magnifying glass with a focus on the inevitably explosive consequences of its racism, the knee on the neck. A writer in the current issue of *National*

Geographic likens the killing of George Floyd to the lynchings of days gone by and “the ultimate display of power of one human being over another.”²

The words of Frederick Douglass, former Maryland slave, scholar, orator, writer, social reformer, anthropologist, statesman, and friend of his Adventist contemporaries, spoken August 1857 in Canandaigua, New York, are apropos at this point. He said, “The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims have been born of earnest struggle. . . If there is no struggle, there is no progress. . . Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

When we see what the process of struggle looks like in the public arena, we wonder if the Adventist Church believes Douglass. We know that for gain, there must be struggle, but ours should be one in which things are spiritually discerned and accomplished. The church, as an institution, must acknowledge that racism and oppression exist, and that racism and oppression are sins. There must be an honest admission that we all are susceptible to its effects.

Humans are being born in this sin and shaped in its iniquity, and Adventism has become “so well-adjusted to [the] culture that [we] fit into it without even thinking” (Rom. 12:2, Message). Thank God this is not our unalterable fate! We can overcome by the grace and power of the Almighty, working both in and through us—and it must be both. While the slower of us try to figure it out, let us just do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.

We must act. I pray that we muster the courage to return to historic Adventism when we led in the public square; when we fought against slavery, racism, and the marginalization of minorities. We need that now—in the pulpit, classroom, boardroom, hospital, mission field, private home, wherever. We as a church body need to preach and teach against racism and other oppressive structures, and in favor of healthy God-ordained human relations as much as against harmful substances and in favor of healthy eating. We need God’s Word as a teacher, and Jesus, the Word made flesh, as the gold standard.

Jesus, both in word and deed, fought all forces of evil including racism and oppression. We see this in His deliberately orchestrated meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well to the dismay of His disciples, who demonstrated unapologetically the accepted racist practices of their day. We hear His parable of the good Samaritan, calling the church to task—not to condemn, but to grow and to save.

And for our own times, He has given His special messenger. She writes, “Many had lost sight of Jesus. They needed to have their eyes directed to His divine person, His merits, and His changeless love for the human family.”³ She urges, “The last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character, they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.”⁴ She encourages: “In visions of the night, representations passed before me of a great reformatory movement among God’s people. Many were praising God. The sick were healed, and other miracles were wrought.”⁵

MY FAITH SAYS YES

This reform movement includes the eradication of racism and healing of its oppressive effects among us and the achievement of that love to which Jesus called us—that love by which the world will know we are Christians. Isaiah says: “Shout! A full-throated shout! . . . Tell my people what’s wrong with their lives. . . To all appearances, they’re a nation of right-living people—law-abiding, God-honoring. They ask me, ‘What’s the right thing to do?’” (Isa. 58:1, 2, Message).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is blessed with God’s complete message for these last days. We are a wonderful, worldwide fellowship of loving people. So, this time, after the shock, the outrage, and the pain of the enemy’s atrocities, let us not return to an unhealthy, inhumane business and ministry as usual, only praying and hoping for that better day of change.

It’s time to get off our knees, like Joshua (Joshua 7:6-13); time to stop praying and move forward. So, let us arise and “let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!” (Amos 5:24).

I can feel the moving now.

NOTES

- ¹ Texts credited to Message are from The Message. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.
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THE GOSPEL DEFEATS RACISM

BY KAYLE B. de WAAL

FOR PETER AND FOR US IN THE PRESENT DAY, THE SPIRIT OF JESUS ROOTS OUT THE SIN OF PREJUDICE

The tragic and senseless killing of George Floyd in the United States on May 25 has brought the issue of racism and police brutality to the fore once more. His murder has reached deeply into the hearts of people all over the world. It has sparked anger, disgust, and protest, first in Minneapolis and then across the globe, from hundreds of thousands of people.

Racism is defined as “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one’s own race is superior.” In short, racism is sin, and because it is sin, it doesn’t always manifest itself as it did with Derek Chauvin pinning George Floyd down with a knee on his neck. Rather, it manifests itself in subtle and nuanced ways in institutional prejudice toward people of color by limiting access to student loans or serving up minimal community municipal services. It has shown itself in systematic racism through overt redlining in the past and by digital and reverse redlining in the present. It manifests itself on the personal level in the false assumption that you are superior to me, or that I am better than you.

It displays itself in subtle antagonism toward the advancement of people of color. Its selfishness is hidden under the pretense of sophistication, corporate tokenism, societal niceties, shallow acquaintance, and the occasional explosion of rude, raw, and rotten nature through confrontation, violence, and, yes, death.

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Because I was born and raised in South Africa, and because I'm a person of color, I know firsthand what racism looks like — how easily it is dismissed by white folk. “Oh, apartheid was not that bad,” they murmur, not wanting to acknowledge their privilege or the inequality and injustice the system bred. I've witnessed the dehumanizing conditions under which Blacks have lived for decades.

The truth is, in every place I've worked — New Zealand, Australia, and South Korea — I've seen racism. The current protests are global because racism is part of the human condition. That's why I know that my own heart is far from good, far from noble, and that I'm in desperate need of grace.

On a personal level, we acknowledge sin, and we confess and repent. The Lord forgives and restores us (1 John 1:9), and we press forward to the prize of the high calling in Christ (Phil. 3:14). But because racism is personal and societal, structural and systematic, and because contemporary Blacks and people of color have endured decades and centuries of racism, it can't be dismissed. We can't say All Lives Matter, because all lives have not mattered. We can't say, “We've spoken about racism, now let's move on,” because Blacks have experienced and are experiencing racism now. Our culture and nations are still unjust and unequal.

PAUL, PETER, AND RACISM?

The Galatian church had struggled with following Paul's teaching on righteousness by faith because some troublemakers from Jerusalem had infiltrated the church and begun to champion another gospel (Gal. 1:7, 8). These provocateurs advocated that salvation could be attained by faith in Jesus plus obedience to certain Jewish practices. Paul recounts his meeting with the Jerusalem leaders in Galatians 2:1-10 and contends that when he finally met with them about his evangelism among the Gentiles, they endorsed his God-given role. Then he talks about an encounter with Peter, recorded in verses 11-14 (NIV):

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Peter had come to Antioch to check out the good work that Paul was doing. In all likelihood, this occurred after the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. At Antioch, Peter discovered Jews and Gentiles eating together, and so he joined in. He no doubt recalled the rooftop vision of the sheet when God told him, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10:15, NIV).

When the circumcision party arrived from Jerusalem, however, Peter distanced himself from the Gentiles with whom he had previously been fellowshiping. In the first-century culture, eating together demonstrated social acceptance. Peter was more afraid of people (Gal. 2:12) than he was of God. Here's Peter, born-again, filled-with-the-Holy-Spirit Peter, acting as a hypocrite. He

assumed that because he was superior to the Gentiles, he could treat them in any way he pleased. He could eat with them when no one important was watching but didn't need to eat with them when someone important was watching. His behavior wasn't determined by his convictions but by the actions of others, or their proximity to him. Peter and those who followed his example knew they were wrong but pretended they were right. Paul states that even Barnabas, who is otherwise always depicted in a positive light in the New Testament, was led astray (v. 13).

Peter's hypocritical actions reveal his ethnocentrism and racism. If, as we have suggested, racism is insidious and subtle, then Peter was demonstrating his ethnic and racial bigotry by his actions toward Gentiles. To save face, Peter chose not to listen to the Spirit, nor to the vision he received from God in Acts 10. Instead, he chose to follow his sinful nature, distancing himself from Gentiles because of the visit of the troublemakers from Jerusalem.

The candid description of Peter in Scripture serves as a witness and encouragement to us all. Scripture doesn't hide the flaws of its leading characters. On the one hand, Peter can declare that Christ is the Son of God (Matt. 16:15-17). On the other, Jesus can rebuke him (vv. 22, 23). We see his betrayal of Christ in the gospels (Matt. 26:69-75), and we hear the tender invitation of Christ for the disciples and Peter to come and meet Him in Galilee (Mark 16:7). We read of Peter's powerful preaching in Acts 2 and now his failure in Galatians 2. In spite of Peter's weakness and failure, God still used him.

THE TRANSFORMING POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Paul lays down a powerful principle in dealing with Peter's racial pride. He argues that Peter hasn't been acting "in line with the truth of the gospel" (v. 14, NIV). The truth of the gospel is the immeasurable and unfailing love of God for all who believe (Gal. 1:6, 15; 2:9a, 16, 21), and thus, the freedom of Gentile believers without the imposition of the law (Gal. 2:4, 5). The phrase "in line" is a translation of *orthopodeō*, the basis for our English word "orthopedics." It means "to walk straight or upright." It denotes unwavering, upright, sincere conduct—not the unsteady, hypocritical course followed by Peter.

In effect, Paul was saying that the gospel provides power for righteous living (Rom. 1:16). The gospel must be applied, therefore, to every aspect of our lives — spiritual, corporate, social, and physical — by our living out the "lines" or implications of the gospel. Paul writes in Philippians 2:12, 13: "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (NIV).

We work out the lines of the gospel as we live our lives each day in and through the work of God in us. The gospel must be given a "workout" in every area of our thinking, relating, serving, feeling, and behaving.

Confession and repentance are what make the gospel operative in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. Confession and repentance build bridges, foster unity, and deepen

relationships. It takes courage — courage God will supply — to confess and repent. Repentance is godly sorrow (1 Cor. 5:7). That sorrow acknowledges that I’m a broken sinner, that my life is deserving of death, eternal death, and that I’m in desperate need of a Savior who can rescue me, redeem me, and restore me. That sorrow never leaves, but it deepens as my walk with Jesus matures — not because of the wrong things I’m doing, but because the closer I get to Jesus, the more I see how far I actually am from Him. The paradox of the Christian journey is that we never arrive, at least until the Lord returns.

The immeasurable and unfailing love of God manifested in the gospel of Jesus Christ empowers new living. Repentance is turning a corner, changing direction, and heading in a new path. We need to repent of our racism — corporately, personally, socially — to make this world a better place. Repentance is a movement of God’s Spirit deep in my heart that brings a godly sorrow — sorrow that changes the direction of my life, my society, my church, my workplace, my family, and my culture. Only God can do it, if we are willing!

Growing into Christlikeness — sanctification — is a life’s journey. Ellen White writes: “All true obedience comes from the heart” (*The Desire of Ages*, 668). The Lord desires the continual transformation of our hearts on this journey.

Sanctification isn’t about getting to heaven but about getting heaven into me. Paul urges Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12), not the bad fight of sin. May we continue to fight this good fight of living our faith, with the power that God supplies so that Jesus Christ will be revealed, and His mission will advance.

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WHY IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO SAY 'I AM NOT A RACIST'

BY BERNIE HOLFORD

Racism is not only morally wrong; it is a sin. As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we are very concerned about sin and like to define it so that we can recognize and avoid it. We cite 'Sin is the transgression of the law' (1 John 3:4), and we hope that, by keeping all the ten commandments, we will be counted with Jesus' sheep on judgment day (Matthew 25:32, forwards).

However, from Matthew 5:21 forwards, Jesus challenges this minimal definition of sin. Sin is not just the physical act but an attitude. He redefines the sin of murder as inappropriate anger against a fellow human being. Sin is more pervasive than the legal definition implies. In a similar way, racism is more deeply rooted than many of us have acknowledged.

Since the death of George Floyd on 25th May, I have learned that it is not enough to say, 'I'm not a racist because I don't use the 'N-word and have black friends.' Like the sin problem, my unconscious racism is deeply embedded in my identity and history.

As a white Englishman (with a German mother), I have tried to re-evaluate my cultural identity. Simply being white has given me and my family opportunities and privileges that my black and minority ethnic (BAME) friends have had to work hard to achieve.

The first time I was told about 'white privilege' I rejected the idea. As a child of a long line of proud working-class ancestors, I could easily talk about 'middle class' privilege and how hard my parents had to work to climb the so-called 'social ladder.' The second time I tried to get my head around the concept of 'white privilege,' my mind began to understand that my history was like chalk and cheese when compared to my BAME friends' experiences. But I still struggled with the

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idea that I was a benefactor of 'white privilege' until a black friend said, 'I can get educated, but can never change the color of my skin!'

As I prayed and pondered about this, a black friend patiently shared their story. As a BAME person, they would always be regarded by many people as 'inferior'. It was as if God suddenly said to me, 'Listen to their story with compassion and not judgment.' God opened my heart to realize how arrogant and indifferent my attitude had been to the racial suffering of my brothers and sisters in Christ.

A few weeks ago, I confessed to my largely black congregation that I was sorry that I've been such a slow learner and pledged to ask God to help me fight for justice as the Bible teaches.

I am proud to be British, and, in my lifetime, I have experienced a reduction of racism following the terrible injustices of our colonial past. However, when I listen to my BAME friends' accounts of prejudice and often racial violence, I have to accept that racism, like sexism, is still prevalent. Jesus calls the majority to help the afflicted minority (Luke 4:18). As a white Christian, it is my calling to stand with the oppressed and speak out against all forms of injustice.

Most people I talk with know that I'm a pastor, and they don't use racist language around me. Occasionally, when talking to neighbors, I may hear a racist insinuation. They are learning that I will try to tactfully challenge these attitudes. Being Jesus' salt in the world means I have to pray for the courage to speak out, even if others do not like it.

I'd like to thank my black friends who have kindly helped me on this road towards becoming anti-racist. I've also been inspired by other books and talks.¹

So, to summarize, systemic, and general racism is real and is as pervasive as sin. White privilege is a given, and I am called to be more than 'not a racist' but a soldier of Christ, challenging racism wherever I experience it.

My prayer is that God will give us a desire to better understand racism and guide us in our unique anti-racist ministries so that together we can model the power of Christ's love in this broken world.

NOTES

¹ 'We Need to Talk About Race' by Ben Lindsay, 'White Fragility' by Robin DiAngelo; <https://youtu.be/HrOFpa>

REPRINTED ARTICLES

— In this section you will find timeless articles that are carefully selected to prepare you in a wider range of subjects.

MEN? VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE?

BY WILLIE OLIVER

ANOTHER SIDE TO A SERIOUS PROBLEM

Domestic Violence (DV) refers to a comprehensive mixture of violent deeds perpetrated by one member of a family against another. It frequently describes the maltreatment of a child, spouse, intimate partner, or other family member, and may include physical injury, intimidation, as well as verbal, psychological, and sexual abuse. The primary difference between DV and other assaults is the relationship between the victim and the person responsible for the abuse.

FOCUS OF THE PROBLEM

While victims of DV are mostly women, a remarkable number of men also sustain physical, mental, and sexual abuse in domestic heterosexual and same-sex relationships.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggest male victimization is a significant public health problem. Data from their comprehensive annual national research on intimate partner violence¹ shows that during their lifetimes:

- approximately one in 10 men (9.6 percent of male population—an estimated 10.6 million men) experienced sexual coercion (e.g., being worn down by someone who repeatedly asked for sex; sexual pressure because of someone using their influence or authority)

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- approximately 20 million men reported unwanted sexual contact (e.g., groping)
- an estimated 2 million male victims of completed or attempted rape reported that their first experience occurred prior to age 25
- many males live in fear today: one in 17 men in the United States (6.4 million) were victims of stalking (harassment, intimidated following, etc.), nearly 41 percent of those before age 25, and almost 13 percent prior to age 18
- in the U.S. one in three men (33.6 percent, or 37.3 million) experienced contact sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking by an intimate partner; for 14.9 percent, the experience constituted severe physical violence;
- more than one third of men (34.2 percent or 28.1 million) experienced psychological aggression by an intimate partner.

SURPRISING, PERHAPS

Data on sexual activity when consent is not acquired or given without reservation may engender its own surprise when it is recognized that 82 percent of male victims of sexual coercion reported only female perpetrators, and 53 percent of male victims of unwanted sexual contact reported only female perpetrators. Female aggression is also documented in data on stalking (repetitive harassment, triggering fear or concerns about safety), in which 46 percent of male victims reported being stalked by female perpetrators only.

PURPOSE OF THIS FOCUS

Drawing attention to numbers on female aggression cannot, with any enlightenment, be seen as toning down the reality of outrageous rates of DV against women each year, much higher than they are for men. Rather, it is meant to shine a light on an expanding discussion: it is important to acknowledge that anyone can become a victim of DV, that everyone deserves access to protection, and that we should all do our part to mitigate these realities.

Adventist congregations must work toward the goal of making our churches safe spaces.

Male victims of DV, much like their female counterparts, experience severe anxiety and insecurity before getting assistance. They are afraid to end such relationships because they've been isolated from friends and family, intimidated, controlled, or physically and emotionally battered. Moreover, their religious beliefs often dictate that they stay with their spouse. They are frightened that their abusers will hurt them if they report the situation. Also, many are in denial about what is happening and believe their partners are good people who will eventually change if they pray hard enough.

WHAT TO DO

The more understanding there is on the issue of DV, the easier it will be for communities to stop the violence before it begins. Also, men in abusive relationships need to know that they

are not alone, and that this experience happens without regard to culture, race, occupation, or socioeconomic status.

Because DV can have serious physical and emotional consequences on any victim, the first thing victims can do to protect themselves and stop the abuse is to reach out for help. They should be willing to talk to a friend, family member, pastor, counselor, or someone else they trust, or call a DV helpline. Acknowledging the problem and looking for assistance doesn't mean a victim has failed as a man or as a husband. In fact, sharing the reality of their abuse with the right person will begin to offer much-needed assistance and a sense of release.

Reading this content in a faith-based publication many may respond that such abuse and violence might be taking place far from their spiritual community, certainly not anywhere close to them, or, perish the thought, in their congregation. It may be easier to question the reliability and validity of the research, and push these revolting thoughts to the back of their consciousness, than to think about what can be done to deliberately make their congregations safe spaces for victims and help perpetrators find transformation through acceptance, healing, and change.

As disciples of Jesus, our assignment is to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus to a world wounded by victimization of all kinds. After all, Jesus Himself, quoting Isaiah 61:1 from the Hebrew Scriptures, declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18, NKJV).²

Adventist congregations must work toward the goal of making our churches safe spaces where victims can share their pain and be heard, and abusers can talk about their disease and find support and healing. Like the early church, we, too, may astonish onlookers by being a community so dedicated to mutual caring that it can truly be said, "They had all things in common" (Acts 4:32, NKJV).

NOTES

¹ National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey: 2015 Data Brief.

² Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

KINDNESS AND COMPASSION GO A LONG WAY

BY WILLIE OLIVER AND ELAINE OLIVER

Have you ever tried making orange juice without oranges, or apple pie without apples? That's what it looks like when we attempt to build a durable and wholesome marriage and family without kindness and compassion as essential ingredients.

While it's true that honesty is one of the most important components of a strong and healthy marriage and family, it's equally significant to grasp how to best communicate the truth for positive results. Any comedian can say the first thing that comes to mind. Cautious, careful, and emotionally intelligent persons, however, edit their thoughts to affirm, nurture, and protect the feelings of those they claim to value greatly.

Everyone arrives at adulthood with emotional baggage. We are products of our families of origin. We are who we are, to be sure, because of the interactions—positive and negative—we engaged in or were privy to while growing up within our families. As a result, we are all wounded to some extent, and it doesn't take much for us to be incredibly hurt if someone targets the weak or vulnerable areas of our lives.

Our marriage relationships, as well as the interactions in our respective families, are meant to help us grow in as healthy a manner as possible: emotionally, intellectually, physically, spiritually, even financially. To achieve this objective, we must follow this counsel: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

Neither women nor men should use hurtful words when they speak to their spouses or other family members. Although speaking the truth is important and should not be avoided, care

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ought to be exercised to communicate kindly and with compassion. A good rule of thumb is to think about how you would like people to communicate with you before uttering a word. Essentially, employing the *golden rule*: “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31, NIV).

Speaking the truth means much more than simply being honest. It means deliberately employing kindness and compassion in all of our inter- actions. It is creating an environment of warmth and good feelings that is fertile ground for building relationships that will stand the test of time.

In marriage and family we must resist the urge to *keep it real*, as invariably advocated by the fashionable urban preference of disclosing unvarnished truth. After all, it isn't very wise to practice being boorish, crude, ill-mannered, or offensive. Rather the wise man counsels: “A soft answer turns away wrath. But a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov. 15:1).

If you have been hurt by something your spouse or another family member has said to you, rather than harboring feelings of anger, resentment, and hurt, ask God to give you the right spirit to confront the situation with kindness, compassion, and patience. Rather than accusing the other person by employing *you messages* such as “You are a terrible person,” to begin the conversation, use *I messages* instead, such as “I feel hurt when you refer to me in those words” to convey and own your feelings.

Our prayer is that every marriage and family will take this message to heart, and by employing kindness and compassion in all their interactions, build strong marriages and families for the kingdom of God.

YOUR MARRIAGE CAN SURVIVE COVID-19

BY WILLIE OLIVER AND ELAINE OLIVER

Some experts are finding that six or seven weeks of pressure is as much as human relationships can last before they crack. Here's a piece many of us should probably read right now.—Editors

COVID-19 has dramatically and drastically changed life in our homes. Many of us are feeling anxious, uncertain, and stressed while trying to adjust to a new and hopefully temporary normal. Marriage and family life are already full of challenges, where we inevitably have conflict and hurt one another. But now the virus has added another layer to regular stressors. It's easy during this time for tensions to rise, tempers to flare, and to get on each other's nerves. Initially, the time together seemed like a blessing, but extra time has created more opportunity for misunderstandings and dysfunctional interactions. This is especially true for husbands and wives where previous relational struggles may have become magnified.

Keeping your marriage healthy during the COVID-19 quarantine needs to be a high priority for all couples. There are no easy answers and quick fixes, and we don't know how long we'll be living under these conditions. So, while we can't control the virus and our current circumstances, we can take control and change our response to what's happening around us. Here are some tips to help your marriage survive and thrive during COVID-19 and beyond.

PRAYER

As people of faith, now is the time to use our spiritual disciplines, especially prayer. We're constantly being reminded during this pandemic to protect ourselves by washing our hands, not

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touching our face, and practicing social distancing. These tasks, however, don't necessarily protect us from the emotional, mental, and spiritual distress we're encountering. This is the reason prayer is so critical at this time. Prayer takes us outside of ourselves and reminds us that our reliance is on God and not ourselves. Paul reminds us: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6, 7).¹

Prayer has to be the first protection for our marriage and family. With tensions rising and tempers flaring, we need a sense of calm and peace in our homes. From a physiological perspective, prayer is highly effective in reducing our reaction to trauma and crises. Prayer takes us out of the fight, flight, or freeze mode and pushes us into a more thoughtful and reflective mode.

When we pray, God speaks to our hearts and transforms our minds. We've witnessed miraculous healing in marriages where one or both spouses commit to praying earnestly for the marriage. Ellen White says: "When we come to ask mercy and blessing from God we should have a spirit of love and forgiveness in our own hearts."²

PRACTICE THE PPC MODEL

Throughout this pandemic, we've heard the term PPE (personal protective equipment), which includes items to defend against the virus such as face masks, gloves, and other protective gear. The PPC Model (pause, pray and choose), however, is a defense strategy to protect your relationship. Using this skill will help you create and ensure a safe environment for your marriage and family.

Pause—when tensions are rising, pause and breathe. Taking deep breaths will activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which conserves energy and slows the heart rate, relaxes the body, and allows the brain to think more clearly.

Pray—say a quick prayer and ask God to help you calm down and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal. 5:22, 23](#)), despite feeling stressed, anxious, and frustrated.

Choose—choose a response that will create a safe space and foster peace in your home.

BE KIND

Are little things about your spouse beginning to irritate you? You've started noticing some things that were probably there before, but all of a sudden they seem more magnified. Don't sweat the small stuff—it's all small stuff! You'll naturally get a little snippy with each other unintentionally, so practice being kind and nice. Give each other lots of grace, and remember that you're on the same team.

ASK YOUR SPOUSE WHAT HE OR SHE NEEDS

Set aside at least 10 minutes every day for a checkup with each other. The simple act of asking and responding as needed validates and supports each partner and sends a message of caring. There might be some things that seem obvious and maybe even things that you normally do to support each other, but now they've become more important. It's easy during this crisis to take each other for granted. Taking the time to communicate your thoughts, fears, needs, and desires will help you to remain in tune with each other.

BE WARM AND AFFECTIONATE

Social distancing rules don't apply to your marriage unless you've tested positive for COVID-19. Make time in your relationship to connect and to be warm and affectionate in your daily interactions. Develop a habit of hugging and kissing each other in the morning when you wake up and before you go to sleep at night, or even in the middle of the day. This will help relieve tension and connect you to each other emotionally. Schedule a weekly date night for just the two of you. Be creative, have fun, and laugh a lot.

TAKE BREAKS FROM EACH OTHER

While marriage is designed to bring out the best in us, it also tends to bring out the worst in us. That's what makes this forced togetherness so difficult. Therefore, it's more than OK to take at least 20 to 30 minutes of uninterrupted time alone every day for the health and well-being of your relationship. Of course, we're not talking about silent treatment or ignoring each other. So talk about it and agree together when you will carve out some personal time each day. Then respect those boundaries going forward.

KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Having a positive attitude about your spouse and your marriage directly impacts the quality of your relationship. Rather than thinking your problems can't be solved, change your self-talk and the way you view your relationship. If you think your marriage is relatively good with some challenges, you'll tend to focus on how you can survive this crisis together and even thrive on the other side. Positive thinking will give you hope about the future and about your marriage. "A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones" (Prov. 17:22).

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Connecting with friends and family through FaceTime, Zoom, SMS, or a simple telephone call will help to lessen the tension and strain on your marriage. In this way, your spouse or children

are not the only people you interact with. If allowed, you can even go outside and say hello to your neighbors while practicing social distancing. Be sure, however, not to connect clandestinely with anyone. This will only invite additional problems into your marriage during this stressful time.

FORGIVE QUICKLY

Because you're human, it's inevitable that at some point during these tension-filled days you may say something or do something that might hurt your spouse, or vice-versa. As soon as someone conveys being hurt, the one causing the pain should be quick to apologize. For this to work, the offended party should also be swift to forgive. This will help your relationship to get back on track and keep the evil one from further damaging your oneness. The Bible says: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4:32, emphasis supplied).

IF NECESSARY, REACH OUT FOR HELP

If you're having problems that you're unable to resolve on your own, seek help from a qualified Christian counselor who shares your values about marriage. Most therapists are offering telehealth for individuals and couples these days. So, talking to a counselor about the challenges you're having can be invaluable during and after the lockdown.

By responding to your challenges in constructive ways, your marriage will survive and thrive during COVID-19. "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mark 10:27).

For more marriage and family resources to help you through COVID-19, visit family.adventist.org. If you're afraid that your spouse might hurt you or your children, or if you're already experiencing some form of domestic violence, reach out for help now. In the United States, you can contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline anytime by calling 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or online at <https://www.thehotline.org/help/>. They offer help in more than 200 languages. If you're outside the United States, look for hotlines that are available in your country.

NOTES

- ¹ All Bible texts are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
- ² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1892), p. 97.

RAISING CONTENTMENT

BY KAREN HOLFORD

Today we're bombarded with messages telling us that we need to buy newer, better, and more perfect things. These messages leave us unhappy with our looks, our clothes, our home, our car, and everything we own.

Jesus taught us not to worry about all these things because God knows our needs (Matthew 6:28, 29). As a missionary, Paul faced hardships and lived without many things, but he learned to be content in all circumstances. Philippians 4 contains some of his secrets for peace: gratitude for what he had; asking God for what he needed; experiencing the peace of God in his heart; and focusing on the positive things around him. These values can help our families find joy in a society that continually whines for more.

MODEL CONTENTMENT

We need to reflect prayerfully on our own attitudes if we want to develop anti-materialistic attitudes in our children. So, how contented am I with my car, home, furniture, clothes, technological devices, and even my appearance? Do I believe that everything I have has to be just perfect, or have I learned the joy of “good enough”?

And how am I verbalizing my contentment to my children? We can talk intentionally about our blessings, peace, and joy. We can express gratitude for what we have. We can limit our own purchases and take care of our possessions. We can teach our children how to “make

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do and mend” in creative ways and share our own delight in giving things away to make others happy.

ANTI-WANTING

Advertising creates a desire for things we never knew we “needed.” Describe advertising to your children as a sneaky little thief who is trying to steal their money and their peace of mind. Help children to spot some of advertising’s nasty little tricks.

When your school-age child wants something very badly, try the anti-wanting debate. Pretend that you are your child, and have your child pretend to be you. You present the case for buying the object, and they have to come up with 5 to 10 reasons, depending on their age, for why it’s not worth buying.

When children want something new, encourage them to write it on a wish list with today’s date, and then see if they still want it in a month. Help them to develop delayed gratification by earning money and saving up for bigger items. This is an important life skill that will protect them from getting into debt later.

ENOUGH

Most of us have enough in our homes already. When tempted to buy something new, be creative and wonder if you already have something you could adapt, repaint, renovate, or reuse. Choose simple, timeless decorating styles, and add color or accessories with budget-friendly items. Challenge your children to have fun making a spaceship out of an appliance box or to find new ways to play with old toys. Explore the Internet for free printable Lego challenge cards, which help children to use this versatile toy in fresh and creative ways.

BUYING AFFECTS THE WORLD

Encourage your child to care for the environment. Most toys are made from plastics and synthetic materials from nonrenewable sources. Encourage older children to explore the environmental effect of using disposable plastics. Learn about fair trade and choose to buy items that show care for the workers who made them and for the creatures and beautiful world God created.

BETTER SPENDING

If children have pocket money to spend, take them to thrift stores and yard sales. Teach them to save money by choosing good, pre-loved toys and clothes. It can be loads of fun discovering interesting toys that you can’t buy in stores today. Show them how to check secondhand items to

make sure that all the pieces are there and nothing is broken. Being willing to buy pre-loved items and knowing how to do it wisely and well could save them thousands of dollars in the future.

ENCOURAGE GENEROSITY

Work together as a family to raise money for a caring project. Try to find a project your children can be actively involved with and where they can see the difference that their generosity makes to others. Provide them the opportunity to give some of their own savings to the project.

Linda's family has decided not to buy anything new unless they can afford to buy two. They wait for half-price sales and two-for-one deals so they can give away the second item or an equivalent-value gift voucher. "We now spend much less, we choose more carefully, and we're more generous," Linda says. "It has changed the way our children think about buying and giving."

When you go to a store with children, give them some money to buy food for a food bank or a gift for a homeless child instead of buying something for themselves.

Celebrate your birthday by taking your children with you to do 10 acts of kindness in the community and encourage them to do the same on their birthdays. Planning acts of generosity can help to focus your child on the needs of others at a time when they might otherwise be focused on their own wants.

MAKE GIVING FUN

Researchers have discovered that the happiest people are not those who have the most but those who regularly give things away. Help your children to experience the joy of giving by showing them how to make simple gifts. Download printable playdough playmats, laminate them, and make little pots of colored dough to share with friends. Bake bread and cookies together, decorate planters, grow bulbs, then share them with neighbors and friends. Learn how to make a giant-bubble mixture and wands using dowels, string, screw eyes, and washers (<https://happyhooligans.ca/homemade-giant-bubbles/>) and share with others at the park. Or make kindness rocks by painting smooth garden stones and decorating them with encouraging messages, Bible verses, and cheerful designs. Brush a layer of clear sealant over each rock to protect the de-sign. Have fun leaving the rocks where they will bring joy. (See www.thekindnessrock-sproject.com/home for more information and project guides.)

It's challenging to help your children swim against the tide of materialism, but they'll develop positive Christian values for a lifetime of contentment and joy.

MY KIND OF CHURCH

BY LARRY R. EVANS

WHAT WE HAVE TO UNLEARN ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

We have a problem, and we aren't unique. Many, it seems, have bought into the myth that weakness always leads to failure and strength always leads to success. But at times we awaken to the reality that we've been squeezed into the mold of conventional wisdom (Rom. 12:2). Almost imperceptibly we've sought to develop heroic virtues in ourselves when simple trust in God is the greater need. As is often the case, God has a way of turning our assumptions upside down. Scripture teaches the fundamental principle that brokenness and wholeness need not be opposites. They are easily complementary (see 2 Cor. 12:10).

NEW LIFE THROUGH BROKENNESS

It began like an ordinary day. Regiane went to the bank to withdraw some cash. As she was driving back to her office, two men followed her on a motorcycle. Soon they drove to within a few feet of the driver's side of the car. The passenger on the motorcycle pulled out a gun, aimed at Regiane's head, and fired. The car crashed; a passerby pulled her out, and waited for the ambulance. The bullet destroyed her sight in both eyes, but her life was spared. In a moment her life, and the life of her family, had been turned upside down.

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Someone has said, “Adversity introduces us to ourselves.” This was the case for Regiane. Moments of loss, pain, and suffering can cause most of us to shout out, “Why!” Such times of brokenness can turn the focus of our lives inward. When we are fully broken, however, the focus shifts outward and upward. Such was the case with Regiane.

I was invited to her home in Brazil for supper and Sabbath vespers. The whole evening was a time of praise to God, not only for His saving her life, but for giving her a ministry for those who are blind. As we sang “How Great Thou Art,” the song took on a deeper meaning for me. Regiane’s blindness helped me see: I saw that immediate tragic circumstances don’t need to be the final word. This is the power of her witness in the small Bible study group of 45 blind individuals that she leads, from which three have already been baptized.

The very year that Regiane lost her sight, Juliana, a pastor’s wife, was also losing hers. Some believed that if she had sufficient faith, her blindness would be healed. But God’s wisdom produced major spiritual success for Juliana, who has become the regional leader for blind ministry (Isa. 55:8). In her search for understanding, God brought her and Regiane together. They are now partners in a growing ministry for blind individuals. Out of two tragedies has come a united ministry for those who are blind.

WHAT IS A WEAKNESS?

God’s process of developing a person’s character often allows mystifying circumstances to come their way. The Bible is filled with examples of individuals who overcame weaknesses and tragedies thanks to God’s leading. Joseph had his faults, and his own brothers dwelt on what they perceived were his weaknesses. As a result, Joseph endured trials of abandonment, deception, and imprisonment. Yet when events turned in his favor, when he had the opportunity for payback, he testified, “It was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:8). Living faithfully despite horrific circumstances turned any weaknesses Joseph had into strengths that blessed not only Israel but Egypt as well.

Moses, another man whose case seemed hopeless, was dismissed as being vulnerable and impulsive. He may have had the best education afforded by Pharaoh’s court, and he may have had good intentions when he killed the Egyptian, but his own people did not trust him. God, however, could see what others could not. It took some 40 years of preparation in the desert herding sheep, but God saw what others failed to understand. When an angel informed Moses of his calling to be God’s spokesman to Pharaoh, Moses recoiled and essentially said, “I am disabled and have been so for a long time!” To which the Lord responded, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say” (Ex. 4:11, 12).

And in answer to his continued resistance God explained that Moses’ brother, Aaron, was “already on his way to meet” him (verse 14). Though we know that God is our Maker

(Ps. 100:3), that He knows how we are formed (Ps. 103:14), we are still slow to trust Him. As humans, we tend to write conclusions while God is still adding chapters. God's conclusion for "disabled" Moses was eventually written, "For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:12). Disabilities notwithstanding, Moses' "church" absolutely needed him. And God still needs people like Moses today.

RELATING TO WEAKNESS

GOD HAS SERVICE ASSIGNMENTS FOR EVERYONE.

Stigmas regarding human weaknesses and disabilities can be demoralizing. Some people are depreciated in the very places where they go to find meaning and purpose, an issue well addressed by Paul: "God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked" (1 Cor. 12:24). In fact, "those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable" (verse 22).

The mission of God's church is nothing if not inclusive, and God desires all of us to feel equally welcome to His party and useful in His company. "To be effective, the mission movement needs every part of the body in Christ 'on mission.' If we do exclude people with disability from missions, then the mission movement is missing part of the body. The mission is itself disabled."¹ God's extravagant and dignifying love enables rather than disables His servants, granting everyone, whether good- or ordinary- or inadequate-looking, their own honored role in His varied fields of service.

GOD EXPECTS US TO BE MOUNTAIN MOVERS.

Unfortunately, many have found barriers keeping them from coming. No wonder John the Baptist, like Isaiah before him, announced that mountain moving, valley raising, and road straightening would all take place, providing total, direct entrance into the coming Messiah's presence (Isa. 40:3-5; Luke 3:4-6). Isaiah's and the Baptist's song of total access was wonderfully demonstrated in the healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12).

A paralyzed man heard about Jesus being in a nearby city. He had no way of going, but he had friends who would do whatever was necessary for their companion to meet Jesus. They carried him all the way. When they arrived, large crowds obstructed their access. But no mountain or valley—roof tiles in this case—could stop them. They opened a road through the roof and lowered their friend directly into the presence of Jesus. Their disabled friend's only hope was meeting Jesus. They saw the need: they moved the mountain that needed to be moved; their friend met Jesus and received the healing and wholeness that he longed for.

GOD'S CHILDREN SHOULDN'T BE DEFINED BY THEIR DISABILITIES.

I had never seen anything like it before—a wheelchair church: scores of wheelchairs crowded into the tight space of this Romanian meeting place. What a sight! Not all were in wheelchairs, but all had one thing in common. They had come to worship, to share, and to befriend one another.

I'll never forget meeting Gheorghe (yes, call him Gheorghe): he has cerebral palsy. I'd be challenged to understand him even if I understood Romanian. But the sparkle in his eyes outsparkled everything else—garbled speech, odd smile, constant drooling, or stuttered gestures. I soon realized that I was encountering something far more amazing than any mere assembly of people with disabilities. It was a time for my own self-examination. Indeed, I had found my people—a people whose faith was not built on their being physically healed or having their rights defended. They were seeking something greater. That day they, and others like them, became my teachers. This was the church I needed—a place where brokenness is not about what we cannot do, nor about prejudices others had about us. Rather it is about finding the real purpose for each one's living. And I found it that day in the wheelchair church.

GOD HAS HIGH AMBITIONS FOR THE DISABLED.

When Jeff was born his parents had great dreams for him. They denied it at first, but the truth became unmistakable: their son had been born deaf. Nobody can say what went “wrong,” but Jeff is deaf. But deafness is not Jeff's identity. He knows that “higher than the highest human thought can reach is God's ideal for His children.”² Jeff is secure in his identity as one of God's children. Today, as an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister, he serves as my honorary associate in Adventist Possibility Ministries, while also engaged as a full-time pastor. His wife, Melissa, is an interpreter for the *It Is Written* telecast. They are a team ministry—one deaf, one hearing.

Jeff's role as a deaf pastor is not an employment accommodation of some sort, but a full-fledged and godly service that has impacted both deaf and hearing persons around the world. The changed moniker from Disability Ministries to Adventist Possibility Ministries is one reflection of the greater respect for God's children who belong to this constituency, as well as the higher regard for the importance of this area of the Lord's service. I give thanks to God that my church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is ever more clearly recognized globally as a movement of bringing hope and soon-coming glory to many who have long lived with despair, depreciation, and disdain. God's providence has placed widows, orphans, and others whom society often marginalizes “in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character.”³

We all need liberation from society's conventional thinking on weakness. Only as we surrender to the truth of our own inadequacy do we become available for ministries of service as God's "jars of clay" from which He may pour out the water of life to thirsty people everywhere (2 Cor. 4:7; John 4:13, 14; 7:37).

NOTES

- ¹ Nathan G. John, "Disability and Mission: For His Glory," in David C. Deuel and Nathan G. John, eds., *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Press, 2019), p. 158.
- ² Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903, 1952), p. 18.
- ³ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 3, p. 511.

CURE FOR HEZEKITIS

BY GARY BLANCHARD

How do we reach and retain the younger generation? Without a doubt this is one of the biggest questions being asked by parents, youth leaders, teachers, and church administrators around the world. Especially as we hear reports that between 60 and 70 percent of our youth disappear from active church life in their 20s and never return. Interestingly, but not shockingly, the reason for this crisis is clearly spelled out for us in the Word of God. Go figure!

In Isaiah 38 we learn about the God-fearing King Hezekiah, who was diagnosed with a terminal illness but by the grace of God was healed and given 15 more years of life (verse 5). However, in the next chapter we learn that visitors from Babylon came to “congratulate” him on his recovery, and in an act of complete stupidity King Hezekiah showed them all the treasures of the kingdom (Isaiah 39:1, 2). When the delegation left, Isaiah the prophet confronted the king, prophesying that the Babylonians would return, take the treasures for themselves, and kidnap and castrate their kids, making them slaves in Babylon.

Now, notice King Hezekiah’s shocking response to this terrible news! “‘This message you have given me from the Lord is good.’ For the king was thinking, ‘At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime’” (Isaiah 39:8, NLT).

Why are we losing so many young people today? Why are they being dragged away from the church and assimilated into the world? Because this kind of attitude, we will call it Hezekitis, is also coming from the older generation! Notice that King Hezekiah was a godly man and was one of the greatest kings Israel ever had, but like many godly church leaders today, he was more concerned

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about the present, about his generation, and gave little thought to the future and those who would one day lead!

Sadly, it was during the extra 15 years of life God had granted him that Hezekiah and his wife had a child that would become one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history! He was godless, lawless, and heartless, and the Bible testifies that he became a leader who "led them [Israel] to do even more evil than the pagan nations that the Lord had destroyed when the people of Israel entered the land" (2 Kings 21:9, NLT).

Currently in the United States everything from guns to drugs is being blamed for the state of affairs among our nation's youth. Violence is high, and you can't watch the news without another school shooting or violent act being committed by the younger generation. Of course, this reality is reflected in other countries as well, but few are aware of the real systemic problem behind the moral free fall among the younger generation. It is the conviction of this writer that Hezekitis is the problem—like King Hezekiah, we are either preoccupied with our own generation or unconscious of the desperate need of the younger generation for our proactive attention. Among this generation is a deep need realized or not for spiritual fathers—an older generation who cares for the lives and souls of the up-and-coming Manassehs (millennials and Generation Z).

But there is great news! God has a cure for Hezekitis and real hope for a Manasseh generation! God's Word predicts that just before His return, He will send "Elijah the prophet," who will "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:5, 6, NKJV). Interestingly, Ellen White compares Elijah to those living at the end of time. She writes, "Elijah was a type of the saints who will be living on the earth at the time of the second advent of Christ and who will be 'changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump,' without tasting of death."¹ So just before the return of Christ, God will raise up a generation that will cure His church of Hezekitis as they wholeheartedly pursue intergenerational youth ministry.

Elijah the prophet was without question one of the greatest youth leaders in the Old Testament. He was a godly man like Hezekiah, but one who cared for the younger generation and did more than just preach "total youth involvement." Elijah "rolled up his sleeves" and invested compassionately into the younger generation as if the future of the church depended upon it! Elijah understood that effective youth ministry is intergenerational, and he did three profound but simple things to cure Hezekitis!

CARE

First, he cared for them. You will remember when the widow of Zarephath's son died, it was Elijah that carried the boy's body upstairs, stretched himself over him three times, and cried out to God to bring him to life. Intergenerational ministry follows a simple formula—proximity + prayer = revival. When the older generation builds close relationships with the younger generation (proximity) and cries out earnestly for their spiritual revival (prayer), supernatural things happen! You will remember, in Ezekiel 37, that it was only after Ezekiel prayed for the Spirit to revive the

dry bones that the army of God came to life (verse 10). I believe this prophesy applies specifically to our army of youth, but that's another article. Caring for this generation is about praying earnestly for their spiritual revival as we pursue close relationships with them.

I love how Ellen White herself appeals for more proximity and prayer in regard to intergenerational youth ministry:

“The youth are the objects of Satan’s special attacks; but kindness, courtesy, and the sympathy which flows from a heart filled with love to Jesus will gain their confidence, and save them from many a snare of the enemy. . . . There must be more study given to the problem of how to deal with the youth, more earnest prayer for the wisdom that is needed in dealing with minds. . . . We should seek to enter into the feelings of the youth, sympathizing with them in their joys and sorrows, their conflicts and victories. . . . We must meet them where they are, if we would help them. . . . Let us remember the claim of God upon us to make the path to heaven bright and attractive.”²²

HELPFUL RESOURCES

The General Conference Youth Department has an excellent resource that will help you, your church, conference, union, and division become more effective and intentional about caring for the younger generation and curing the Hezekitis among us. The resource is called Intergenerational Churches of Refuge, or iCOR. It is a resource that church leaders can study preferably with their leadership teams in order to care intentionally and effectively for the younger generation. You can download the resource for free at youth.adventist.org. Also stay tuned for training opportunities at [@gcyouthministries](https://www.instagram.com/gcyouthministries) and youth.adventist.org.

CHALLENGE

Second, Elijah challenged them. On Mount Carmel he did not preach smooth and comfortable messages. Instead he shook the younger generation up by challenging them to get off the fence and follow the Lord wholeheartedly. “If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him,” he declared (1 Kings 18:21, NLT).

Once a young man was sitting on the fence and Jesus approached him, challenging him to get off the fence and follow Him wholeheartedly. The young man said, “No, thank You, Jesus; I want to remain on the fence.” Jesus went away sad. Next the devil appeared to the young man and invited him to follow him wholeheartedly as well. The young man replied in the same way, “No, thank you, I am going to remain on the fence.” The devil smiled and said, “That’s OK, young man, you can remain on the fence. After all, I own the fence!”

Yes, the younger generation needs to know that Jesus loves them, that His grace covers their sins, and that justification is theirs by faith alone and not by works. But where are the challenging

messages today? Where are the messages calling young people to live holy lives for God, to keep His Sabbath, to live pure, to grow in grace, to be Spirit-filled and sanctified? Where is the challenge to live counterculture for Jesus even when it's dangerous? Where are the messages calling for health reform, mission service, tithing responsibility, and respect for religious and political authority? Maybe you've noticed that we feature tons of David testimonies but few Joseph and Daniel stories of God's grace. Moreover, where are the warning messages that the end is near and that faith as well as repentance is required of those who wish to be saved?

Ellen White writes:

“The smooth sermons so often preached make no lasting impression: the trumpet does not give a certain sound. Men are not cut to the heart by the plain, sharp truths of God's Word. . . . When will the voice of faithful rebuke be heard once more in the church? . . . If they were not so rare, we should see more of the power of God revealed among men. . . . It is not from love for their neighbor that they smooth down the message entrusted to them, but because they are self-indulgent and ease-loving. True love seeks first the honor of God and the salvation of souls. . . . God calls for men like Elijah, Nathan, and John the Baptist—men who will bear His message with faithfulness, regardless of the consequences; men who will speak the truth bravely, though it call for the sacrifice of all they have.”³

I believe it was the great Charles Spurgeon that warned, “A time will come when instead of shepherds feeding the sheep the church will have clowns entertaining the goats.” Oh, Lord, how we need church leaders who will courageously challenge the younger generation the way Elijah did!

HELPFUL RESOURCES

There is no better resource for this than Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy. We encourage leaders around the world to learn from credible Christian authors, but always prioritizing Scripture and Spirit of Prophecy! We challenge Adventist youth leaders to make young disciples for Christ, teaching them to “obey all” that Jesus taught, even the countercultural and dangerous truths (Matthew 28:19, 20).

CALL

Third, Elijah called young people. In the eyes of most, Elijah was an example of ministry success. After all, he was well loved and respected by the church, but apparently in the eyes of God his ministry was incomplete. In 1 Kings 19:16 God “commands” him to pass on leadership to the younger generation! Someone once said, “No success without a successor,” and apparently God agrees. Ellen White writes, “As Elijah, divinely directed in seeking a successor, passed the field in which Elisha was plowing, he cast upon the young man's shoulders the mantle of consecration.”⁴

Like many of us, Elijah seems to have obeyed God's command here halfheartedly. I may be wrong with this assumption, but you will remember that when he found Elisha, he threw the mantle over him and kept walking (1 Kings 19:19). This seems to be the common way we mentor young people today. Instead of training them for ministry and giving them responsibilities they can handle, we throw the mantle over them and shout, "Sink or swim, kid. Don't let us down; after all, you are the church of today!" But calling the younger generation into ministry and leadership is about passing it on, not dumping it on them! Jesus took the young people on His ministry team through a process that took three years. He began with observation (watch Me do it), then participation (help Me do it), and finally activation (you do it). Elijah did the same thing over a period of several years. Sister White writes, "Ministry comprehends far more than preaching the Word. It means training young men as Elijah trained Elisha, taking them from their ordinary duties, and giving them responsibilities to bear in God's work—small responsibilities at first, and larger ones as they gain strength and experience."⁵

Thankfully, Elijah grew to be an amazing mentor to Elisha. Some might even argue that he was so good at it that his young successor exceeded him! Ellen White seems to affirm this when she wrote, "When the Lord in His providence sees fit to remove from His work those to whom He has given wisdom, He helps and strengthens their successors, if they will look to Him for aid and will walk in His ways. They may be even wiser than their predecessors; for they may profit by their experience and learn wisdom from their mistakes. Henceforth Elisha stood in Elijah's place. He who had been faithful in that which was least was to prove himself faithful also in much."⁶

The greatest compliment to the older generation is the younger generation, whom they have cared for, challenged, and called into ministry, becoming even wiser than they! Unlike King Saul, who grew jealous of his young successor and even worked to sabotage him, Elijah encouraged and equipped Elisha and became a spiritual "father" to him. You will remember that as he ascended in a fiery chariot Elisha shouted, "My father! My father! I see the chariots and charioteers of Israel" (2 Kings 2:12, NLT). What a compliment to the older generation when the younger generation responds to their fatherly love expressed through caring, challenging, and calling! So, leader, never forget, if the ones you are mentoring grow to be better speakers, teachers, administrators, and even leaders than you, then praise God—you're in good company, with such empowering leaders as Elijah, Barnabas, and yes, even Jesus, who empowered His followers to even greater things. Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12, NIV). Think on that!

RESOURCES

The General Conference Youth Department has some wonderful resources for those who want to grow as youth leaders who care, challenge, and call the younger generation to ministry for the Master. Senior Youth Leadership (SYL) is one of these training resources. We also have the new *Adventist Youth Leader Magazine*, designed to equip leaders around the world to pass on leadership

to the younger generation more effectively. Both of these resources are free for download at youth.adventist.org. Why not make sure all the youth leaders in your area of influence have these resources in hand?

THANK YOU!

My deepest respects and appreciation go out to the parents, youth leaders, teachers, club directors, pastors, and administrators around the world who are investing their time, talents, and treasures into the generation coming behind them. You are the fulfillment of Malachi's promise!

On behalf of the General Conference Youth Department, we thank you! Only in the future will we know how much we owe to your vigilance, dedication, and hard work.

Hopefully this article has stimulated your thinking and strengthened your resolve to intentionally lead God's church in caring, challenging, and calling the younger generation. I believe this article contains the key to reaching and retaining the younger generation. The cure for Hezekitis is simple but not easy. We as church leaders must act intentionally now!

What matters most in these last days is that we pour into the younger generation and resist the urge to care only for ourselves and our generation. Now is the time for the Elijah leaders to step up and stand out in behalf of the younger generation. It's time to intentionally care, challenge, and call them! As mentioned above, Hezekiah was a godly king, and no doubt he cared deeply for his son Manasseh, but life has a way of forcing priorities, and if we are not careful, it is highly likely that our priority will be for ourselves and will naturally lead to neglecting the needs of the younger generation. But Jesus will help us; He prioritized children, and He can put this same desire within each of us.

Why not take some time in the next few days or weeks to come up with a written and intentional plan to "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" in your area of influence?

Never forget that Malachi 4:5, 6 is not just a promise—it's a warning! "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord arrives. His preaching will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse" (NLT).

NOTES

- ¹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1917), p. 227.
- ² Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), pp. 207-212.
- ³ E. G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 140-142.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 220.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 222.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

RESOURCES

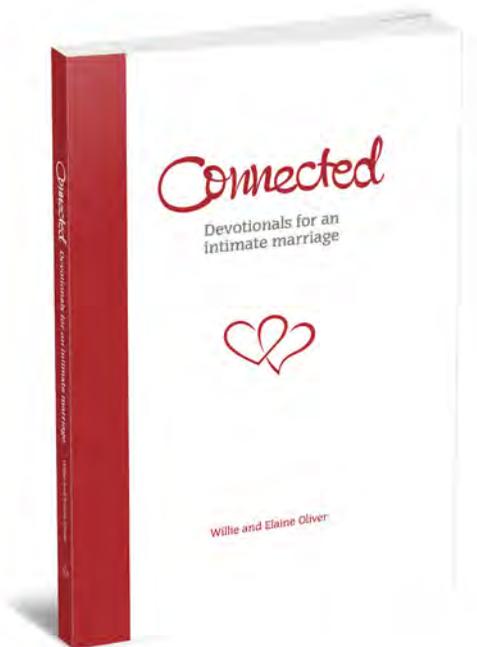
— The Seventh-day Adventist Church
is constantly creating materials to
empower you.

CONNECTED: DEVOTIONALS FOR AN INTIMATE MARRIAGE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Stanbrough Press Ltd., 2020

162 pages



Imagine if you could take your marriage up to the next level. What if it were possible to go from a relationship that survives to one that thrives? What if there were a way to strengthen your commitment to each other? What if better communication could create greater trust? And, best of all, what if grace could help you see the best in your spouse?

In *Connected: Devotionals for an intimate marriage*, Willie and Elaine Oliver share over 35 years of marriage experience, growing together, learning from each other, and rearing children. They know how to make the 'what ifs' become reality.

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Discover more within! Available at www.lifeforcebookshop.co.uk

HOPE FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES

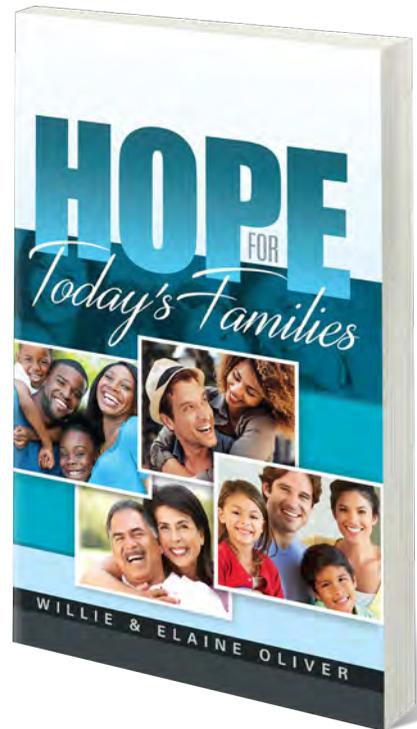
BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2018

94 pages

The 2019 world missionary book of the year is still good to help strengthen marriages and families any time. It offers *Hope for Today's Families* using time-proven principles that will facilitate a meaningful and happy life.

Available in many languages at Adventist Book Centers worldwide or through your local publishing house.

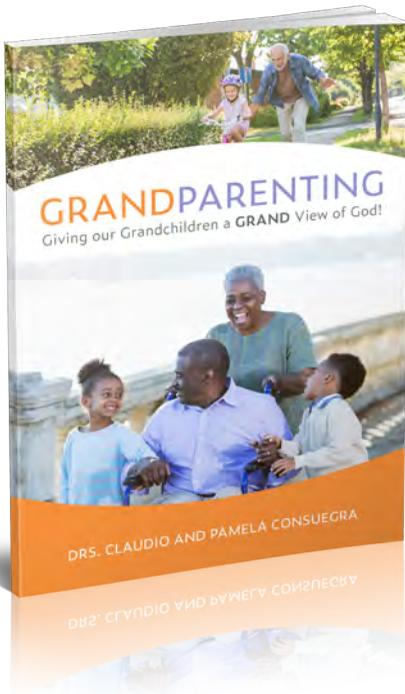


GRANDPARENTING: GIVING OUR GRANDCHILDREN A GRAND VIEW OF GOD

BY CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

AdventSource, 2018

149 pages

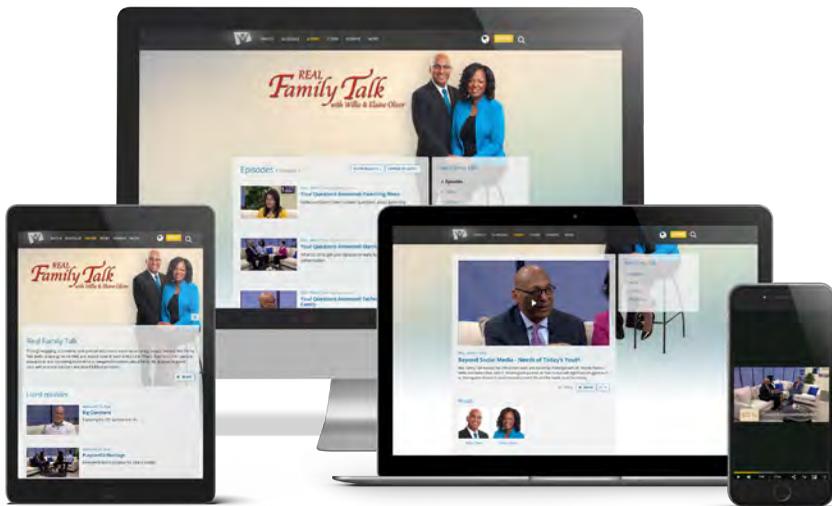


God's ideal for grandparents has been marred by a world filled with sin. His original plan has been pushed out of the picture and society has blurred the clarity of the role that we, as grandparents, have been called to fill. The culture's distracting noise screams loudly to grandparents, calling them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

REAL FAMILY TALK

WITH WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

www.hopetv.org



Through engaging, informative, and spiritual discussions about issues facing today's families, *Real Family Talk* seeks to strengthen families and inspire hope. In each edition, the Olivers draw from their pastoral, educational, and counseling experience to navigate discussions about family life, approaching each topic with practical solutions and sound biblical principles.

Access the show on your TV, computer, tablet or smartphone. Find current and previous episodes via the HopeTV App or visit www.hopetv.org

COUPLE'S BIBLE

Safeliz, 2019

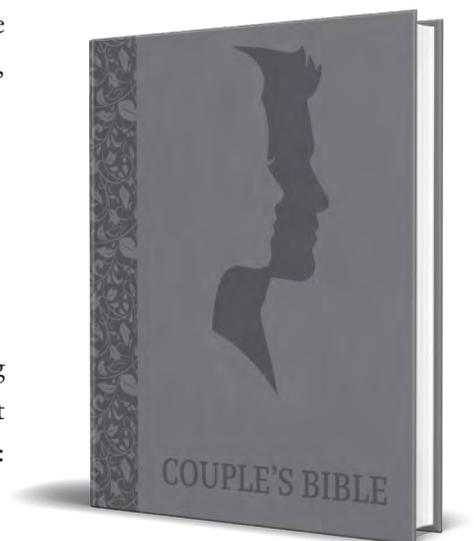
1,500 pages

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

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

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

www.safelizbibles.com



APPENDIX A FAMILY MINISTRIES IMPLEMENTATION

— Please use these documents as part of your work in Family Ministries. The contents are the result of working with families in our church around the world.

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: family.adventist.org/2021RB

A FAMILY MINISTRIES POLICY AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

The congregation and staff of the:

.....

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

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

- Volunteers who work with children and youth are required to be active members of this congregation for a minimum of six months, and must be approved by appropriate church personnel before they may begin working directly with children, unless there has been previous documented clearance.
- All NAD employees and NAD volunteers who regularly work with children must complete an application form (see NAD’s Children’s Ministries website: <https://www.childmin.org/childrens-safety>). References must be obtained from potential volunteers. Appropriate personnel or staff must check those references. Other divisions are encouraged to follow this procedure.
- All workers with children should observe the “two person” rule, which means that workers must avoid one-on-one situations with children whenever possible.

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

THE FAMILY MINISTRIES LEADER

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

1. Develop and chair a small family ministries committee that reflects the distinctiveness of the congregation. It may include a single parent, young married persons, mid-life families, retired, widowed or divorced persons. People who serve on this committee should be carefully chosen as visionary people reflecting the grace of God.
2. Be a family advocate. Family ministries is not merely program-oriented, but must look at the whole church program with sensitivity to its impact on families. In some situations the family ministries leader may need to advocate for family time. In other words, there may be so many programs going on in a congregation that people have little time to live their own lives as families.
3. Survey family needs and interests in the congregation. The needs assessment survey and family profile sheet may be used to help determine the needs of the congregation.
4. Plan programs and activities for the year that may include video presentations, retreats or special speakers who present workshops and seminars. Plans should

- also include simple activities that may be suggested to families through the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Work with the pastor and church board to be sure plans are included in the local church budget.
 6. Make use of the resources available from the conference family ministries department. These can save time, energy and serve to keep costs down for the local congregation. When planning for special presentations, the conference family ministries director is able to assist in finding interesting and qualified presenters.
 7. Communicate with the congregation. Family ministries should not be perceived simply as an annual event. Keep the importance of good family skills alive by use of posters, the church newsletter and/or bulletin throughout the year.
 8. Share your plans with the conference family ministries director.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

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

- Families are nuclear – with Mom, Dad and children who were born to this Mom and Dad.
- Families are stepfamilies – sometimes called blended. Stepfamilies are formed when parents divorce or are widowed and remarry. Some become stepfamilies when an unmarried parent marries someone not the father/mother of his/her child.
- Families are single – sometimes just me and the cat – living alone. They may be divorced, widowed or never married, but the household is a separate entity. Some singles may live with other singles in one household.
- Families are single parent – This may occur when a parent is divorced or widowed and has not remarried, or is a parent who has never married.
- Families are empty nest families – Mom and Dad when the kids leave home.
- Families are re-attached – When adult children come back to live with Mom and Dad – usually a temporary arrangement. A family is re-attached when an older parent lives with the family of a son or daughter or grandchild.

- Families are a part of the family of God. Many consider members in their congregation as family and may feel closer ties to them than those related by birth or marriage.

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

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

COMMITTEE AND PLANNING GUIDELINES

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

- Select a small number of persons with similar concerns for families. They should represent the variety of families found in the congregation. This committee might have a single parent, married couple, divorced, retired or widowed persons, and reflect the gender and ethnic profile of the church.
- The committee should not be too large—five to seven persons are ideal. Individuals may represent more than one family category.
- Especially for the first meeting, gather in an informal setting—perhaps at someone's home or a comfortable room at the church. Begin with prayer for God's blessing.
- Provide light refreshments that include water or hot or cold drinks, something light too much on like fresh fruit, cookies, or nuts. Make it attractive, but not fussy or involving great effort.
- For the first meeting, spend time telling each other your story. This is not a therapy session so let people know that they should tell only what is comfortable. A few guidelines will help: confidentiality is to be respected and seen as a gift to one

another. It might be good for the leader to begin—starting with sentences like, “I was born in..., raised in a (Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic or whatever) home.” Include other things like where you went to school, children’s names or other pertinent information. Include how you became a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist or a pleasant or funny story from childhood. This may seem like a waste of time. But you may be surprised to hear the story of someone you thought you knew for a long time. The telling of our stories is how we connect and bond with each other. It will make your work together go more smoothly. It will also make it easier for committee members to be sensitive to the needs of one another.

- For all subsequent meetings, spend a portion of time—perhaps 10 or 20 minutes in re-connecting with your committee members. One might be rejoicing over an important event. Another may need support with a special need. Here are some questions you could ask to start your meetings:
 - * Who are the people you consider to be your close family?
 - * How do you live your faith together as a family?
 - * What do you think the church could do to help your family?
 - * What do you like best about your family?

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

- Review results of the Interest Survey.
- Talk about goals. What do you wish to accomplish? Will it meet a need? Who are you trying to reach? How can you accomplish your goals?
- Pray for God’s blessing, plan wisely so that people do not burn out and ministry is soon underway.

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

A GOOD PRESENTATION WILL DO FOUR THINGS

1. **INFORM** – People should learn something they did not know prior to attending your presentation.
2. **ENTERTAIN** – People deserve not to be bored!!!
3. **TOUCH THE EMOTIONS** – Information that only informs the head never makes a change in attitude or behavior.
4. **MOVE TO ACTION** – If participants leave your presentation without a desire to DO something different –you have wasted your time and theirs!

HANDOUTS

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.
- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

INTRODUCTION

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

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PRESENTATIONS

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

Reprinted from Family Ministries Handbook: The complete how-to guide for local church leaders. (2003). Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. Used with permission

FAMILY LIFE PROFILE SURVEY

Name Date of Birth

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

Gender: M F

Address

Telephone (Home) (Work)

Baptized SDA Yes No

If Yes, local church membership

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

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

Married—Spouse is a Member

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

Single—Never Married

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

Inactive Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Non-member

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

Single—Divorced

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

FAMILY MINISTRIES INTEREST SURVEY

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

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

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

Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name

Address Telephone

Area(s) of specialty

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

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

COMMUNITY FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION SURVEY

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?

.....

2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area?
(Select as many as you wish.)

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

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="radio"/>						
Afternoon	<input type="radio"/>						
Evening	<input type="radio"/>						

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

Sex: M F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

- 17 or under 19-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

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

Are you:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Never married | <input type="radio"/> Married |
| <input type="radio"/> Separated | <input type="radio"/> Divorced |
| <input type="radio"/> Widowed | <input type="radio"/> 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
Dissatisfied | Somewhat
Dissatisfied | Somewhat
Satisfied | Generally
Satisfied | Very
Satisfied |

7. Who made this evaluation?

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

Gender: M F

Marital Status:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Never married | <input type="radio"/> Married |
| <input type="radio"/> Separated | <input type="radio"/> Divorced |
| <input type="radio"/> 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!

APPENDIX B VOTED STATEMENTS

— These *Voted Statements* are official positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on these topics.

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.

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 Seventh-day Adventists, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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

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

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victims' deepest feelings about

themselves, others, and God, and shatter their capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

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

As a Church we believe our faith calls us to:

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

(The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Lev 18:20; 2 Sam 13:1-22; Matt 18:6-9; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 5:5-8.)

This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on Tuesday, April 1, 1997, in Loma Linda, California.

STATEMENT ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

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

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

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

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

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

It is our belief that the Church has a responsibility-

1. To care for those involved in family violence and to respond to their needs by:
 - a. Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.
 - b. Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.
 - c. Providing a caring, supportive ministry to families affected by violence and abuse, seeking to enable both victims and perpetrators to access counseling with Seventh-day Adventist professionals where available or other professional resources in the community.
 - d. Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.
 - e. Offering a ministry of reconciliation when the perpetrator's repentance makes possible the contemplation of forgiveness and restoration in relationships. Repentance always includes acceptance of full responsibility for the wrongs committed, willingness to make restitution in every way possible, and changes in behavior to eliminate the abuse.
 - f. Focusing the light of the gospel on the nature of husband-wife, parent-child, and other close relationships, and empowering individuals and families to grow toward God's ideals in their lives together.
 - g. Guarding against the ostracism of either victims or perpetrators within the family or church community, while firmly holding perpetrators responsible for their actions.

2. To strengthen family life by:
 - a. Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.

- b. Increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to family violence.
 - c. Developing ways to prevent abuse and violence and the recurring cycle often observed within families and across generations.
 - d. Rectifying commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up family violence. For example, while parents are instructed by God to redemptively correct their children, this responsibility does not give license for the use of harsh, punitive disciplinary measures.
3. To accept our moral responsibility to be alert and responsive to abuse within the families of our congregations and our communities, and to declare that such abusive behavior is a violation of Seventh-day Adventist Christian standards. Any indications or reports of abuse must not be minimized but seriously considered. For church members to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and possibly extend family violence.

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

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

STATEMENT ON THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF UNBORN LIFE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ABORTION

Human beings are created in the image of God. Part of the gift that God has given us as humans is procreation, the ability to participate in creation along with the Author of life. This sacred gift should always be valued and treasured. In God's original plan every pregnancy should be the result of the expression of love between a man and a woman committed to each other in marriage. A pregnancy should be wanted, and each baby should be loved, valued, and nurtured even before birth. Unfortunately, since the entrance of sin, Satan has made intentional efforts to mar the image of God by defacing all of God's gifts—including the gift of procreation. Consequently, individuals are at times faced with difficult dilemmas and decisions regarding a pregnancy.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to the teachings and principles of the Holy Scriptures which express God's values on life and provide guidance for prospective mothers and fathers, medical personnel, churches, and all believers in matters of faith, doctrine, ethical behavior, and lifestyle. The Church while not being the conscience of individual believers has the duty to convey the principles and teachings of the Word of God.

This statement affirms the sanctity of life and presents biblical principles bearing on abortion. As used in this statement, abortion is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy and does not include the spontaneous termination of a pregnancy, known also as a miscarriage.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND TEACHINGS RELATING TO ABORTION

As the practice of abortion must be weighed in the light of Scripture, the following biblical principles and teachings provide guidance for the community of faith and individuals affected by such difficult choices:

1. God upholds the value and sacredness of human life. Human life is of the greatest value to God. Having created humanity in His image (Genesis 1:27; 2:7), God has a personal interest in people. God loves them and communicates with them, and they in turn can love and communicate with Him.

Life is a gift of God, and God is the Giver of life. In Jesus is life (John 1:4). He has life in Himself (John 5:26). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25; 14:6). He provides abundant life (John 10:10). Those who have the Son have life (1 John 5:12). He is also the Sustainer of life (Acts 17:25-28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3), and the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2). God cares deeply for His creation and especially for humankind.

Furthermore, the importance of human life is made clear by the fact that, after the Fall (Genesis 3), God “gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). While God could have abandoned and terminated sinful humanity, He opted for life. Consequently, Christ’s followers will be raised from the dead and will live in face-to-face communion with God (John 11:25-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16; Revelation 21:3). Thus, human life is of inestimable value. This is true for all stages of human life: the unborn, children of various ages, adolescents, adults, and seniors—independent of physical, mental, and emotional capacities. It is also true for all humans regardless of sex, ethnicity, social status, religion, and whatever else may distinguish them. Such an understanding of the sanctity of life gives inviolable and equal value to each and every human life and requires it to be treated with the utmost respect and care.

2. God considers the unborn child as human life. Prenatal life is precious in God’s sight, and the Bible describes God’s knowledge of people before they were conceived. “Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:16). In certain cases, God directly guided prenatal life. Samson was to “be a Nazirite to God from the womb” (Judges 13:5). The servant of God is “called from the womb” (Isaiah 49:1, 5). Jeremiah was already chosen as a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5), as was Paul (Galatians 1:15), and John the Baptist was to “be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Of Jesus the angel Gabriel explained to Mary: “therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). In His Incarnation Jesus Himself experienced the human prenatal period and was recognized as the Messiah and Son of God soon after His conception (Luke 1:40-45). The Bible already attributes to the unborn child joy (Luke 1:44) and even rivalry (Genesis 25:21-23). Those not-yet-born have a firm place with God (Job 10:8-12; 31:13-15). Biblical law shows a strong regard for protecting human life and considers harm to or the loss of a baby or mother as a result of a violent act a serious issue (Exodus 21:22-23).

3. *The will of God regarding human life is expressed in the Ten Commandments and explained by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.* The Decalogue was given to God's covenant people and the world to guide their lives and protect them. Its commandments are unchanging truths which should be cherished, respected, and obeyed. The Psalmist praises God's law (e.g., Psalm 119), and Paul calls it holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12). The sixth commandment states: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13), which calls for the preservation of human life. The principle to preserve life enshrined in the sixth commandment places abortion within its scope. Jesus reinforced the commandment not to kill in Matthew 5:21-22. Life is protected by God. It is not measured by individuals' abilities or their usefulness, but by the value that God's creation and sacrificial love has placed on it. Personhood, human value, and salvation are not earned or merited but graciously granted by God.

4. *God is the Owner of life, and human beings are His stewards.* Scripture teaches that God owns everything (Psalm 50:10-12). God has a dual claim on humans. They are His because He is their Creator and therefore He owns them (Psalm 139:13-16). They are also His because He is their Redeemer and has bought them with the highest possible price—His own life (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This means that all human beings are stewards of whatever God has entrusted to them, including their own lives, the lives of their children, and the unborn.

The stewardship of life also includes carrying responsibilities which in some ways limit their choices (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). Since God is the Giver and Owner of life, human beings do not have ultimate control over themselves and should seek to preserve life wherever possible. The principle of the stewardship of life obligates the community of believers to guide, support, care for, and love those facing decisions about pregnancies.

5. *The Bible teaches care for the weak and the vulnerable.* God Himself cares for those who are disadvantaged and oppressed and protects them. He "shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18, cf. Psalm 82:3-4; James 1:27). He does not hold children accountable for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:20). God expects the same of His children. They are called to help vulnerable people and ease their lot (Psalm 41:1; 82:3-4; Acts 20:35). Jesus speaks of the least of His brothers (Matthew 25:40), for whom His followers are responsible, and of the little ones who should not be despised or lost (Matthew 18:10-14). The very youngest, namely the unborn, should be counted among them.

6. *God's grace promotes life in a world marred by sin and death.* It is God's nature to protect, preserve, and sustain life. In addition to the providence of God over His creation (Psalm 103:19; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3), the Bible acknowledges the wide-ranging, devastating, and degrading effects of sin on the creation, including on human bodies. In Romans 8:20-24 Paul describes the impact of the Fall as subjecting the creation to futility. Consequently, in rare

and extreme cases, human conception may produce pregnancies with fatal prospects and/or acute, life-threatening birth anomalies that present individuals and couples with exceptional dilemmas. Decisions in such cases may be left to the conscience of the individuals involved and their families. These decisions should be well-informed and guided by the Holy Spirit and the biblical view of life outlined above. God's grace promotes and protects life. Individuals in these challenging situations may come to Him in sincerity and find direction, comfort, and peace in the Lord.

IMPLICATIONS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church considers abortion out of harmony with God's plan for human life. It affects the unborn, the mother, the father, immediate and extended family members, the church family, and society with long-term consequences for all. Believers aim to trust God and follow His will for them, knowing He has their best interests in mind.

While not condoning abortion, the Church and its members are called to follow the example of Jesus, being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), to (1) create an atmosphere of true love and provide grace-filled, biblical pastoral care and loving support to those facing difficult decisions regarding abortion; (2) enlist the help of well-functioning and committed families and educate them to provide care for struggling individuals, couples, and families; (3) encourage church members to open their homes to those in need, including single-parents, parentless children, and adoptive or foster care children; (4) care deeply for and support in various ways pregnant women who decide to keep their unborn children; and (5) provide emotional and spiritual support to those who have aborted a child for various reasons or were forced to have an abortion and may be hurting physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually.

The issue of abortion presents enormous challenges, but it gives individuals and the Church the opportunity to be what they aspire to be, the fellowship of brothers and sisters, the community of believers, the family of God, revealing His immeasurable and unfailing love.



This resource also includes free presentations of the seminars and handouts. To download them please visit:
family.adventist.org/2021RB

Unity in Community 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.

● **Sermons**

- Who Will Go?
- Barriers To Family Wellness
- Grandparents' Legacy

● **Children's Stories**

- Fayeza's Story
- Who created the Dinosaurs?
- Forgiveness Story

● **Seminars**

- What Every Person Needs to Know Before Getting Married
- The Church as the Body of Christ: Supporting Families in Crisis
- The Biblical Purpose of Grandparenting
- How to Improve the Mental Health of Your Children

● **Leadership Resources**

- Involving Children in Service Develops Good Character
- Ministering to a Bereaved Spouse
- Ministering to Grieving Children: Jesus' Experience of Grief and Restoration

● **Leadership Resources for Greater Cultural and Racial Understanding**

- Parenting Children for Christian Interracial Friendships
- Get off the bank
- Love Is an Action Word
- The Gospel Defeats Racism
- Why It Is Not Enough to Say 'I Am Not A Racist'

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Articles, Resources recommendations, and Family Ministries Implementation Materials.

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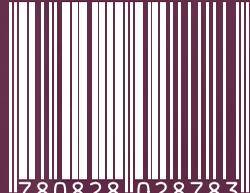
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