



2023
RESOURCE
BOOK



Adventist[®]
Family Ministries

I WILL GO WITH MY FAMILY:

FAMILIES AND MENTAL HEALTH

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



Adventist®
Family Ministries

I WILL GO WITH MY FAMILY:
***FAMILIES AND
MENTAL HEALTH***
WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

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Adventist® Family Ministries

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- I Will Go with My Family: Unity in Community
- Reaching Families for Jesus: Making Disciples
- Reaching Families for Jesus: Strengthening Disciples
- Reaching Families for Jesus: Discipleship and Service
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- Revival and Reformation: Families Reaching Up
- Revival and Reformation: Families Reaching Out
- Revival and Reformation: Families Reaching Across

Available at:
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PREFACE

The psalmist declares in Psalm 42:1: “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God.”

What a remarkable representation of a thirst-crazed deer desperately searching the desert for a stream of water. With the same intensity as the animal is looking for the *living water* the psalmist is looking for the **living God** from whom life, strength, courage, and hope come. The text does not indicate the precise reason or nature of the psalmist’s anguish, yet, whatever he is dealing with takes him to a place of profound depression and at the same time the realization that real hope for his condition is only found in the person of the **living God**.

Emotional Health experts suggest that stressfull life situations such as the death of a loved one, marriage and family problems, or divorce, may cause harm to a person’s mental health. Also, chronic illness, brain damage as a result of a serious injury (causing traumatic brain injury), the loss of a job, military combat or assault, all contribute to the likelihood of mental illness.

Communities around the world are at present filled with masses of people experiencing anguish, despair, and worry every day. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has not totally been conquered—increasing stress in many families through job loss and escalating family tension—added to serious ongoing military conflict in many parts of the world, are seriously jeopardizing the mental wellbeing of families and of individuals everywhere.

This is where Family Ministries can assist and support families with tools to help them communicate more effectively, deepen commitment in marriage, become better parents, and develop greater trust in God—the primary and leading source of mental

health. After all, it is God who admonishes in Philippians 4:6, 7: “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.”

It is our prayer that the 2023 Family Ministries Resource Book—emphasizing *Family and Mental Health*—will serve as a valuable resource for pastors, Family Ministries leaders, and members who are dedicated to supporting families, not only with their emotional health issues, but also their spiritual wellbeing, and be able to live out our vision of *I Will Go with My Family*.

Maranatha!

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors

Adventist Family Ministries

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

World Headquarters

Silver Spring, Maryland

family.adventist.org



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE BOOK

The Family Ministries Resource Book is an annual resource organized by the General Conference Adventist Family Ministries with input from the world field to provide Family Ministries leaders in divisions, unions, conferences, and local churches around the world with resources for the special family emphases weeks and Sabbaths.

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 the 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/2023RB**

For more topics on a range of family life issues, download previous years of the Resource Book at family.adventist.org/resources/resource-book/

CHRISTIAN HOME AND MARRIAGE WEEK: FEBRUARY 11-18

Christian Home and Marriage Week takes place 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 11**

Use the marriage sermon idea for the Sabbath worship service and the marriage seminar for any program segment during this celebration.

**CHRISTIAN HOME DAY (EMPHASIZES PARENTING):
SABBATH, FEBRUARY 18**

Use the parenting sermon idea for the Sabbath worship service and the parenting seminar for any program segment during this celebration.

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER:
SEPTEMBER 3-9**

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

A supplemental resource with daily readings and family activities will be provided for the Family Togetherness Week of Prayer. To download this resource please visit: family.adventist.org

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS DAY OF PRAYER:
(FOR MARRIAGES, FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS)
SABBATH, SEPTEMBER 9**

Use the Family Sermon idea for the Sabbath worship service found in this Resource Book.

SERMON IDEAS

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

FEED YOUR HEART: FINDING SPIRITUAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH IN A BROKEN WORLD

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

John 14:1-3; 12, 13, 15, 18

I. INTRODUCTION

If you get an invitation to have a bagel, a banitsa, some chana poori, some changua, some chilaquiles, scrambled eggs, gallo pinto, jianbing, kosai, mandazi, oatmeal, shakshuka, or vegemite, would you know what the invitation is for? Well, it all depends on where in the world you live or are from, you would recognize these options as breakfast foods, so it must be breakfast time.

According to the Mayo Clinic—a famous medical institution located in the United States of America—to decrease the probability of heart trouble, there's one meal you shouldn't skip. You will agree that most people in the world grew up hearing their mothers say that breakfast was the most important meal of the day. And for those of you who love history, the notion that “Breakfast is the most important meal of the day” was invented in the 19th century by Seventh-day Adventists—James Caleb and John Harvey Kellogg—to sell their newly invented breakfast cereal. If you have doubts, Google it.

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of Adventist Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
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Dr. Naima Covassin, a researcher at Mayo Clinic's Cardiovascular Physiology Laboratory found in a recent study that people who ate breakfast regularly put on less than three pounds in a year as compared to eight pounds for those who didn't eat breakfast. That weight gain is dangerous fat—according to Dr. Covassin—and is consistently associated with hypertension, high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease.¹

To be sure, researchers advocate waking up and eating a nutritious breakfast to have a great start to your day. Breakfasts that include whole grains, lean protein, fruits and vegetables, and 100 percent fruit juices without added sugar are crucial to avoiding serious heart trouble later in life.²

So—unquestionably—mom was right!

Our message today is titled: *Feed Your Heart: Finding Emotional Health in a Broken World*. Let's pray.

II. THE TEXT

John 14:1-3, 12, 13, 15, 18.

“1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also... 12 Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son...15 If you love Me, keep My commandments... 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

III. EXPLICATION AND APPLICATION

AN UNTROUBLED HEART? REALLY?

Mothers and medical investigators aren't the only ones concerned about heart trouble. So is Jesus. In today's teaching, Jesus knew that His little band of followers could and would be stunned by the announcement of His going away but also by the fact that He would soon become the crucified Lamb.³ So, Jesus gives His disciples—and us today—this clear command, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1). After all—He conveys by this message of hope—that He is with us now, and that He will be coming back for us soon, so there is no reason to worry or fret.

Ellen White offers insights about this moment between Jesus and His disciples by stating in *The Desire of Ages*, p. 663: “The object of Christ's departure was the opposite of what the disciples feared. It did not mean a final separation. He was going to prepare a place for them, that He might come again...while He was building mansions for them, they were to build characters after the divine similitude.”⁴

To be sure, Jesus isn't talking about cholesterol levels or bypass surgeries.⁵ Jesus is talking about a different kind of heart trouble—the kind that can also be classified as anxiety, apprehension, concern, fear, worry, or stress. The kind of heart trouble that can feel like a loss of hope, a lack of faith, a panic attack, or pangs of uncertainty. The kind of heart trouble that keeps you up at night thinking about money, biting your nails when you are worried about your child, on the telephone with a friend craving advice for a crumbling marriage, or concerned about difficult challenges in your own marriage relationship that don't seem to go away.

Perhaps today you've already had palpitations of worry or fear about some financial issue or problems with your spouse or children. That's the kind of heart trouble Jesus is talking about. It's the kind we've all experienced. It's the kind of heart trouble, faith trouble, lack-of-peace trouble that tends to run raging and rampant in our lives. Trouble that seems to appear every day in our lives; the kind of trouble we haven't gotten used to and don't care to.

It is very clear that heart trouble—of the physical, emotional, and spiritual kind—is a significant threat to our well-being as followers of Christ. Thanks to scientific studies, we know that a healthy breakfast will help our arteries. But what about our hearts of faith, our worries, and anxieties? What about those gnawing fears and gnawed fingernails? Let's be honest—is it even possible—as followers of Jesus in an extremely messed-up world, to listen to His command and have an untroubled heart? *Really?* Of course, it is. After all, Jesus, the Son of God; Jesus, the Messiah; Jesus, your Lord, and my Lord; Jesus, your Savior, and my Savior, is the one who is saying “Let not your heart be troubled” (v. 1).

WHAT ARE YOU FEEDING YOUR HEART?

According to God's Word—in fact, according to Jesus Himself—having an untroubled heart of faith all comes down to what you're *feeding* your heart. Just as granola or ugali make a difference physically, what you're feasting on or depriving yourself of makes all the difference spiritually and emotionally.

Ask the experts, and they will tell you there are three keys to physical well-being: a healthy diet, regular exercise, and adequate rest. If you neglect any of these, you are headed for trouble. The same is true with your heart of faith and emotional well-being. It must be well-fed and well-run to be spiritually and emotionally healthy and strong. If we take another look at the words of Jesus, we hear Him say: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (v. 1). Jesus tells us the key to *heart health*—which includes emotional health—is to trust in and feast on Him. What our hearts need to stay healthy and strong is regular nourishment from Christ and an active life of following Christ. Like muscles in our bodies, the more we exercise our faith the stronger it will be. The more experience you have with God, the more confident you will be that what He says He will do; the promises He has made, He will keep!

Isaiah 41:10 reminds us: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

Joshua 1:9 brings encouragement to a fearful heart by declaring: “...do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Ellen White shares in *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 68: “Behold your Helper, Jesus Christ. Welcome Him and invite His gracious presence. Your mind may be renewed day by day, and it is your privilege to accept peace and rest, rise above worries, and praise God for your blessings.”⁶

The psalmist refocuses the reason of our hope in Psalm 27:1: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

At first glance, these answers may look like, smell like, or feel like Sabbath School simplicity. Yet, it is true! Too many followers of Jesus have heart trouble stemming from the fact that their lives include no regular *consumption* of Jesus—of His word—no actual exercise of their faith in Him and no true rest in Him. As a result, they’re unable to endure the anxieties of life that come up daily. Hungry for a sense of direction that comes from Christ in His word or craving some lasting peace that can come only from standing on His promises, we end up looking for nourishment in all the wrong places.

We tend to skip the spiritual meals in favor of earthly solutions. Later, we binge on earthly things, believing they will bring us God-things. For example, you might religiously consume cable news, thinking the talking heads from your preferred political tribe will give you lasting wisdom in a crumbling world. You may join the neighborhood gym and begin obsessing about your physical appearance and calorie count, wrongly believing that getting back control over your body will give you control over your scared, frightened, and terrified soul.

In the meantime, our unfed hearts of faith are going through extended periods of indifferent laziness. Our troubled hearts of faith that were once tested in difficult conversations with unbelieving friends at the university or at work, exercised through prayer in times of stress and difficulties, now sit on the couch and feed on nothing but junk. No wonder we feel defenseless, unprotected, and vulnerable, as we confront the doubts, uncertainties, and worries of life!

Ellen White counsels in *An Appeal to the Youth*, p. 79: “While you make the Scriptures more your study, and become more familiar with them, you will be better fortified against the temptations of Satan.”⁷

After all, if we go to God’s word, we’ll run into Psalm 46:1,2: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...”

If we study God’s word, we will be comforted by the message of James 1:5: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

And James 3:17 declares: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”

Of course, we are not suggesting mental illness is not real, or that your condition may not need professional help. God gave such gifts as counseling (*helps*) to the body of Christ—as the Apostle Paul outlines in 1 Corinthians 12—for the edification of the church. So, if you happen to

have clinically diagnosed anxiety, don't be afraid to get good and reputable professional help if you need it and it is available in your area of the world. Yet, we are also aware that much of our daily anxiety, fear, worry, and stress are manifested because we have neglected to feed on a steady and nutritious diet from the word of God. We have not internalized His love, His joy, His peace, His patience, His kindness, His goodness, His faithfulness, His gentleness, or His self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). And we have forgotten that God loves us with an everlasting love (Jer. 31:3).

If you already know you suffer from actual heart disease, the specialists prescribe a dizzying array of *easy* steps to help you establish a healthier lifestyle. Simply give up all vices, control your cholesterol, manage your diet, get moving for 30 minutes each day, manage your stress, practice good hygiene, maintain a healthy weight, take your vitamins and be sure to get your flu shot or whatever is necessary to remain healthy these days.

But when it comes to our hearts of faith, it's once again about just three things. Our troubled hearts need to be fed with Jesus, exercised in a life of following Him, and taking the blessings of Sabbath rest seriously. This will help us to receive the physical, spiritual, and emotional rest God means for us to have each week. Remember Jesus' own words immediately following the command that our hearts be trouble-free. Five times—*five times in just two verses*—Jesus uses the words *I* or *Me*. It's nothing less than a plea for us to anchor our hearts in the hope He gives and the promise that He'll soon come back to take us to live with Him forever, to a delightful place free from stress and trouble.

SO, WHAT DOES A JESUS-DIET LOOK LIKE?

How do we feed our hearts the power of Jesus? It comes down to being connected to the promises of His word, found in the Bible, and the power of His presence, found in His people. Just as someone who's cultivating physical heart health by taking up running might subscribe to a running publication for insight and join a local running club for accountability—like so many of our relatives and friends do—God's Word and His people are essential for a strong heart of faith that will bless us spiritually and strengthen us emotionally, especially in our most intimate relationships with our spouse, our children, and other family members.

Jesus makes a promise in v. 18 when He says: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." Quite often—when our hearts are troubled and we feel far away from Jesus, it's simply because we are far from the three places—His word, His people, and His day of rest—where He's promised to always be found. What's more, we live in a world in which access to God's word has never been easier. Just one example: if you sign up at www.RevivalAndReformation.org of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference, for Believe His Prophets, or United in Prayer, or The Daily Devotional you will receive a daily devotional, Bible reading guide, and weekly United in Prayer information that will keep you connected to God, to His church, and His will for your life.

Once your heart of faith is fed with Jesus, the essential element is to make sure it's regularly stretched, exercised, and put to the test in a lifestyle of relentlessly pursuing Jesus. Immediately after telling His disciples to feast on Him, Jesus boldly proclaimed that they would be living lives

of faith in which they achieved more amazing things than He did! “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do...” (v.12). The disciples needed hearts that were fed with Jesus because they would be thrown into lives of doing incredible, frightening, heart-straining works in the name of Jesus. This is the lifestyle you need to embrace to be able to feed your heart to find spiritual and emotional health in a broken world.

Could it be that your faith feels so frail because it never gets off the couch? Could it be that the very reason you feel so unprepared to face life’s problems—including the challenges in your marriage or family—is because you’ve only made the effort to avoid them? Could it be that the very ways of strengthening your heart of faith so you can experience spiritual and emotional health is jumping at opportunities that will test it? After all, Jesus said to His disciples—and that message is also meant for us today—“And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (v.13). If we are going to be able to find spiritual and emotional health in a broken world, we will need to heed the voice of Jesus and ask Him for whatever we need to find the health we desperately stand in need of.

And last, but not least, Jesus offers the prescription for heart health: “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (v.15) Your physical heart will not be healthy and survive, much less thrive, if you eat anything you want, whenever you want, in whatever quantities you want; any more than your spiritual and emotional heart survive without obeying the One who is altogether lovely and working all things out for our good. We already know He loves us. But if we love Him, we will demonstrate it by obedience. And obedience to God’s will means heart-health. The kind of heart-health that will banish anxiety and fear. The wise man declares in Proverbs 19:23: “The fear of the Lord leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; He will not be visited with evil.”

IV. CONCLUSION

THE REALITY IN MARRIAGE TODAY

The truth is, Husbands and wives are often tired these days, bringing that exhaustion to their marriage relationships each day. Without a doubt, life in the 21st century is overloaded with time-consuming, and stress-producing concerns. Between work, school, church, and social obligations, stress is growing, and is threatening to become the central illness of our time. When it becomes overwhelming, stress affects our physical, spiritual, and emotional health. This kind of environment in our homes makes for a very stressful marriage and family reality. A setting filled with arguments, disagreements, conflicts, controversies, and strife.

It is in the middle of this kind of atmosphere that Jesus says: “Let not your heart be troubled” (v. 1).

Satan’s plan is to diminish our physical, spiritual, and emotional energies by keeping us busier than we should be—so we are constantly rushing from one unnecessary activity to another—which leaves us always running on empty. If we feed our spiritual hearts on junk food that lacks the

necessary nutrition to keep us heart-healthy and strong, every molehill of a challenge to our marriage will become a huge mountain of despair and destruction that will overwhelm and overcome our feeble energies and relationship.

Still, heeding the message of Jesus means feeding our hearts with the nourishment found in His word that sustains, invigorates, and endures. Filled with this energy-producing message our hearts will be spiritually and emotionally vigorous and strong, that we will find it possible to utter the words “I am sorry,” “please forgive me,” or “I love you,” at appropriate times. Such will be the fitting evidence that we are disciples of Jesus, and we feed our hearts with His words of life. Because being disciples of Jesus is truly much more than a mere profession of His name, rather a reproduction of His character to bless our homes, our communities, and our churches.

ILLUSTRATION

Jim Cymbala, senior pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle Church in Brooklyn, New York shared in one of his many books:

“When I was growing up, I thought the greatest Christian must be the person who walks around with shoulders thrown back because of tremendous inner strength and power, quoting Scripture and letting everyone know he has arrived. I have since learned that the most mature believer is the one who is bent over, leaning most heavily on the Lord, and admitting his total inability to do anything without Christ. The greatest Christian is not the one who has achieved the most but rather the one who has received the most. God’s grace, love and mercy flow through him abundantly because he walks in total dependence.”⁸

So, as you attempt to negotiate the space and activities at home with your spouse or family, pick a fruit of the Spirit—for heart health—each day (Gal. 5:22, 23). Whether love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control, this heaven-sent nourishing diet, will keep you spiritually and emotionally well. This will make sure, that “all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35).

Beloved, your heart doesn’t need to be troubled because as the song says about Jesus:

You are here, moving in our midst, I worship you, I worship you.
You are here, working in this place, I worship you, I worship you.
You are way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness,
My God, that is who You are.
You are way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness,
My God, that is who You are. That is who You are.

You are here touching every heart, I worship you, I worship you.
You are here, healing every heart, I worship you, Jesus, I worship you.
You are here, oh, turning lives around, I worship you, I worship you.
You are here, mending every heart, I worship you, I worship you.
And you are way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, light in the darkness,
My God, that is who You are.
That is who You are, and that is who You are, and that is who You are, my Jesus
That is who You are.

Even when I don't see it, You're working.
Even when I don't feel it, You're working.
You never stop, You never stop working.
You never stop, You never stop working.
Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper, Light in the darkness,
My God, that is who You are.
His name is above depression, His name is above loneliness;
His name is above disease, His name is above cancer.
His name is above every other name, listen, listen,
That is who You are, that is who You are.
Oh, I know that is who You are, that is who You are.

It is this Jesus who says: “Let not your heart be troubled” (v. 1). And this is the same Jesus who turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee (Jn. 2). This is the same Jesus who raised Lazarus from the dead (Jn. 11). This is the same Jesus who healed Bartimaeus from his blindness (Mk. 10). This is the same Jesus who healed the woman with the issue of blood and raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mk. 5). This is the same Jesus who cured the 10 lepers of their dreaded disease (Lk. 17). This is the same Jesus who healed the paralytic in Capernaum; the one brought down through the roof by his four friends (Mk. 2). This is the same Jesus who cast out the demon from the daughter of the Syrophoenician woman (Mk. 7). This is the same Jesus who fed 5,000 men, women, and children with five loaves of bread and two little fish (Mt. 14). This is the same Jesus who walked on the waters (Mt. 14). This is the same Jesus who commands: “Let not your heart be troubled” (v. 1).

As we process what we should do with the message we've just heard, may God help us to dine on this kind of nourishment regularly. This will assist us to enjoy spiritual and emotional health in this broken world since Jesus is the only *breakfast that truly satisfies*.

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A TALE OF TWO FAMILIES

BY JOHN NIXON, SR.

THE TEXTS

Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:28

INTRODUCTION

This is the story of two families and the similarities and differences between them. Both families faced crises from the outside world that put them under severe trial. The secularism of their time tested the spirituality of their homes. Both families shunned evil. Both families knew the true God and worshipped Him. But in the end, they fared very differently. The lesson of this story lies in the differences between them, why one family survived intact while the other family fell apart. Lot is the man who lost his family; Noah is the man who saved his family.

COMPARISON OF SETTINGS

Both the world before the flood and the city of Sodom presented challenges of the most extreme kind to the believers of their time. In various places in the New Testament, the antediluvian world and the city of Sodom are each presented as eschatological signs of the final rebellion against God and its consequences. Jesus' prophecy in Matthew 24 pointed to the time of Noah as the example of world conditions in the time just before His return.

“As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” – Matthew 24:37-39

Jude made an end-time connection with the city of Sodom.

“They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.” – Jude 7

What’s interesting about both cases is that in the Old Testament, the stories of those times are told through the experiences of families. We see them from the inside. Both families were recipients of God’s grace amid devastating divine judgment (Genesis 6:8; Genesis 19:16). But only one family came through the crisis unscathed. The nature of a spiritually resilient family is revealed in their stories.

I. THE DAYS OF NOAH

“Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.” – Genesis 6:1-3

The downfall of humanity began when the difference between the righteous and the unrighteous dissipated. The sons of God chose wives based on the outward instead of the inward - physical beauty rather than character - and they took “any they wanted.” (New Living Translation)

Intermarriage between the “sethites” and the “cainites” caused a breakdown in the separation between them. The breakdown in separation then led to a breakdown in distinction. It is a principle of life, “Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character’” (1 Corinthians. 15:33). In the antediluvian world, righteousness and unrighteousness mingled together until the former assimilated to the latter and the knowledge of God began to be lost on the earth.

Noah was the patriarch of the first generation born after the death of Adam. For 900 years the world’s first man bounced his grandkids off his knee and told them the story of Paradise lost – of the beautiful Garden now guarded by a flaming sword - of the Tree of Life, now off-limits - of walking with angels and talking face to face with God - of the serpent and the Forbidden Tree and the gradual steps away from integrity that led to the curse of sin.

It was hard to deny the existence of God while Adam was on the earth. He could tell with true conviction what he had seen with his own eyes. He could show the scar on his body from the divine surgery that brought Eve into existence. But with his death, the last natural barrier against

wickedness was lost and sin went on a violent rampage. The world had become so corrupt that only the most extreme language could be used to describe the depraved condition to which humanity had fallen, and the heartbroken grief of God.

“The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.” – Genesis 6:5,6

This was also the time of the Nephilim, people of great size and strength who were “the heroes of old, men of renown.” (Genesis 6:4). Their descendants were the giants that intimidated the men Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:33). But the name Nephilim in Hebrew means “fallen ones”, suggesting that although they may have been renowned in the eyes of men, in God’s assessment they were sinners. The commentary from *Patriarchs and Prophets* bears it out, “their guilt in giving loose rein to iniquity was in proportion to their skill and mental ability.” Their wickedness “was open and daring” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 90,91).

“Men put God out of their knowledge and worshiped the creatures of their own imagination; and as the result, they became more and more debased” (PP 91).

This was the world in which Noah had to raise his family. He did not choose the conditions of society and he couldn’t control the world outside his doors. But he could control his own life and his own home and he did so with integrity and faithfulness to God.

II. THE TIME OF LOT

“It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.” – Luke 17:28

While the Bible points to violence as the outward sign of the corruption of Noah’s time (Genesis 6:11), Sodom was known for its sexual immorality, and more than that, sexual perversion (Jude 7). But while the vilest and degrading practices were going on, life in Sodom continued from day to day as though it was nothing strange. Indeed, it had become ordinary, and this was the doom of Sodom.

When the men of Sodom tried to break down Lot’s door to sexually violate the two visitors in his home, it was “all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old” (Genesis 19:4). When sin is replete with no restraint, it is the sign that the Holy Spirit has been rejected and has completely withdrawn and the only thing left is divine judgment.

So, we see the similarities. Both Noah and Lot raised their families in conditions that were detrimental to godly family life, but they came upon those conditions differently.

MATERIALISM OR SPIRITUALITY

“Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt . . . So, Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east.” – Genesis 13:10,11

When Lot decided where to raise his family, he made his decision based on the prospect of increasing his wealth, not realizing the effect it would have on his household. He did not consult the Lord. Lot exposed his family to evil. He made a materialistic decision and in so doing, set up his family to learn to value material things above all. These values became central to the disaster that befell his family when Sodom was destroyed.

Lot was already rich when he moved his family to Sodom (Genesis 13:5). He didn't need anything. And because of materialism, he lost both his family and his wealth. He “went into Sodom rich; he left with nothing” (*Counsels on Health*, 270). The first loss was by far the most devastating, but it was set up by the values that drove Lot's decision. Lot fell into a life of luxury and luxury ruined his faith.

“When Lot entered Sodom, he fully intended to keep himself free from iniquity and to command his household after him. But he signally failed. The corrupting influences about him had an effect upon his own faith, and his children's connection with the inhabitants of Sodom bound up his interest in a measure with theirs” (*Adventist Home*, 138).

For a family to thrive spiritually, decision-making must be based on spiritual values. As it was in the days of Lot, so it is today. The allure of materialism is all around us. The promise of personal wealth and the happiness it will bring is the essential feature of capitalism. The system, however, is driven by self-interest, private ownership for the sake of profit, and the acquisition of wealth as an end in itself.

As of 2021, there are more than a million millionaires in the United States, far more in fact. According to one report, a million new millionaires were created in the U. S. in 2021 alone. There are now 14.6 millionaires in America, with 2021 being “the strongest year ever for millionaire creation.”¹

With so much wealth among us and the possibility of gaining it open to so much of the population it would be easy for us to fall into an attitude of “this world living.” But when we place material things at the center of our value system, we put our spiritual health and the health of our family at risk. In the experience of Lot and his family, “the result is before us” (*Adventist Home*, 138).

Conversely, Noah built his life and the interests of his family around the mission he had been given by God. His entire life was driven by it. The ark project demanded the use of all his gifts

and talents – the architectural ingenuity to plot God’s building instructions, the physical brawn to prepare and the place the construction materials, the leadership skills to organize the workers to make the most of their abilities and talents, and stamina of mind and body to keep at it every day until the mission was complete.

He even invested his personal assets. Noah poured his own money into the building of the ark until he had spent it all. He had no separation anxiety when he led his family into the ark because he was leaving nothing behind. The project also called for great faith on Noah’s part. He built a boat on dry ground in a world that had never seen rain. The scientists discredited him. The intellectuals demeaned him. The rude and irreverent mocked him. But Noah kept on building.

Noah’s entire life was driven by the character of his faith. In the end, he had to turn his back completely on the generation of his time as they continued to turn their backs on God. There was a clear choice between the values of the world he lived in and the values of the kingdom to which he had attached himself. And the result is before us.

DECISIVENESS OR VACILLATION

One of the clearest signs of what happened to Lot’s faith as he lived in Sodom was his reaction when he learned his city was about to be destroyed. If he wasn’t sure his visitors were angels when he first took them in, the events at his front door made it perfectly clear.

“Then they struck the men who were at the door of the house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.” – Genesis 19:11

The angels’ warning was emphatic, as were their actions in defending Lot and his family from the depraved crowd. They didn’t just make an invitation of salvation to Lot, they gave the command they were instructed to give.

“Do you have anyone else here—sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the Lord against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it.” – Genesis 19:12,13

The message was clear and the warning was immediate. There could be no doubt as to the urgency of the angels’ command, yet Lot did a strange thing. He hesitated.

“With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, ‘Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.’ When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them.” – Genesis 19:15,16

GOD'S GRACE TO LOT

In the same way that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Genesis 6:8), Lot found mercy in the patience of the Lord. Here’s what I love about the Sodom story, Lot was an ordinary believer like you and me. He was no faith-giant like Abraham or great prophet like Moses. He was not called “perfect in his generation” the way Job was. Lot chose to live in Sodom, and he chose it for the wrong reasons. At first, he was on the outskirts of town, then he moved in. He remained there despite the conditions because he was living comfortably.

Lot did not partake of the sins of Sodom. The Sodomites hated him because he preached against their sins; he was not one of them. But he wasn’t a perfect servant either, yet God was determined to save him despite himself.

The destroying angels persisted in their mission to bring Lot’s family to safety. God was as determined to save them as He was to destroy the wicked, and more so, for He limited His power to destroy by the measure of His purpose to save.

The angels were instructed that they could do nothing until Lot and his family were safe (verse 22). But even then, while being led to safety by angels of God, Lot resisted salvation, so weak had his faith become. He didn’t trust God’s provision for his safety and pled to go to a safe retreat of his own choosing. The angels complied with his request, but it didn’t turn the way Lot expected.

As the little family ran toward the place of safety Mrs. Lot gradually slowed her steps. Her pace slackened and her progress diminished. But it was not because of fatigue. The heat of the fire was at the backs of their necks and the wails of dying were ringing in their ears. In his haste and panic, Lot didn’t notice that his wife had fallen behind. She was conflicted and unsettled; her head was in a whirl.

Suddenly she stopped and took a backward look, and as her eyes beheld the city she loved more than anything else, she saw their last sight on this earth. Immediately she was frozen into a pillar of salt, a grotesque monument to the peril of a divided heart. She almost made it out, a few more steps and she would have been safe. Instead, she was lost on the brink of salvation.

This story frightened me as a child. I couldn’t understand it. Mrs. Lot was doing everything the angel told her to do. She only turned her head. Was this gesture deserving of death? Sure, the angel told her not to look back but maybe she forgot. With all that was going on, maybe she got confused. One head motion and she was dead! Is this the lesson of Lot’s wife?

Surely, it is not. If God wanted to destroy Lot’s wife, He would’ve left her in the city. God was trying to save Mrs. Lot. What we see on the plain in that pillar of salt is a woman refusing salvation because she didn’t like the cost of it. Lot’s wife disdained God’s deliverance because His judgment against Sodom included her wealth. Her home was ablaze back there. She hated God’s salvation because it did not include her furs, her cash, her friends, and her wicked children who would not take the warning. “She felt she had been severely dealt with because the wealth it took her years to accumulate must be left to destruction” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 161).

It was not the backward look that killed Lot’s wife. The look was only a symptom. It was not what she did with her head that was her doom; it was what she had already done with her heart.

And the hesitation of her husband in fleeing the destruction of Sodom only weakened her resolve. The cost of his vacillation was her life.

The tragedy of Mrs. Lot reminds us of the biblical principle of detachment. The Bible does not teach that wealth is a sin or that material possessions are evil in themselves. Abraham was richer than Lot, but it did not cost him his spirituality. The danger of material possessions is not in what we have but in whether or not it has us. The Lot story reminds us of the importance of how we relate to our things.

Detachment means we turn our possessions over to God by covenant. We are ready to use them for His purposes or give them up at a moment's notice as He commands. And if our faith is what it should be, God may take our wealth without explaining Himself. Paul connects detachment with contentment.

"I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." – Philippians 4:12

NOAH'S DECISIVENESS

In contrast to Lot's vacillation, Noah's faith was demonstrated by his decisiveness. "By faith Noah, being warned about things not yet seen moved in holy fear and built an ark to save his family" (Hebrews 11:7). While Lot's faith weakened during the time he spent in Sodom, the faith of Noah remained strong when tested.

Faith in God is more than just the belief that He exists. Believing that God is, is just the entry step, the minimum requirement to knowing God (Hebrews 11:6). When faith is mature it goes beyond mere belief. It becomes the basis of a new worldview. The Bible is describing a mature faith when it states:

"So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." – 2 Corinthians 4:18

The paradox of "fixing our eyes" on something that can't be seen points to the reality of the spiritual realm. When Jesus says, "my kingdom is not of this world," this is what He means. There is a worldview and a set of values that neither come from nor conform to the values of this world. There is a realm of reality that is unseen to the physical eye but seen by the eye of faith. It was this worldview that led to Noah's decisiveness in contrast to Lot's vacillation.

A recurring theme in the story of Noah's life was his immediate and complete obedience to God's commands. While Lot attempted to negotiate his salvation based on fear, Noah obeyed in faith. If either of them would be suspect of the means of escape God had provided, it should have been Noah – a boat against a deluge in a world where it had never rained. But Noah was strong in faith, and it showed in his actions.

- “Noah did everything just as God commanded him” (Genesis 6:22).
- “And Noah did all that the Lord commanded him” (Genesis 7:5).
- “Male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah” (Genesis 7:9).

For 120 years Noah never wavered from God’s purpose for his life. He took the scorn and insult of his ministry without complaining and never asked for a different assignment. Babies were born, grew up, became adults, married, had babies of their own, who grew up, became adults, and had babies of their own, and Noah was still preaching. The influence of his actions was just as telling on his family as Lot’s influence was on his.

“As a rule, children inherit the dispositions and tendencies of their parents, and imitate their example” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 117). And as “Noah was the most pious and holy of any upon the earth” (*Story of Redemption*, 63), his family benefitted greatly from the influence of his faith and obedience to God.

When Noah’s sons were born, their father was already engaged in the ark project. They participated in it beside him as soon as they were old enough to hold a hammer. They contributed to the building of the vessel that would save their lives, under their father’s tutelage.

Ham, Shem, and Japheth watched their father as they were growing up and knew that he was for real. Noah was an example to his boys and the influence of his life made a deep impression on them.

In his poem, *Sermons We See* (in the public domain), Edgar Guest has a relevant line that reads: “For I might misunderstand you and the high advice you give, But there’s no misunderstanding how you act and how you live.”

The grace of God to Noah was transmitted to his sons; they were saved by his example. Noah was sowing the seeds of salvation in his home by living as a man of God.

“As a reward for his faithfulness and integrity, God saved all the members of his family with him. What encouragement to parental fidelity!” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 98)

Every parent is a pastor, and the family is the first church. And here is a general truth I’ve learned over my years in the ministry, a woman in love will follow her man in doing right, and the children will come along. You often see women in church without their man, but seldom do you see a godly man in church without his woman and children beside him.

Mrs. Noah followed her husband into the ark because he was firm in his convictions, while Mrs. Lot did not follow her husband to safety because he was vacillating.

Here’s a promise believing parents love to claim.

“But thus says the Lord: ‘even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you. And I will save your children.’ – Isaiah 49:25

It’s a beautiful promise and it gives us hope when our children go astray. But when we claim this promise we should remember it has conditions. It is presumption, not faith, for us to ask God to save your children without our participation. We must do our part as Noah did his part. Noah’s family was saved by God’s Spirit working through Noah.

“Noah’s experience was a noble example for Christians who know they are living in the time of the end and are preparing themselves for translation. Their greatest missionary work is to be done in the home.”²

A father’s greatest asset as the head of the home is not his harshness or his strictness. It is not how hard and military he can be in commanding his family to obey his orders. The strong father is not the one who can dominate everyone under his roof. It’s the father who by his example shows what it means to be a man of God.

It means something to have a father you can look up to, one whose life is founded on the character of Christ. It sets a standard for the children on the inside, an internal standard that they can never fully escape. Even when they don’t live up to it themselves, their consciences will ever be telling them that they should be better than they are; that they should be like dad. This is the kind of leader every head of a family should be.

EXAMPLE

My wife and I were fortunate in our fathers - not highly educated men but hard-working honest men who were genuine in their faith. I’m not comparing them to Noah, whom the Bible calls a perfect man in his generation. They were not perfect by any means, and even as children, we could see their flaws. But what I’ve learned over the years is that children will forgive their parent’s shortcomings if they believe in them. They will excuse their parent’s faults, but they won’t excuse hypocrisy.

When our dads took us to church on Sabbath or picked up the Bible at home for evening worship, they meant every word they taught us to obey. They believed what they taught and lived it to the best of their abilities. This is what it takes to be a man of God and save your family; it takes everything. We must be determined and completely sold out for God.

CONCLUSION

And now we have come full circle. The difference between the Noah and Lot’s families, and in particular the heads of those families, was the difference between being spiritually strong or

spiritually weak. The societal conditions around them were the same. The differences were inside, not outside. The differences were the reason one family stayed intact while the other was broken. It was the difference between spirituality and materialism and the power of decisiveness over vacillation. These characteristics are determined by the strength or weakness of our faith in God. As we grow in faith, we prove our love and trust to God and ensure our own happiness.

ILLUSTRATION

There's a story of a dad who was awakened in the middle of the night by the sound of his son's voice, "Daddy there's a man in the house!" The father jumped up to see the shocking sight of a stranger holding a knife to his young daughter's throat. The intruder froze at the door as the father confronted him. The two men squared off without a word passing between them in a deadly stare down with everything at stake.

The dad felt the adrenalin rush and every sense heightened as he watches for his opportunity. The intruder turned his head for a second to get his bearings and the father took his chance. He leapt at the intruder and a desperate struggle began. The knife dislodged, the daughter escaped, and the intruder ran away. The father took his daughter and son into his arms. He had saved his family.

When the incident was over the father recounted what happened to the police. One of them asked, "what was going through your mind?" "As I stood there face to face with that man, his hands around my little girl's throat, I made a solemn promise in my mind there and then. No matter what happens to me, even if it costs me my life, that man is not leaving here with my daughter!"

APPLICATION

An intruder has entered all our homes with murderous intent. He has his hands around our children's throats waiting for an opportunity to take them away forever. This is truer in our day than it has ever been. But there is no need for fear. The Lord is on our side, and He has provided a way of escape and a place of safety in His Son, Jesus. Christ is the Ark of safety for all who put their trust in Him. Lot or Noah? It is for us to choose.

NOTES

¹ Robert Frank, "A million new millionaires were created in the U.S. last year, and the richest got richer, report says", CNBC, March 17, 2022 <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/17/million-new-millionaires-were-created-in-us-last-year-report-says.html>

² Francis D. Nichol, editor, The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary in seven volumes (Washington, D.C., 1978), 1:254

FAMILY WORSHIP: A PROTECTING HEDGE

BY JOHN B. YOUNGBERG

THE TEXTS

Malachi 4:5-6; Joshua 24:15

PROTECTION FROM PHYSICAL HARM

In the book of Job, Chapter 1, a scene is portrayed in heaven where Satan, considering himself to be the ruler of sinful Planet Earth, complains to God concerning the righteous man Job. He says, “Have you not made a *hedge* around him, around his household, and around all that he has . . . ?” Satan admits that God is protecting Job from his own evil plans to hurt Job. Isn’t that what modern families want? a protecting hedge around their families? I am proposing in this sermon that family worship is that protecting hedge. In *Child Guidance*, p. 520 Ellen White says, “Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God’s altar. Ask for the guardianship of holy angels in your home.”

Five hundred feet of rocky riverbank whizzed by Sandy as though she sped past them on a toboggan run. The glacier-polished slope of the Tuolumne River was as slick as ice. Now the deafening roar of Le Conte Falls thundered in her ears. How could she stop her Evel-Knievel-style ride before plunging over the edge of the 200 ft. falls in front of her? The only thing the river offered to grab hold of was green algae, clinging to slimy rocks. Was the day that had begun with such happiness end in death from her accidental *waterboggan* ride?

That morning the family had gathered around the campfire before continuing their backpacking trip into Yosemite National Park's high country. The blended voices of father, mother, and six children had sung: "Father, we thank Thee for the night, and for the pleasant morning light; For rest, and food, and loving care, And all that makes the day so fair. Help us to do the things we should, To be to others kind and good, In all we do, at work or play, To love Thee better day by day."

As the last notes died away into the forest, the father petitioned God to place his family into the hands of loving angels that day. And then they started working their way up the trail beside a two-thousand-foot stretch of waterfalls, their packs bulging with twelve days' provisions.

When fourteen-year-old Sandy, who was ahead of her siblings, arrived at the next night's campsite she unbuckled her backpack, changed into her swimming suit, and went to the river to take a slide in the fast-moving water. At first, she squealed with glee as she slipped along. She planned to go only a little way in the shallow part. However, the granite river bottom sloped more than she thought, suddenly whipping her into the current. Faster and faster she whizzed by the big rocks and boulders on the edge of the swift-moving stream. If only there were something she could grasp, the limb of a bush or tree. Or, if she could straddle a rock. "Jesus, help me!" she cried. Although Sandy tried desperately, she could not stop her plunge. Fear gripped her heart as the current hurdled her down the final stretch toward the falls.

Seventeen-year-old Charlene, hiking up the trail, arrived at the falls just in time to see the rushing water push Sandy to the brink. She saw her sister enter the smaller falls that cascaded down into the larger falls, from which the water fell hundreds of feet to the jagged rocks below. In a split second, the roaring falls would swallow its prey. And then Charlene saw the miracle! Right before her eyes, an invisible hand pushed Sandy back up the falls against the current where she latched onto a rock, straddling it with her legs. In a frightened daze, Sandy lifted herself onto the rock and then stumbled to a large flat boulder where she collapsed, trembling and totally exhausted. Screaming, Charlene ran up the path to get her father. Rushing down the rocky terrain, he spied his daughter lying motionless on the boulder, unable to speak. Then she began to sob. After comforting her, Sandy's physician father examined her and found that she didn't have a scratch or a bruise on her body.

Gratefully the family thanked God for His protective care in worship that night. No one doubted that angels had intervened to save Sandy from probable death that day. God had fulfilled for them His promise: "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone" (Psalm 91:11, 12).

PROTECTION AGAINST SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE

The book of Job also tells us that Job "rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings" for each of his children (Job 1:5). Satan complained to God, "Have you not made a *hedge* around him, around his household, and around all that he has . . . ?"

Ellen White gives the following counsel. "In the morning the Christian's first thoughts should be upon God. Worldly labor and self-interest should be secondary. Children should be

taught to respect and reverence the hour of prayer. . . It is the duty of the Christian parent morning and evening by earnest prayer and persevering faith, to make a *hedge* about their children. They should patiently instruct them—kindly and untiringly teach them how to live in order to please God” (*Child Guidance* p. 512).

Abraham was another altar builder of the Old Testament. The Bible tells about when he arrived in the land of Canaan. “And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land,’ and there he built an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him” (Genesis 12:7). Then he moved on to Bethel and there “He built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord” (verse 8). Because of a famine in the land, Abram went to Egypt. Then he returned again to Canaan near Bethel, “to the place of the altar which he had made there at first. And there Abram called on the name of the Lord” (Genesis 13:4). Abram believed in God and worshiped him, and “He counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). Later God changed Abram’s name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). And in Genesis 18:18-19 God said, “Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. . . For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.”

As the Children of Israel were ready to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7). This focus on worshiping God and teaching His ways would keep them from becoming idolatrous like the nations around them.

Imagine that it is the last day on Planet Earth. The King is coming! The message of the Three Angels has already sounded from east to west, from pole to pole. The whole world has already heard the loud voice of “the EVERLASTING GOSPEL.” Yes, it was a message of “WORSHIP HIM [the Creator] who made heaven and earth” (See Revelation 14). It is the same message that Elijah shared when he rebuilt the broken-down altar on Mt. Carmel, and then prayed that God would turn the hearts of the people (see I Kings 18). It is the same message that John the Baptist (the second Elijah) preached on the banks of the Jordan, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

It is the message of the last-day Elijahs, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers (and mothers) to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers (and mothers)” (see Malachi 4:5-6, author’s paraphrase). And now there is a solemn pause, and the earnest question to parents is heard, “Where is the flock that was given thee, thy beautiful flock?” (Jeremiah 13:20). Looking around them, families gather their loved ones together in a circle, and with grateful and humble hearts, they respond, “Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!” (Isaiah. 8:18). Glorious day!

Can we claim the following promises? “Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the mighty [margin] be delivered? But thus says the Lord: Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children” (Isaiah 49:24-25). “All your children shall be taught by the Lord; and great shall be the peace of your children” (Isaiah 54:13). How can we make this come true for our families today?

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOUR WORSHIP IS ACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

Someone has said that human beings are worshipping creatures. We all worship something or someone. Some worship entertainment celebrities. Some worship sports. Some worship fashion. Some worship their bank accounts. So we ask, what or who receives the most attention in your life? That is who or what you worship. Revelation 17:17 says that in the last days the wicked will be “of one mind . . . to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.” This means that everyone will make a choice as to whom they worship, and some choose false worship, ignoring the Creator God in favor of worldly incentives that are contrary to the counsels in the word of God concerning true worship, and forcing everyone to worship a false god.

On the other hand, some people focus their worship on the only true God and Jesus Christ who created every human being. He created us to worship Him alone. In Isaiah 44:6 and 8 it says, “Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no God; I know not any.” Whom we choose to worship will crystallize our mindset. Worshiping God the way that He has chosen for us determines our destiny in life, including eternal life. It is crucial for us to make the right choice. The Bible says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Isaiah 26:3). So we have pictured in the Holy Scripture a clash of minds, of mindsets, especially as we traverse the very last days of the great conflict between good and evil.

We must each decide, individually, if we choose the mind of the enemy of men women, and children, or if we choose the mind of Christ. As the children of Israel entered into the Promised Land, Joshua, their leader said to them, “And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, CHOOSE for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

In the modern Christian home, family worship teaches the children about God and His plan for their lives. It passes on the knowledge of the Bible and its importance in our lives. It gives the children the opportunity to accept the plan of salvation early in their lives and commit to serving God in meaningful ways. When family worships are joyful, Christ-centered, and engaging with age-appropriate activities, the ties between family members are strengthened.

HOW IS YOUR FAMILY WORSHIP?

Would you like to make family worship a regular, dynamic, experience in your home? Would you like to offer your family members the fresh, daily spiritual manna of a growing relationship with God? Could these times of refreshing be of high quality and enriching for all of the family members?

When John Elick and his wife went to the upper Amazon jungles of Peru pioneering among native tribes, they had a parrot as a family pet. The parrot heard them singing a song as they celebrated worship. After a while, when it was almost time for family worship the parrot would begin to sing their worship song even if no one had arrived yet, because he knew it was worship time. Yes, family worship should be a regular habit twice a day, when possible, even if one or more members cannot be present.

Try having the children participate in family worship. In one family, when the two sons were in early adolescence, the family gathered one evening and Dad handed out slips of paper. He said, “We’ve done lots of things together, I want you to make a list of the most interesting experiences we have had as a family.” Everybody began to write. After a bit they tabulated the jottings. How surprised Dad was when he read over all the lists. What came in first? It was the family vacation canoeing the Pierre Marquette River, one of the fastest rivers in Michigan’s Lower Peninsula. The boys climbed into one canoe. Father and Mother climbed into a second canoe with their food, sleeping bags, and tent.

They hadn’t even gotten past the first curve in the fast-flowing river and were still adjusting their cargo when Boom! their canoe hit a submerged log and capsized. Dad’s new Canon camera went to the bottom and he dove in to retrieve it. They finally got to the first campsite after dark. They pitched the wet tent and built a fire to dry out two of the sleeping bags. Their son John was walking by the riverbank, chuckling over his parents’ surprise bath when Thud! he stumbled over his own sleeping bag that he had left in the path, and accidentally kicked it into the river. The next day son Wes was standing up in the other canoe looking at a wasp nest hanging from a tree limb when Crash! the canoe hit a submerged rock and he went flying off the front into the river. What a 14-day vacation! It rained 10 of those days. But when it was past, no one had been injured, God had protected them, and they’d had a fun family time together.

As they finished worship that evening, remembering their family vacation, the boys said, “Hey Dad, that was fun! Let’s do worship like that again some time!”

On another occasion, sons, John and Wes, were up and getting ready for school when their Mom called the family for breakfast. As they came into the kitchen, the surprised sons looked at each other. “What’s the big deal? Your birthday? No. My birthday? No!” The table was well decorated with candles and beautiful flowers. Dad said, “December 5, what happened on December 5?” Suddenly John’s face lighted up. “I remember! We were baptized three years ago today!” Then Mom brought out the baptismal certificates they had signed promising Jesus to follow Him. They told their sons they were proud of their decisions and they all had a prayer thanking God for His goodness and for their special times. Then Mom brought out a delicious breakfast. No one complained about that family worship!

The common denominator in these three stories is celebration. Effective family worships include CELEBRATION.

WHAT MAKES FAMILY WORSHIP EFFECTIVE?

Dr. Edgel Phillips, while a student at Andrews University, did research on the aims and methods of family worship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He found that the most powerful method in drawing families closer to God and each other was in the relational aspects that were a natural part of the family worship atmosphere.

Personal interactions:

- Greeting and welcoming each other,
- Sharing experiences of the day,
- Discussing the problems of the day,
- Expressing thanks for the good things that have happened,
- Asking for forgiveness for wrongs done to each other,
- Talking about what God means to each individual,
- Quoting Bible promises.

Personal affirmation:

- A sense of belonging and acceptance,
- A feeling of love and well being,

Praying together:

- Praying both morning and evening,
- Inviting the Holy Spirit into each person's life,
- Sharing prayer requests,
- Taking turns praying around the circle.

Effective prayer includes two important aspects.

1. We speak to God. We share our thanks, our adoration, our needs, and our requests. We pray for our children, for those who are battling with the enemy, and for our daily needs.
2. God speaks to us. Prayer is a 2-way communication—not only do we speak to God but we often forget to listen to His voice speaking to us. Yes, in prayer, we listen to God as we search and study the Word of God—the Bible. God also can speak to us in the silence through the impressions of the Holy Spirit, but we may not always take time to listen for His voice. The child Samuel heard God's voice calling him, "Samuel, Samuel." The Scripture also says, "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it,' whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).

Years ago, John B. Youngberg and his wife, Millie, were on their knees, reading and claiming this promise. John was just finishing his doctorate and needed a call. Prospective employers had contacted him from several conferences, but these positions did not seem right since his wife was employed at Andrews University (AU). Would God hear their prayer for a position closer to Andrews University? As they earnestly pleaded with God, the doorbell rang. Upon answering it, an out-of-breath professor reported he had just come from a committee meeting of professors in the Department of Education and that they had voted to recommend to the university vice-president, that John be hired for the Religious Education Program. That first summer John's teaching load was light and Millie suggested that they begin a seminar on Family Life, which they conducted at AU that summer. This seminar, later named Family Life International, continued for 25 fruitful years at AU, had served numerous students from six divisions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Did God hear and answer their prayer? Yes! Above all that they could ask or think!

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF EFFECTIVE FAMILY WORSHIP?

Family unity is one result of consistent family worship. A familiar proverb says, "The family that prays together, stays together." An illustration of this compares the family to a wheel with spokes converging to a central hub. The hub represents Jesus. The members of the family are the spokes. The closer the spokes come to the hub, the closer they are to each other. Likewise, the closer family members come to Jesus—the great center—the more united they are to each other.

Another benefit is a stronger church community, the natural outcome of strongly committed families to the glory of God. As these benefits reach the wider community, greater Christian outreach and witnessing to others has a ripple effect in the uplifting of humanity. What today's fallen culture has destroyed, the Elijah Message will restore. "And Elijah, when he comes will restore all things" (Matthew 17:10-11). Ellen White declares, "The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 349).

As we have been talking about various aspects of family worship, you might say that we have been gathering the broken down stones so that we can rebuild the altars in our homes. That is important, but as we bring our thoughts to a close, let's go back to the most important point. The key to successful family worship is to make it Christ-centered. The Innocent Sacrifice, representing the Lamb of God, is on the altar. He redeems us to Himself, taking away our sins and preparing us for His glorious kingdom.

A father had been traveling several days for work and returned home on Friday. He gathered the family for worship at the sunset hour. For the topic, he felt impressed to share these verses about Jesus' sacrifice from the book of Isaiah, in a personal way, "He [Jesus] was wounded for MY transgressions, He was bruised for MY iniquities. . . and with His stripes I am healed." (Isaiah 53:4-5). Dad went on to describe Jesus' painful walk outside the walls of Jerusalem to Calvary, a place where criminals were executed.

He also shared with the family the seven sayings of Jesus on the cross. Jesus' first three sayings were for others. First, as the soldiers were nailing the big spikes through the tender flesh of Jesus' hands and feet, He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus' second words were for the thief on His right side who believed Jesus was dying for his sins, and he repented. Jesus told the thief that he would indeed be with Him in paradise, (Luke 23:43). And then, Jesus, seeing His mother supported by His beloved disciple, John, at the foot of the cross, told John to care for His mother after He was gone (John 19:26-27).

Dad went on. The last four sayings were about Himself. Jesus was suffering there for YOU—Ralph and Grace and Bobby, and for me and Mom. He took our place. He was our substitute. During this extreme agony, Jesus could not see His Father's face although the Father was very near the cross, covered in darkness. Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus suffered thirst and asked for a drink, "I thirst" (see John 19:28). He had not had a drink since the night before in the upper room at the last supper. He became thirsty in His human condition so that we could have the hope of drinking freely from the River of Life in heaven someday. Then in a booming voice that seemed to echo throughout creation, Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). The plan of salvation for all sinners was complete. The One who had come down from heaven to save—Ralph, Grace, Bobby, Mom, Dad, and all the people of the world had succeeded! Satan became a conquered foe! Then, when Jesus' thorn-crowned head slumped in death, He repeated a favorite Psalm, "Into Your hands I commend My spirit" (see Luke 24:46) Dad looked around the living room and noticed that there were tears in the eyes of his three children and in Mom's eyes too. He said, "Oh, how much Jesus loves each one of us!" What joy and hope we have because of His great sacrifice!

Moms, Dads, children, very soon we're going to have another "family worship". It won't be in this sad world but in heaven. Jesus will gather together "the whole glorious family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:15). Notice, our "whole family" which has for 6,000 years been separated will be united there. Then every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that He is King of kings and Lord of lords! (Isaiah 45:23 and Philippians 9-11).

WITH ALL YOUR HEART FOR A LIFETIME!

BY JASMINE FRASER

THE TEXTS

“1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: 3 that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. 4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” Ephesians 6:1-4

“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. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Deuteronomy 6:4-9

INTRODUCTION

The story is told of a young man who had made quite an impression on his neighbor, an elderly lady. Each day the young man would help the old lady with little chores in her yard or help

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with carrying packages from her car. One day the old lady, out of amazement and curiosity, asked the young man, “Son, how did you become such a fine young man?”

The young man replied, “Well when I was a boy, I had a “drag” problem.”

Before the puzzled old lady could further query his response, the young man continued, “You see, my parents dragged me to church for Sabbath worship, dragged me to church for Sunday night services, and dragged me to church for Wednesday night prayer meetings.”

Beyond the tinge of humor in this story is the sobering reality of parents’ efforts to “bring up children in the nurture and admonition of God” (Ephesians 6:4). I believe many parents are doing their best to raise godly children. But as society embarks on a post-Christian era¹ the responsibility to nurture and admonish children for the honor of God is becoming more daunting.

The family unit was instituted at creation and divinely ordained to showcase and perpetuate the attributes of God’s character, preserve the identity and wellbeing of each family member, and provide adequate leadership for a more stable society.² Family relationships make or break society. Over time, we see the sanctity, role, and purpose of the family becoming endangered by the fluid nature of society’s morals and values. Consequently, we must realize that it takes more than dragging or coercing children into worship environments to instill practices that honor God.

We are appalled by ongoing studies revealing the decline in church attendance by youth and young adults. Many young people are forfeiting their allegiance and devotion to organized religion.³ In the wake of a global pandemic, family issues become more complex as many families, especially those with younger children, wrestle with mental-emotional challenges that affect children’s developmental process and the quality of the parent-child relationships. As a church, it is essential that we find ways to help our young people reaffirm faith in Christ and remain connected through corporate worship. At the same time, it is crucial that we also respond to the needs of parents with younger children, helping them mitigate mental-emotional challenges and empower their children in developing lifelong faith and commitment to Christ and the community of faith.

Studies have shown that one factor contributing to mature faith, lifelong values, and commitment to Christ in the faith community is the communication process between parents and children during the developmental years.⁴ Studies have also revealed that “positive family communication leads to developing values and social competencies in children.”⁵ Much effort is often devoted to helping improve communication between spouses. Consequently, it is also vital for us to provide resources to help parents develop and maintain functional relationships with their children.

CONTEXT AND APPLICATION

The parent-child relationship is one of the most important relationships a child will experience. The influence of this relationship goes beyond childhood and affects development into adulthood, including marital relationships.⁶ Factors such as parents’ behavior and parenting styles, children’s attachment styles, and the practice of mutuality influence the quality of parent-

child relationships and affect children's mental, emotional, and spiritual development positively or negatively. Parents' attention and response to the physical and emotional needs of children determines the quality of emotional attachment of a child as well as the dynamics of the parent-child relationship. In essence, parent-child relationships are significant determinants in a person's quality of life throughout a lifespan and across generations.

It is no wonder that the Bible is replete with instructions on developing and maintaining functional parent-child relationships. Though things change with the ebb and flow of culture and society, the word of God remains unchangeable. It is profitable in guiding parents in building a functional relationship with each child.

Today we will revisit some of the advice given in the Bible on the dynamics of parent-child relationships and, in the process, suggest ways in which parents can develop and maintain healthy relationships with their children. Ultimately, our goal is to equip parents, helping them empower their children for a lifetime commitment to Christ and the church.

One of the passages of Scripture that is often used as a guide for the parent-child relationship is Ephesians 6:1-4. With the use of this passage, the emphasis is usually on verses 1-3. The focus often highlights children's need to be obedient to parents at all costs. But less attention is given to verse 4. There is no doubt that God commands children to walk in obedience to their parents and ultimately to Him. But it is necessary to point out here that one of the traits of any healthy functional relationship is mutuality. To foster mutuality in any relationship is to be mindful of the needs of both parties in the relationship. Hence, the parent-child relational encounters should not be a unilateral transaction through which parents mete out rules and regulations to children. Instead, there should be a level of exchange with appropriate reciprocity between parent and child.

Mutuality in the parent-child relationship is based on "mutual care and respect as well as open communication."⁷ It means that parents are entrusted with the responsibility of creating a safe environment where children's needs are adequately met, their concerns and interests are validated and addressed, and they develop trust. Trust is essential in the relational exchange between family members as well as the relationship each member of the family fosters with God. At the same time, children are admonished to respond in obedience to their parents. The practice of mutuality in the parent-child relationship has been linked to fewer behavior issues and increased social competency.⁸ Ultimately, both parents and children stand to benefit mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in the exercise of mutuality.

It is important to note that the quintessential model of mutuality is embedded in Scripture. The Bible uses parenting language to explain "the relationship between the Creator God and the created ones"⁹ ascribing to God the role of Father. Evidence of Parent-child mutuality is seen in Scripture through the alluring invitation to "come and reason" with God and, in the process, experience His fatherly love and compassion (Isaiah 1:18; Psalm 103:13; 2 Corinthians 6:18). Coming to Father God and experiencing daily the symphony of the divine-human interplay sets the foundation for parents' relationship with their children. Parents' relationships with God as Father are essential as they endeavor to instruct and guide their children in the way of the Lord. It is almost

impossible to teach about a topic or introduce someone we have little or no knowledge of. Likewise, it is hard for a parent to teach a child about a God they have no relationship with.

Parents, as you endeavor to integrate the practice of mutuality in your relationship with each child, I encourage you to reflect on this biblical model of the Parent-child relationship. Let your experience with the heavenly Father guide your encounters with each child.

Another passage of Scripture that is fundamental in the understanding and practice of functional parent-child relationships is found in Deuteronomy 6 verses 4-9. Several lessons on how parents are to disciple their children are embedded in this passage. In this context, we will focus on three main points that I believe are essential in helping parents in their relational encounters with their children. These points are embedded in parents' responsibility to 1) hear God, 2) love God, and 3) teach children.

HEARING GOD

Verse 4 of Deuteronomy 6 echoes the clarion call to hear God: "Hear, O Israel!" It is important to notice that the call is not just to parents; it is to the entire nation of Israel and ultimately to all of us. A call to hear is at the foundation of a person's life purpose. Hearing provides directions or instructions on being or regarding a specific assignment. Our response to a call to hear can be spontaneous, selective, or attentive. Spontaneous response is a natural attribute of our five senses (e.g., seeing, tasting, feeling, smelling, and hearing). Spontaneously, we hear the chatter of people as we travel daily. We hear the chirping of birds or the rustle of leaves swaying in the wind but often do not respond directly to what we hear in these contexts.

Another level of hearing is selective: a process in which we choose to hear something desirable or of importance to us and often filter out the undesirable. A parent hears the delightful laughter or the urgent call of a child above all other voices at a crowded playground. With selective hearing, our responses are usually based on our desired or anticipated outcomes of a given situation.

The third level of hearing is *attentive hearing*: the process of being mentally and spiritually alert to what is communicated ***with the intent to act on what one hears***. In this context, we will focus on *attentive hearing* as we seek to understand what is communicated in verse 4. Moses, the servant of God, called Israel to *hear*, to listen physically and mentally observe what was being communicated, with the intention to act in obedience to what they heard. The call to hear was a call of belonging; it validated their identity as children of God. But it was also a call to reflect on the One true God. As a nation, Israel was at the threshold of the promised land, an environment infested with multiple gods and idol worship. They needed to be reminded of the God they belong to and Who was faithful in caring for them in all of life's situations. They needed to be reminded so they would not confuse the One true God with the idols in the promised land.

Like Israel of old, the call to hear comes to us now as we read God's word and commune with Him in prayer. This specific call to hear God is for everyone, including parents who are desirous of bringing up their children in the love and admonishment of God. Amidst the noises of our culture and society, it is sometimes hard to hear clearly what God is saying to us. For this reason,

we must be intentional in training our spiritual ears to hear what God is saying to each of us in any given circumstance.

We train our spiritual ears to hear God through the mindful reading of the Scripture because it is “a lamp to our feet and a light to our path” (Psalm 119:105). We also train our ears to hear God as we rest in quiet times with Him. Through the inspired writings, we are reminded that: We must individually hear [God] speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Here alone can true rest be found. And this is the effectual preparation for all who labor for God. Amid the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, the soul that is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. The life will breathe out fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts.¹⁰

LOVING GOD

Following the urgent call to hear is the command to love God supremely with heart, soul, and strength. In the command to love, we must not miss the emphasis on the degree to which we must love God. The call to love God supremely denotes acts of devotion and obedience, which are informed and motivated by our mental and emotional capacities. To love God supremely is also to be fond of Him, to have affection and desire for Him; it is a call to delight in Him. Loving God implies a devoted inclination of the mind and a tenderness of affection; it involves a strong emotional attachment to Him and a desire to live with intent in His presence. Loving God supremely means that He becomes the sole Object of our loyalty and worship.

This call to love steers us away from two extremes: rote innocuous confession of love for God without much fervor and passion and enthusiasm without covenant obedience. “Where true love to God exists in the heart, it will manifest itself in a regard to his will, and in the diligent keeping of his commandments.”¹¹ Parents and children alike are called to love God supremely, but parents’ response to this command is likely to have short and long-term effects on their children’s capacity to love God supremely. What parents practice become a visual aid for children, and they are more likely to grasp what they see more than what they are told. Ultimately, as parents respond with a deep desire for love to God, their experiences impact the relationships with their children and serve as examples for the child’s growth in loving God.

TEACHING YOUR CHILDREN

Having heeded the command to hear and love God, parents are then entrusted with the responsibility to teach their children. They are to inscribe or engrave the command of God in the cognitive and affective dimensions of their children. In so doing, they are charged with the duty of *perpetuating in their children the covenant relationships they have with God*. It is interesting

to note that verse 6 pointed out that God told Israel to keep what He told them in their hearts. To keep in the heart is to value and treasure with intent. They were to treasure God's promises and their experiences of His manifest power in their lives. Having done so they were to teach them with much deliberation to their children. Through personal responses to the call to hear God and love Him supremely, parents now become visual aids through which their children interpret the teachings imparted to them and grow in their knowledge and understanding of God.

In highlighting parents' influence and responsibility to their children's spiritual development and wellbeing, Ellen White proposed that "very much depends upon the parents" and that "in cultivating that which is best in themselves, [they] are exerting an influence to mold society and uplift future generations."¹² Through the teachings they impart, parents are to pass on to their children the legacy of their experiences of God's faithfulness and evidence of their devotion to Him.

The call to teach children the commandments of God repetitively and in different places suggests the importance and lifelong implications of the teachings of God. Such teachings take time and are not limited to times of Sabbath worship, Sunday night services, and Wednesday night prayer meetings. They are not limited to the mornings and evenings gathering at the family altar. The teachings of God are dynamic, encapsulating the cognitive, affective, and behavioral capacity of children's development. These teachings undergird the covenant relationship that binds each of us to God over a lifetime and extends throughout generations.

The instruction to teach children through various methods, places, and contexts indicates that God is to be honored and exalted in every sphere of our lives. To bind them on the hands and between the frontlet of their eyes specified that they were to let God's words guide every thought and action. To write God's words on the doorpost and gates of the home is to let the commandments constantly permeate every life experience. In today's culture, it is a common practice of Christians to compartmentalize their lives into the spiritual and secular, a process wherein Christ and the practice of Christian values are often excluded from certain life encounters. A response to teach and thus honor God in all aspects of our lives discredits the idea and practice of separation of Christian-spiritual life and the secular life. God desires to be active in all areas of our lives.

CONCLUSION

In this context, we have discussed the importance of functional parent-child relationships and their contributions to the mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of both parents and children. The stability of these relationships is enhanced through mutual encounters in the communication process between parents and children, and parents' response in "hearing" and "loving" God supremely. As parents model reciprocity in their relational encounters with their children and respond in devoted obedience to the call to hear and love God, these experiences contribute to children's positive mental, emotional, and spiritual development and serve as best practices for family discipleship.

One simple way we as a church can help in the parent-child relational encounters is to create environments where parents are nurtured spiritually and emotionally. I believe that in addition to the special ministries that we have for children, youth, women, and men, there can be a parents' ministry or discipleship focus. Through a parents' ministry, we can also support mothers and fathers in establishing and practicing reciprocity in their relationship with their children.

The goal of a parents' ministry or discipleship is to help parents grow and enrich their experiences with God. As a result of these experiences, parents are equipped to be the primary source of discipleship for their children. Parents ministry or discipleship can be carried out through a sequential triadic relational model consisting of *church-parent*, *parent-child*, and *church-child* relationships.¹³ This means that we invest in nurturing parents, empowering them to nurture their children spiritually and emotionally, and through our ministry to children, we reaffirm what was instilled in them by parents.

NOTES

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THE JOURNEY OF DESPERATION

BY RICK McEDWARD

THE TEXT

"In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple." Isaiah 6:1

"37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Mathew 25:37-40

His name is Ahmed*. Syrian by birth. When he was 7 years old the war in Syria was too much for his family. Their village was on the frontlines and sleeping at night was difficult with the frequent bursts of gunfire or the occasional mortar falling nearby. Seeing death was not something his parents prepared him for, yet it was all around him. Fearing their children would be forced to become fighters for the Islamic State, his parents made the most difficult decision...to leave their middle-class life, their home, furniture, jobs, schools, friends, and relatives, to escape the horrors of war and to provide a safe place where they could raise their family.

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In their escape, Ahmed and his family were taken by bus from Damascus, but before the border the young boys were hidden in the luggage, covered with cardboard boxes and quiet in hopes of not being discovered. “O God the merciful, protect our children today,” they prayed. Once past the border the parents and children breathed, tears rolling down the parents faces, they had successfully passed the border into Lebanon, where they would be free from fear.

On arrival, they contacted other families they knew. With 3 other families, they shared a 2-room basement storage area, with no windows to let in light, only darkness.

Ahmed’s father, struggling with becoming a “refugee,” finally registered with the UN to begin an endless multi-year process to seek a new home in the west.

In the meantime, the family had to survive, and every family member needed to contribute. Work was hard to find, especially for refugees. Lebanon welcomed more than a million Syrians over a 2-year span, making jobs and any income-generating activity extremely challenging.

Schools were off-limits to refugee children and too expensive for a struggling family. Ahmed and his siblings spent their time playing in the streets and alleys in the neighborhood, sometimes getting into a bit of trouble with the shopkeepers. One day they heard about a new school just for refugee children. Their parents rushed to sign them up, only to find there were over 130 other children on a waiting list, but he and his sister were invited to come for a placement test.

While they were taking the placement test, their mother waited nervously. When the children returned, one of the teachers was there with Ahmed and his sister, “You have two very good children, they can start school next week.” His mother cried and thanked Allah for this opportunity for their children.

For the rest of their primary school, Ahmed and his sister attended the Adventist Learning Center in Bourj Hammoud, a neighborhood of Beirut. In this school Ahmed met many good teachers, who gave him a good education, life skills, and showed him a positive way of life. In the learning center, he was able to grow and become a person of light.

Recently I met Ahmed, I asked him what he wants to do with his life. “I want to be a doctor or translator,” he replied. “But no matter what I want to do my best to serve God and others.”

I could not contain my smile when, while I was talking to him, an older gentleman approached, “This is a great young man, we need more like him, thanks to the Adventist school around the corner.”

Due to war, famine, disasters, and economic crises, according to UNHCR there were 84 million displaced people in the world. Another 10-15 million people left their homes as a result of the war in Ukraine, bringing the global population of refugees and displaced persons very close to 100 million. About one person out of 75 in the world left their home due to circumstances beyond their control.

As God’s people, how are we to respond to families in crisis? What should we do in the face of the pandemic of displacement? How would Jesus respond to families in Crisis?

We get a glimpse of Christ’s attitude toward people in Crisis when He announces His ministry. Jesus gives us an amazing summary of His mission Luke chapter 4:

16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read.

17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 “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;

19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

20 Then He closed the book, gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

21 And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Quoting from Isaiah 61:1,2 Jesus directs his mission to the poor, brokenhearted, captives, blind, and oppressed. It leads us to the question: how are these people represented in my life and in my church? How do I see them, how do I look at their situations? Do I see the downcast as someone to love or someone to look down upon?

But wait a minute, why was Christ talking about ministry to the downcast, was this something new? Let’s take a deeper look.

Actually, from the entry of sin, man has been pictured as a wanderer, sojourner, or stranger. The who’s who of scripture are identified in the group of wanderers, sojourners, and strangers. The anguish of Cain who said, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!” (Genesis 4:13) Even in his sin and rejection, Cain was provided a mark of some kind so that no one would kill him. Even though Cain was out of favor, God still protected him. (Genesis 4:15)

At different points of their lives, several patriarchs are pictured as wanderers or sojourners. God’s covenant man Abraham left Haran, crossing many nations before coming to the promised land. Jacob and his descendants sojourned to Egypt as a result of famine and were cared for by Pharaohs. The story of Joseph is particularly painful and illustrative of the up and down life of a person who lives away from his home country.

As painful as Joseph’s story is, the end of the book of Genesis records a powerful antidote to negative feelings. After Jacob dies, his brothers are terrified that Joseph will take revenge on them for selling him as a slave to eastern traders. “20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Genesis 50:20 NIV).

God somehow used the awful circumstances of Joseph’s life of being sold into slavery by his own family, falsely accused, imprisoned, and forgotten, to bless Joseph in a foreign land and allow him to minister to the very brothers who had sold him. God’s poetic justice show that divine sovereignty is active even in the most crisis-ridden circumstances.

Joseph's story illustrates that the broken and disquieting circumstances of this world are not God's full intent for His creation. God's real desire is to give us joy!

To stories of sojourners is not complete without recognizing the Exodus story when the nation of Israel became the most prominent wanderers in scripture during a forty-year journey of desperation. When they were to land in the promised land, they were to remember their own sojourn and remember others in the same situation. The book of Deuteronomy records the offering that Israelites were to give after entering the promised land. "Then the priest shall take the basket out of your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God. And you shall answer and say before the Lord your God: 'My father *was* a Syrian, about to perish, and he went down to Egypt and dwelt there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous'" (Deuteronomy 26:4-5).

All through Israel's history they experienced being refugees! They knew the status of those who had lost their homes, left their families, or become displaced because of the will of dictators or the situation of war.

As a result, when God gave Israel's law to them, he included many laws of hospitality to treat the stranger and the sojourner as though they were part of your family. God points Israel back to their history of being sojourners and reminds them of the grace they experienced in their journey. Travelers and strangers were to be welcomed, treated well, and fed. Hospitality to travelers and strangers became a key part of God shining His light through them, by treating others gracefully.

After God gave the Ten Commandments, He provided the Israelites with laws that were built upon the ten. Somehow each of the ten laws was applied in various settings and ways so that Israel would be a just nation, representing the virtue and love of God to other nations. Several laws given were specifically applied to strangers or sojourners.

- "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9 ESV).
- "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 22:21 ESV).
- "You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child" (Exodus 22:21,22 ESV).
- "And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your son and your daughter, your male servant and your female servant, the Levite who is within your towns, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are among you, at the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there" (Deuteronomy 16:11 ESV).
- "You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19 NRSV).
- "The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I *am* the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:34).

- “Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!” (Deuteronomy 27:19 NIV)

Isn't it incredible that the very people who often feel neglected by society, God instructs His people to bless and to hold up? Widows, Orphans, and Strangers (Aliens) were all to be part of God's plan. In fact, the laws of Israel were to be righteous laws that would attract the attention of other nations, because they illustrated the righteousness and justice of God. It is remarkable what God tells His people in Deuteronomy 4:6-8 regarding the laws He had provided for their welfare and as an attraction to the nations around them:

"6 Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." 7 What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? 8 And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?"

If Israel had kept God's law in its abundance the other nations were literally going to stand in awe of Israel's God because of the righteous laws of His people.

Cities of refuge were also established to protect those who hurt someone unintentionally so that justice would not be applied to accidental death (Numbers 35).

God clearly protected the downcast. That God's people were sojourners, so they should remember those who are on a journey away from home. That special provision is given to them as hospitality. Often strangers are mentioned in the same passages where orphans and widows are mentioned. That Israel would welcome travelers was to be a blessing to them, as a way of revealing God to them. All the classes protected by God were families in crisis:

- Widows- loss of a spouse
- Orphans- without parents who could provide for their upbringing
- Strangers/Aliens- travelers for business, family, or other obligations. But in their day traveling was a long journey and a ministry to a traveler was completely a ministry to lonely or isolated individuals. The terms strangers and aliens clearly point to those who are not of their own nation, ethnicity, or religion.

It is easier for us to feel empathy for those that are more like us, but God's way is to feel empathy for people of other ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Bible encourages believers to entertain as a way of demonstrating God's love to non-believers.

Sojourners were allowed to participate in Passover, but only if they were circumcised. Circumcision was a sign that foreigners were invited to be part of the covenant people of God and to

worship God through the festivals of deliverance. It is abundantly clear that non-Jews were invited into a relationship with God and to enjoy His favor along with the chosen people.

Israel's laws were created to exhibit the character of God to the nations. God's laws for Israel were to show His glory to the nations through justice and mercy. If Israel had followed these laws, they would have attracted other nations to worship God. Unfortunately, the OT prophets speak openly about the exile and how Israel did not follow God, and they abused the poor, widows, and orphans. God judged his own special people, in part, for their neglect of his laws of justice to families in crisis.

- “For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever” (Jeremiah 7:5-7 NRSV).
- “You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you and have begotten children among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:22 NRSV).
- “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another” (Zechariah 7:9-10 NRSV).

Just imagine for a moment...They were just a refugee family, mother, father, and baby... seeking safety from an angry dictator, and finding it in Egypt. As Israel was supposed to welcome strangers, the tables are turned, and the tiny baby who was born to redeem Israel is forced to flee to Egypt and is welcomed by a nation that does not recognize the perfect law of God or claim to obey it. Yet that nation provides refuge for the Christ child.

Jesus, king of kings, inconspicuously arrives, unknown, to dwell in a cave in Upper Egypt. He is welcomed by strangers and treated well by those who did not understand the prophecies about the Messiah they did not recognize. By the time Jesus arrives on the scene, there had been 400 years since of silence the last of the prophets spoke or wrote. Israel had a palpable sense of abandonment, yet it was they who had not followed God's way of treating people.

Yet because of an angry ruler, the baby Messiah was taken by His family to be sojourners in Egypt, in a tangible sense repeating the sojourn of Israel, the nation He represented. Out of Egypt Jesus came to save those who would follow Him.

When Christ finally arrives and announces the beginning of His public ministry, He announces liberty, justice, healing, and a new jubilee (from where we get the term jubilation). It is clear that Jesus intends to bring the freedom that the Old Testament law meant for His people. There is a sense that God is about to fulfill messianic prophecies and deliver His people and restore JOY to the world, little by little replacing the dominion of the enemy.

When Jesus inaugurates His ministry He recasts the entire failed history of Israel, through His life, and relived it as God had intended Israel to live. In his own words and actions, Jesus rewrites the failings of Israel and lives a life of complete self-denial and disinterested benevolence. But look how he did it,

- He healed the sick
- Gave sight to the blind
- Gave liberty to the oppressed
- Fed the hungry

All through His ministry, Christ gives away joy, peace, and freedom to all downcast who would look to Him. In the two chapters of Matthew 8 and 9 Christ repeatedly heals and casts out demons. Christ's mission gave life and wholeness to people on a journey of desperation.

From the beginning of His ministry, he announced Liberty and personally delivered the jubilee. In Luke 4, we see the life of Christ dramatically telling of God's love and concern for people who were downcast.

Jesus ministered to all people: poor, children, women, Romans, Canaanites, Lepers, sick, dead, lonely, demon-possessed, curious, non-religious, and non-Jewish. He and his followers ministered to whoever needed, whoever was curious, whoever was open.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus liberated people from demons, health problems, criticism, and judgement. Toward the end of His ministry, he shared the parable of the sheep and the goats, showing the ways that those who will be saved will treat the downcast of society (Matthew 25:31-46).

From the Old Testament to the life of Jesus it is clear that God called his people to minister to others, in His name, and to reveal His glory, love, and character. In obvious tones of grace Jesus fulfilled the laws of the Old Testament by doing loving acts to others, no matter the barriers of creed, caste, or ethnicity.

With the joy that redemption brings Jesus calls His people to take up His example. Even today, the words of the Old Testament and the ministry of Christ is summed up in the encouragement of Hebrews 13: 1-3 "Let brotherly love continue. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so *doing* some have unwittingly entertained angels. Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also."

Remember where Jesus quoted in Isaiah 61:

1 "The Spirit of the Lord God *is* upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to *those who are bound*;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn,
3 To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

Jesus wants to replace the brokenness of this world with JOY, and He wants to do that through you and me, through ministering to those families in crisis. Perhaps we have not looked deeply at this topic before. Would you prayerfully consider your own attitudes, words, and actions about the sojourners, aliens, and refugees of this world?

Hebrews 11:13 reminds us that we are still pilgrims and strangers in this world: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Ultimately God wants us to shine His glory and to give away the hope that we have. Isaiah 60:19-21 says:

“The sun shall no longer be your light by day,
Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you;
But the Lord will be to you an everlasting light,
And your God your glory.
Your sun shall no longer go down,
Nor shall your moon withdraw itself;
For the Lord will be your everlasting light,
And the days of your mourning shall be ended.
Also your people *shall* all *be* righteous;
They shall inherit the land forever,
The branch of My planting,
The work of My hands,
That I may be glorified.

Matthew 25:37-40 reminds us: “Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take *You* in, or naked and clothe *You*? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me.’”

Another family, but similar story... they left Syria on a desperate journey, smuggling their children across the border into Lebanon. Their children were admitted into the Adventist Learning Center and grew to see life with new eyes.

The father was not active in his Islamic faith, he had not ever had a personal relationship with God. After he became very ill, he became so hopeless that he could not see any way to provide even a simple way of life for his family. He feared his family would not have food. In his illness, he desperately called out to God and received the promise of peace. Little by little the father's health improved and he could see God was asking him to trust Him. He began to walk with God and was growing day by day, trusting and seeing incredible answers to prayer. He began to see the love of God through several Adventist church members from the nearby Middle East University. One university professor took him into his home for 3 weeks to show him a better path for healthful living. Another Adventist gave him some nutritious food and prayed for his family. God miraculously provided enough money to buy food for the family. As faith sprouted in Omar's heart, he gave his life to Jesus and committed to demonstrate God's love to the other refugee families. Today Omar is totally devoted to the Lord and is helping others know about Jesus and His soon return. Omar studies with many people from an unreached people group each week, sharing the Bible with them.

If you ask Omar what made the difference in His life, he will tell you. "God showed me His love through the lives of Adventists who took me in, helped me live a healthy life, helped me to stop smoking, and helped my family in many practical ways." Today Omar is shining the light that he saw, by helping others in ways that show them that God's love is practical.

Their family took the journey of desperation, with little hope of a bright future. Today, their family is giving hope to other families in crisis. Omar's life shows that Christ's joy is contagious, we just need to give it away.

Today would you pray for the millions of refugees, crossing borders to find freedom. May they find their hearts' true desire; finding the joy and hope of Jesus and His soon return.

APPLICATION

- What ways can you give hope to someone who is new to your community?
- Is your church currently engaged with assisting refugees or connecting with people of other religious backgrounds?

*Ahmed is not his real name

CHILDREN'S STORIES

— Use *Children's Stories* for the special family Sabbaths. Please feel free to use props and materials that are easily available to you. The objective is to engage the children in your church family.

GROWING GOOD ZUCCHINI

BY ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Luke 2:52

PROPS

- 1 large zucchini, eggplant, or another large vegetable that can be grown from seeds
- 1 package of seeds for the vegetable you are using for this story
- 1 small or medium sized plant pot with a small amount of dirt
- 1 basket or small box that can hold and display the other props

Ask the children what their favorite vegetable is. Give 3-4 children an opportunity to raise their hands and share or you can just listen for a chorus of responses. Then ask them if they know where vegetables grow. In a GARDEN!

Gardens are where people grow pretty flowers, plants, or good things to eat. Hold up your zucchini [or another vegetable] so that all the children can see. This zucchini tastes good, and it is good for us. (Keep looking at the zucchini and talking and try not to encourage the children to give opinions on whether zucchini tastes good to them!).

Does anyone know where zucchini's come from? Do they just pop up in the garden, big and green? No! (Smile or laugh). To make a zucchini, we need 4 things: Seeds (show packet of seeds), the right environment or right place to live and grow (show pot with dirt), water (rain), and sunshine.

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There is something else the zucchini needs to grow into a good zucchini. Do you know what that is? For the zucchini to grow into a good zucchini it needs a lot of love and care. We need to work in the dirt and make sure to keep bad things out like weeds and hungry bugs.

Guess what? There's one more thing the zucchini needs to grow into a good zucchini! Can anyone guess what that is? FAITH! Yes, we need to believe that if we plant a zucchini seed, in the right place, give it water, sunshine and loving care, it will grow into a big, delicious zucchini. (Hold up zucchini again and smile).

The same is true for you and me. If we are going to grow up to be good, successful, and delicious (kind and compassionate) people, we need to grow in the right place, our parents help create the right place for us at home. We need to eat good food, like zucchini, drink water, and get lots of sunshine by playing outside instead of just watching a screen. We need to stay away from bad habits, like weeds that hurt the zucchini plant, and make good choices. Lastly, we need to learn about Jesus and how He was as a child and an adult. We also need to pray to Jesus and ask him to help us to have faith like we needed for the zucchini seed to grow and to always believe in Him because he believes in us. Jesus loves us and cares for us. He will make us the best people we can possibly be!

Our bible verse today tells us, *"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men."* That means that as Jesus grew up, he continued to learn more and more. His body grew bigger and stronger, his mind grew wiser, and he pleased his parents, and God.

Pray today and every day to be more like Jesus.

DEALING WITH ANGRY FEELINGS

BY DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

THE TEXT

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” Matthew 19:26 (NIV)

PROPS

Broken pieces of a vase (or something else you might be able to use as an illustration), pressure cooker, paper stop sign with PPC on one side, and STOP on the other, Bible.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I get angry. Angry feelings begin brewing up inside me when someone says or does something I don't like. Other times I get angry at myself for making mistakes or ruining something. And when I am in an angry mood, watch out because I might just say something with an angry voice. Anger can be like a pressure cooker (show pressure cooker) building up those angry feelings until you finally explode.

When I am feeling angry, that is where I often get myself into trouble, because I may not be very careful about what I say or do. For example, sometimes, after I clean the kitchen, somebody comes into the kitchen and gets things out but doesn't put them away. Then, later when I return to the kitchen, it is not all nice and clean as I left it. That makes me angry. Or, one day, someone walked by the cabinet in the living room and knocked off a vase (show broken pieces). That made me very angry because it was one of my favorite vases.

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What makes you angry? Maybe you have built a cool Lego car that transforms into a boat. You are having the best time with your masterpiece. Then your little brother enters the room, and he wants to transform your car-boat transformer into a spaceship? And before you know it, he and your Lego creation have taken off like a rocket to space!

Perhaps you have drawn a fantastic picture of a kitty parade! You decide to take your artwork to show your mom and dad. On your way rushing down the hallway, you collide with your sister, who is holding a cup of cold water. The cup of water flies up in the air, you and your sister fall to the floor, and your kitty parade turns into a kitty pool!

Or how about when your baby brother is taking a nap, and you have all the stuffed animals to yourself. You have neatly set them around in a circle, and you are their teacher. They are such good listeners! Then your little brother wakes up from his nap and mama brings him into your room. He wants to play with you and starts to pick up your favorite teddy bear. How do you feel? You might feel angry and want to tell him to leave.

Maybe you are outside, building the best fort EVER! It is AMAZING! Then you hear your dad call your name and say that it is "time to put things away because lunch is almost ready." But you do not want to stop playing, and you certainly don't want to put anything away! I am sure you have had an experience when someone upset you and you felt angry.

Today, I want to share a secret weapon that YOU can use during THESE times when you are upset and angry words want to burst out of your mouth. It is called PPC* (show sign with the letters PPC*)

PAUSE – PRAY – CHOOSE*

Think of the letters 'PPC*' as a STOP sign (show stop sign). When you are feeling angry and want to say something unkind or hurtful: PAUSE and take a deep breath. Then, PRAY and ask Jesus to help take away the unkind thoughts you are having and unkind words from escaping your mouth. Take another deep breath. Then, CHOOSE kind words to say. Jesus will help you use kind words. And I assure you that when kind words come out of your mouth, there will be no argument or fight. After you calm down, you can talk about how you felt because it is important to let people know when they upset you. With the help of Jesus, you can do it calmly, with love.

I am not very good at choosing a kind response when I am upset. But Jesus (hold up Bible) gives us a very special promise in Matthew 19:26. It says that "with God all things are possible." Even though I cannot control what other people say to me, Jesus can help me choose to respond with kind words and kind actions.

(Hold up the broken pieces for children to see) This broken vase is not more important than the one who broke it, right? Jesus doesn't want me to use angry, hurtful words which will damage my relationship over a silly vase. So, remember PPC the next time you are feeling angry or grumpy.

Let's ask Jesus to help us PAUSE, PRAY & CHOOSE* kind words and actions. (Have a short prayer with the children).

*Coined by Willie and Elaine Oliver.

THE ESCAPE PLAN

BY MINDY SALYERS

THE TEXT

“6 Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7 (NLT)

At first glance, Wally the Walrus seems like any other sea creature living in the European Atlantic Ocean. Despite his enormous size, this 2,000-pound mammal does normal walrus things, such as binge eating fish and taking long, 42-hour naps. However, Wally is anything but regular. In fact, he’s very, very special.

Wally was first spotted last year in March of 2021 and attracted a lot of attention. Sightseers would crowd around Wally, snapping photos and making social media videos of the newly famous sea animal. Nicknamed the “Fun-gie,” Wally’s popularity grew with antics like balancing a starfish on his nose! In Wales where Wally lounged for weeks, restaurants began serving Wally-branded drinks and stores sold Wally souvenirs. In his tours to France, Spain, and the United Kingdom, Wally’s whiskered face and loveable nature made him world-famous.

However, in September 2021, something changed in Wally. Overstimulated by the throngs of people crowded too close, noise from nearby fog horns, and commotion from tourist destinations, Wally’s sweet-natured personality began to change. He began to feel irritated and distressed. His

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internal peace was disturbed, leading to periods where he felt anxious and upset. He needed to get away.

Stressed and agitated, Wally went in search of a quiet resting place. He needed a place where he could nap and escape. Swimming out into the harbor, Wally saw something familiar. A boat! He remembered that humans had occasionally fed him from similar-looking yachts. Was this a safe place to take a break? Using his massive flippers, Wally pulled himself onto the small vessel and laid on the soft leather cushions. Would this boat help him get away from the people and pressures that were causing him stress? Wally hoped so.

Day after day, Wally swam in the waters off St. Mary's Island, seeking a quiet place to retreat. He knew that taking a break would allow him to get back to the "Fun-gie" he used to be. However, with each attempt to escape onto a boat, he became more upset. His flippers were injured from climbing aboard. He was still attracting the attention of people who thought a walrus in a boat was a great spectacle. And, to top it off, his mega-weight caused damage to many boats and several to capsized. Wally could tell that boat owners' patience was getting thin, calling him 'loveable, but naughty' and 'the adorable sea terror.' He needed help, but he didn't know what else to do.

Finally, Seal Rescue Ireland came to Wally's aid. Seeing that the walrus was more distressed than ever and desperately needed a break, Executive Director Melanie Croc came up with a master plan. Naval officials constructed a customized boat-like pontoon that was able to sustain a walrus of Wally's size. Using his own scent, marine biologists made the floatable couch feel like his home. They positioned the structure away from people to let Wally chill out. This Escape Plan ensured the safety and protection of others while affording Wally the space he needed to rest undisturbed.

Now, six months later, Wally is back to his happy, loveable self! He's rested and relaxed, building up his blubber reserves so that he can return to join his fellow walruses in the Arctic and eventually find a mate. Thanks to the Escape Plan, Wally the Walrus has a place to go when he begins to feel stressed and anxious so that he can process pressure in a healthy way.

Wally's story makes me think of Someone else needing an Escape Plan. In John 6, Jesus was known as the "King of the Jews," gaining popularity with his miraculous healings and feeding of 5,000 people. People from all over crowded the grassy hillside overlooking the Sea of Tiberias, eagerly hoping to catch sight of "The Prophet Guy." Jesus' teachings and acts of wonder had made Him world-famous!

However, the constant demands of people stressed Jesus out. He felt pressure from the crowds and expectation to perform. Overstimulated by throngs of people crowded too close, noise from hungry children, and commotion from angry Pharisees, Jesus felt himself irritated and distressed. His internal peace was disturbed, leading to periods where he felt anxious and upset. He needed to get away.

Stressed and agitated, Jesus went in search of a quiet resting place. He needed a place where He could nap and escape. Looking out into the Sea of Galilee harbor, Jesus saw something familiar. A boat! Was this a safe place to take a break? Would this boat help Him get away from the people and pressures that were causing him stress? Jesus hoped so. Climbing aboard, "He left in a boat to

a remote area to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns” (Matthew 14:13 NIV). He was still attracting the attention of people who thought a carpenter doing miracles was a great spectacle. Like Wally, Jesus needed help.

Finally, Jesus’ disciples come to His aid. “...He found Himself so utterly wearied that He determined to seek retirement in some solitary place across the lake. After He had dismissed the multitude, they took Him “even as He was,” into the boat, and hastily set off” (*Desire of Ages*, p. 333). Those disciples provided a way to let Jesus chill out. Their Escape Plan ensured safety and protection from the Pharisees and Sadducees and afforded Jesus the space He needed to rest undisturbed.

Just like Wally and Jesus, we, too, can become agitated and stressed. Pressures from school, home, and friends can cause feelings of anxiety and irritation. Although these feelings are normal, too many strong feelings can cause hurt to ourselves and others. That’s why it’s so important that we develop an Escape Plan. Just like Jesus got away in a boat, we need to have a safe place that affords us the ability to decompress and reset. This may look like a time-out spot, a quiet nook, or a “Fume Room.” Using tools like noise-canceling headphones, stress balls, and fidget toys can help, too. And finally, just as Jesus’ disciples accepted Him ‘even as He was,’ we, too, can rely on our closest friends and family to be safe harbors when we’re facing emotional storms.

Finally, our emotional Escape Plan gives us a strategy to be at peace with our thoughts and feelings. God promises in Philippians 4:6-7 “Don’t worry about anything; instead pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God’s peace which exceeds anything we can understand. This peace will guard your hearts and mind as you live in Christ Jesus.”

SEMINARS

 *Seminars* are designed to be used during Christian Home and Marriage Week. Please read the seminars thoroughly to get familiar with the content and technical terms. To download a PowerPoint® presentation file visit: **family.adventist.org/2023RB**

NURTURING EMOTIONAL WELLBEING IN THE FAMILY

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

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

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This seminar explores how family environment and interaction can impact an individual's social, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being across the lifespan. This seminar will provide recommendations drawn from psychological, biblical and spirit of prophecy perspectives.

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INTRODUCTION

All parents want to see their children grow up and succeed physically, mentally, intellectually, spiritually, and socially. Most want their children to find fulfilling and purposeful work and contribute to the home, church, and society. Therefore, the family is the primary center of nurture for the holistic well-being of individuals in the community.

Individuals are expected to encounter challenges as they grow and move along their lifespan. Some of these challenges are unforeseen, such as congenital disabilities, developmental delays, accidents, etc. In contrast, others are because of experiences, attitudes, and actions a child confronts in their home and other spaces or adverse childhood experiences, known as ACES. Childhood experiences, positive and adverse, shape and inform each one of us from birth to adulthood.

Proverbs 22:6 says, “***Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.***” This verse has often been used specifically to encourage parents to discipline their children. While this purpose may partly be correct, there is a broader more holistic meaning behind it. The Hebrew translation for the first part of the verse literally is, “*initiate a child in accordance with his way.*”¹ Then even when he is old, he will “*behave appropriately.*”²

It is an injunction to consider the child’s nature, temperament, and aptitudes in the education or nurturing given so that when the child grows up, she will feel competent and confident in navigating her world. This education or nurturing that regards the uniqueness of the child will bear fruit for the rest of her life; it will become second nature. Thus, even when challenged by divergent and hostile worldviews, it will not be obliterated. There are parallel verses in scripture that uphold this injunction:

Ephesians 6:4: “*And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*”

Deuteronomy 6:7: “*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.*”

2 Timothy 3:15: “*And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*”

Ellen G. White states in the book *Child Guidance*,

“In order for parents and teachers to do this work, they must themselves understand “the way” the child should go. This embraces more than merely having a knowledge of books. It takes in everything that is good, virtuous, righteous, and holy. It comprehends the practice of temperance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love to God and to one another. In order to attain this object, the physical, mental, moral, and religious education of children must have attention.” CG 297.23³

Nurturing emotional well-being in the family is the most critical issue in building family resilience and creating stability in the family. To prevent or mitigate preventable challenges or ACEs, we must increase nurturing home environments.

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACES)

When a child faces a difficult challenge, whether it's emotional distress due to family turmoil, it affects the child in various ways. The dedicated term for such experiences is adverse childhood experiences or ACEs. ACEs are stressful and potentially traumatic situations children face in the first 18 years of life. These experiences include different forms of abuse, neglect, and severe household dysfunction.

Various studies worldwide reveal that at least one-third of children experience at least one ACE before age 18, and approximately 14% experience two or more ACEs.^{4 5} Since the COVID pandemic, every single child has already experienced one adverse childhood experience. The most common type of ACE reported is death of parent, followed by physical abuse, parental divorce, and family violence. About a quarter of the time, divorces or separations are responsible for ACEs.⁶ Many ACEs are interrelated, meaning that having one ACE has a substantially higher likelihood that other forms of adverse experiences may occur during childhood.

Other ACEs include the following.

- Being a victim of violence, abuse, or neglect at home
- Instability due to parental separation/divorce
- Witnessing violent acts in your home or community
- A family member attempting or committing suicide
- Substance abuse
- Mental health problems
- Having a household member who is in jail or prison
- War or political conflict, becoming a refugee

An adverse experience doesn't guarantee a future problem; however, it increases a child's future risk of mental health problems, injury, risky behaviors, infectious or chronic disease and lack of income or educational opportunities. Most notably, as it relates to this topic, ACEs can increase the risk of depression, anxiety, suicide, and PTSD. The CDC estimates as many as 21 million cases of depression could have been potentially avoided by shielding children from these adverse experiences.

Social learning theory tells us that children who observe antisocial behavior by people who are part of their intimate social circle are more likely to learn and acquire antisocial behavior. Physical abuse, violence, drug and alcohol misuse and other strategies for managing problems are passed on to children who are bearing witness to such dysfunctional coping mechanisms and lack of self-control. Research has demonstrated that children who have been exposed to violence (e.g., exposure to domestic violence) or who have directly experienced adverse experiences such as physical or sexual abuse are more likely to perpetrate violent crimes later in life.

The learning and acquisition of antisocial behavior is substantially more likely to occur during early developmental stages, particularly if the observed behavior is committed by people who are part of the individual's intimate social circle (Felson & Lane, 2009). Since family members are the leading role models during child development, early adversity is particularly detrimental when it occurs within the family unit. Children can perceive violent and dysfunctional experiences (e.g., physical abuse, witnessing domestic violence, parental drug, or alcohol misuse) as valid strategies to manage problems, particularly if those responsible for such violent behaviors were never stopped or, worse if such violence against children is reinforced by other family members (Akers, 2017).

Many ACEs are preventable. Thus, it is essential to understand and address the factors that put individuals at risk and be committed to protecting them from these experiences. Parents can do their part by creating and sustaining a safe and stable home environment and nurturing relationships that ensure children can tackle difficult emotions when they surface.

In the book, *Adventist Home*, Ellen G White discusses the importance of the home environment:

“To a large extent parents create the atmosphere of the home circle, and when there is disagreement between father and mother, the children partake of the same spirit. Make your home atmosphere fragrant with tender thoughtfulness. If you have become estranged and have failed to be Bible Christians, be converted; for the character you bear in probationary time will be the character you will have at the coming of Christ. If you would be a saint in heaven, you must first be a saint on earth. The traits of character you cherish in life will not be changed by death or by the resurrection. You will come up from the grave with the same disposition you manifested in your home and in society.” AH 16.1 ⁷

PARENTING STYLE AND MENTAL HEALTH

While some parents are guilty of underparenting, a new phenomenon, or maybe not so new, of overparenting can challenge a child's development and affect their ability to learn how to handle stressful situations later in adulthood. Parents who overparent usually have their children's best interests at heart. They are aware of society's dangers and divergent views and seek to protect their children from dangerous influences. However, overparenting may have the opposite effect, where children who feel overly protected may become naïve about certain dangerous situations and may become curious about some risky behaviors. A child's inability to handle stress-inducing situations can lead to excessive worry or anxiety disorders later in life.

Meanwhile, critical, condescending, or dismissive parents can diminish their child's self-esteem, how they feel about themselves, and their self-worth. How an individual thinks about themselves as an adult, whether they have high or low self-worth, often starts in childhood in their family of origin. A family life filled with criticism, contempt, and disapproval can follow a person

into adult life. Interestingly, these negative behaviors are also associated with poor marital quality, distress, and future divorce.⁸ To be sure, low self-esteem can also become a problem because of a poor school environment or a dysfunctional workplace. Likewise, an unhappy relationship can also alter a person's self-worth.

In general, parents fall under four types of parenting styles.⁹ Here is a summary of each.

- **Authoritarian.** There are clear rules and punishment when those rules are not met. There is little warmth or support and high control. In this structured environment, it's all about meeting the parents' wishes with little regard for "who" the child is and the nature or needs of the child (remember, "train a child in the way he should go"). Without needed support, children may never feel good enough and develop depression when raised by authoritarian parents.
- **Permissive.** Parents have low expectations and generally are more lenient with few rules to abide by. Even when rules are broken, permissive parents tend to avoid conflict. Without much grounding, children raised like this may be more impulsive and prone to seeking risks. Anxiety and depression risks are also in play.
- **Neglectful.** Parents are uninvolved and uninterested and invest little time in their children. There are no rules and no warmth or support. Children in these types of households are more at risk of struggling in future relationships due to withdrawal and fear of abandonment. Adult relationships, in general, may be anxiety-provoking due to their upbringing.
- **Authoritative.** Parents develop clear standards and are responsive to their children's needs in a democratic way. Instead of being the boss, they are open to communication and will listen to their children. Growing up in an authoritative household provides a child with a solid foundation, but they're also likely to maintain a strong connection with their parents through adulthood.

While parenting style isn't the only indicator of the type of adult you will become, it has been associated with impacting mental health and social-emotional development. We see in Ephesians 6:4 that the apostle Paul gives specific instruction for parents, "*Fathers [parents], do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*" When children are parented in an environment that challenges yet supports them and provides warmth, they have a greater potential to grow into independent adults who are more likely to handle life's challenges in more healthy and positive ways.

It is important to note that research shows that a family history of poor mental health or mental illness and other adverse experiences leads to higher levels of anxiety and depression. However, research studies show that people who didn't blame their parents, themselves, or others for negative experiences had better mental health and emotional well-being. In other words, even if your parents didn't parent well or had mental health issues, seeking help for childhood ACEs or trauma could lead to a healthier adult.

WARM BOUNDARIES

Parenting research has identified two factors associated with the dynamics of the parent-child relationship: support and control. Perhaps a better way to express it would be warmth and boundaries. Every child needs to feel a sense of belonging. Support refers to the level of warmth and affection that contributes to a child feeling that they are supported, valued, and belong in their home environment. When there is high support, parents are responsive to their child's need for love in the way they need to be loved.

Keep in mind that not all children need to be loved similarly. So, it is vital to understand the temperament and personality of your child, their likes, and preferences, and who God created them to be. Supportive parents convey love to their children in ways that make them feel loved. Being attentive, showing affection with healthy touch, using good communication skills, and giving positive verbal affirmation are other ways of showing support. It is not enough to just show love; it also needs to be verbalized!

Control is another word for structure or boundaries. It is not about controlling your child.

In fact, parents need to practice the art of self-control (*Proverbs 25:28; 2 Timothy 1:7*) to have a more significant influence on their children. Every child needs structure or boundaries that are age appropriate; this is necessary for a child to have a sense of security. In addition to feeling that they belong, children need to feel secure. Children are not born with self-discipline, so parents must set family rules and expect compliance. When children are given clear boundaries in childhood, they grow into responsible adults who have a well-defined sense of who they are, what they are responsible for, what they control, and what and who they don't control. In the book, *Boundaries with Kids*, Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend say it thus: "The essence of boundaries is self-control, responsibility, freedom, and love. These are the bedrock of the spiritual life. Along with loving and obeying God, what could be a better outcome of parenting than that?" p. 19¹⁰

Children are more likely to become responsible and emotionally healthy adults when parents have a healthy balance of warmth and boundaries (support and control). There is also a greater likelihood that they will accept parental values, develop morally according to age, and become socially responsible and caring adults.

CREATING A HEAVENLY ATMOSPHERE IN YOUR HOME

"Home should be made all that the word implies. It should be a little heaven upon earth, a place where the affections are cultivated instead of being studiously repressed. Our happiness depends upon this cultivation of love, sympathy, and true courtesy to one another. The sweetest type of heaven is a home where the Spirit of the Lord presides. If the will of God is fulfilled, the husband and wife will respect each other and cultivate love and confidence." AH 15.3, 4

Ellen G. White wrote these words decades before developmental psychologists identified factors such as warmth, support, affection that are associated with the healthy development and emotional well-being of children and who we become as adults. Today, we have many diverse family formations aside from husband and wife, nonetheless, the essence of her statement is about the type of home environment that nurtures each family member and gives them a taste of heaven.

Here are 5 tips for nurturing healthy emotional well-being in your family:

1. **Healthy families create an atmosphere where angels want to dwell.** This does not mean that things will always be perfect, or mistakes won't be made. Healthy families learn to be flexible and know how to apologize and forgive. They intentionally resolve conflict in a Christlike manner; they work together as a team to resolve issues. Have regular family council meetings to discuss issues and problems.
2. **Healthy families practice good communication.** Everyone has a voice, and everyone gets to be heard. This includes using respectful, kind, and loving words and tone of voice. There is an understanding that parents are the leaders. Still, children are allowed to make age-appropriate choices—they can lead out in worship sometimes, organize a family activity, and choose their own clothing. Parents are authoritative, not authoritarian.
3. **Healthy families have family bonding time.** Having regular mealtimes creates an open atmosphere to discuss how everyone is doing. This is not a time for scolding or shaming, just a time of family sharing and togetherness. There is a lot of research on the benefits of family dinners and their protective factors against at-risk behaviors in children and teens.
4. **Healthy families play and laugh together.** Play games, watch funny movies, and read funny stories. Make time for fun. Protect this time from solving issues and problems.
5. **Healthy families worship God together.** Commit to having daily family worship as a family. It doesn't have to be extended. It can be in the car, at breakfast, at dinner, or before bed. Just take time out to put God in the center of your lives and teach your children to worship God.

It is important to remember that all families go through various life cycles and stages because the individuals that make up the family go through different life cycles and stages. Some families encounter more stress than others, but all will experience the ebb and flow of a life where births, deaths, divorces, stepfamily blending, economic crises, pandemics, or other life occurrences. When the emotional wellbeing of family members is nurtured, including parents and children, the family becomes more resilient, and the individual members also become more resilient. Resilience acknowledges the trials but believes emotional wellbeing is possible despite the challenges.¹¹

In this seminar, we focused on parenting to show the lifespan of how adults develop emotional wellbeing. However, if one was not nurtured emotionally from childhood, there's still the opportunity to begin the journey in adulthood. Finding a good devotional that gives you hope for emotional wellbeing is an excellent place to start. *"You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is*

stayed on you, because he trusts in you.” Isaiah 26:3. Find a trusted Christian counselor to help you process past hurts, traumas, or neglect. Pray daily and regularly for God to heal your mind and soul.

NOTES

- ¹ Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Ed.). (1909). *Proverbs* (p. 422). London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company.
- ² Dybdahl, J. L. (Ed.). (2010). *Andrews Study Bible Notes* (p. 818). Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press.
- ³ White, Ellen G. (2001). *Child Guidance*. Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- ⁴ World Health Organization (WHO) Mental Health Surveys.
- ⁵ National Survey of Children’s Health.
- ⁶ Centers for Disease Control (CDC). www.cdc.gov
- ⁷ White, Ellen G. (2001). *The Adventist Home*. Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- ⁸ Gottman, John. (2015). *7 Principles for Making Marriage Work*. New York, NY: Harmony Books.
- ⁹ See Baumrind’s Parenting Styles.
- ¹⁰ Cloud, Henry C & Townsend, John. (1998). *Boundaries with Kids*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- ¹¹ Oliver, W. & E. (Ed.). (2021). *I Will Go With My Family: Family Resilience*. Resource Book 2022. Review and Herald Publishing Association.

LIVING WITH A SPOUSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

“The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” Phillippians 4:9

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Living with a spouse who has a mental illness is not an easy task. It can be especially difficult and confusing if your spouse does not acknowledge there is an issue. Communication, spouse support, and self-care are essential for all marriages to be successful and happy, and even more critical when mental illness is present.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is generally believed to have mental health benefits—higher quality of life, lower mortality rates, more earnings, better sex, better physical and mental health, and lifelong companionship among other benefits. However, depending on the nature of marriage and family relationships, mental health can be positively enhanced or negatively impacted, particularly in individuals who are already struggling with mental illness. Sometimes the nature of the relationship can also trigger symptoms in individuals who might have been predisposed to mental illness.

For too long, mental illness has been the “silent” illness in faith communities and across many cultures. Sadly, this silence has caused many individuals to go undiagnosed and untreated. When this happens, spouses and other family members are unprepared to deal with what might be a mild illness but could also be a potentially life-threatening illness. In many cases, this lends itself to creating insecurity and fragility in marriage and the family.

In this seminar, we will primarily address mild mental illness and offer guidance on how to identify symptoms and offer tips on how to live with a spouse who is struggling with mental illness. As we begin this section, we want to unequivocally state that you should never diagnose or accuse your spouse of being mentally ill. Criticizing or belittling your spouse under ordinary circumstances is destructive to your partner and to your marriage, and even more devastating if your spouse has a mental illness.

IDENTIFYING SIGNS OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN YOUR SPOUSE

Mental health disorders can impact a person’s life in significant ways, including how they cope with life events, earn a living, and relate to others. While each mental health disorder has its own unique set of symptoms, there are some common signs that can help you get a general idea of whether there may be a problem that needs to be addressed. Some of these signs may seem like ordinary personality flaws or annoyances, or you may think your spouse is just being lazy. However, if these symptoms disrupt your spouse’s normal functioning, they could be signs of mental illness.

- Excessive sadness
- Trouble sleeping or feeling tired
- Strong feelings of anger or irritability
- Excessive worries or fears
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Extreme mood swings (i.e., going from feeling depressed to feeling euphoric quickly)
- Having hallucinations or delusions, or difficulty perceiving reality
- Isolation from friends
- Withdrawing from social activities
- Inability to deal with daily problems or stress
- Changes in sex drive

- Changes in appetite
- Pervasive lethargy

If you have observed any of these signs in your spouse and assessed that it is more than just your own annoyance or idiosyncrasy, even if in doubt, discuss your observations with your spouse and suggest they talk to their primary care physician or a counselor. This should be done kindly without criticism or attacking them. Mental health disorders aren't always preventable, but by getting assessment and treatment which should include attending therapy or another form of counseling, you can prevent an existing disorder from getting worse.

MENTAL HEALTH RISK FACTORS

Mental disorders are health conditions that affect how a person thinks, feels, and acts. Some people can be predisposed to having a mental illness. Risk factors for developing mental health disorders include the following:

- Family history of mental illness
- Child abuse or neglect
- Traumatic experiences like sexual assault or military combat
- Having a previous mental illness
- A lack of healthy relationships

Your family health history may be one of your best clues for determining your risk of developing a mental disorder and many other common illnesses. Certain mental disorders tend to run in families and having a close relative with a mental disorder could mean you are at a higher risk. Many of us learn how to cope or not cope from our families of origin. However, the fact that someone in your family has a mental illness does not necessarily mean that you will develop one. Many other factors, some listed above, can contribute to mental illness.

TIPS FOR LIVING WITH A SPOUSE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

WORK AS A TEAM

Approach your spouse's problem as a "we" problem rather than just their problem. While your spouse may be the clinically diagnosed person, it affects your marriage and family. Learn all you can about the diagnosed mental disorder and try to understand it. Find out what the symptoms are and show compassion when you see the symptoms emerging. Talk to your spouse and ask them what they are experiencing.

Living with a spouse with mental illness can be very frustrating but showing compassion will go a long way in conveying care and concern for your spouse. If your spouse feels supported,

they might be more willing to seek help and remain in treatment. If your spouse is resistant to seeking help, you can seek out therapy for yourself to help you better cope with the mental illness.

COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND HONESTLY WITH YOUR SPOUSE

Being on the same team doesn't mean becoming an enabler or a doormat. Ask your spouse how you can help them manage their symptoms, however, ultimately it is up to your spouse to be responsible for their own treatment and wellbeing. Listening doesn't mean that you become your spouse's therapist; just be a loving supportive spouse and continue to encourage and support them in their therapy or other treatment.

When your spouse does something that hurts you, even if they didn't mean it, make sure to talk about it with them afterward. Work on your relationship the way you would normally if mental illness wasn't involved. Affirm the positive in your spouse and your marriage; do special things together every day. If appropriate, you can attend couples counseling with a Christian counselor to help you manage the challenges and also enrich your marriage.

SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Living with someone with mental illness can create a fragile environment if healthy, loving boundaries are not established. Let your spouse know that vicious, mean, and insulting outbursts will not be tolerated. You can say, "when you react or respond in this manner, I will not be able to stay in your presence and will have to leave the room." Physical violence is not acceptable under any circumstances and if this occurs, you may need to find a place of safety.

FIND SUPPORT

There are many support groups for people and families of people with mental illnesses, including online resources (see websites in Notes). In addition, many churches offer various small groups; if one does not exist at your local church, discuss the possibility of starting one with your pastor. You may be surprised to find that other members are dealing with a spouse or other family member who has a mental health disorder. As mentioned earlier, you may also want to seek out therapy for yourself. We encourage you to find a Christian mental health counselor that shares your values about marriage and faith.

PRACTICE SELF-CARE

One of the most important things you can do while living with someone with a mental illness is to practice self-care. You must make your mental health a priority otherwise you will decline as will the relationship. It is very easy to burn out while living with a spouse with a mental illness.

Establish a daily routine that includes prayer, meditating on God's word, reading positive words, and exercising. Spending some time apart from your spouse and socializing with other family members and friends periodically is also vital. For any relationship to be healthy there should be a

good balance of togetherness and an opportunity to pursue activities and interests that bring you joy. When you take care of your own health—physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually, you can be a more supportive and involved spouse.

HOPE FOR SPOUSES

Despite some daunting statistics, many marriages have survived living with a spouse or family member with mental illness. The good news is that more people are becoming open about their mental health challenges, and more is being written publicly about the effects of mental illness. Due to the increasing numbers of children, teens, and adults with mental illness, it has been designated as a public health crisis of the 21st century.

On the one hand, while many people are still unwilling to acknowledge mental illness as a genuine health condition, others might be inclined to say of someone who is behaving strangely—“that person is bipolar, or my spouse has depression.” The truth is most people would not easily recognize signs of mental illness; the fact that your spouse or child is sometimes moody may not necessarily mean they are bipolar. What is important is to identify if a spouse, child, or other loved one consistently behaves in erratic and unpredictable ways that create a lot of tension and instability in the family. When you identify such disruptions, getting help from a professional counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist is critical.

For many Christians, seeking help from a mental health specialist appears unthinkable. However, consider that if you had a toothache, you wouldn't try to pull your tooth out yourself. Or if you had a broken arm, you wouldn't try to set it in a cast yourself? In both cases, one would seek the help of a specialist—a dentist or orthopedic surgeon. Mental illness is no different than any other illness requiring proper diagnosis and treatment. If an infected tooth or broken arm is left unattended, it leads to compounded problems. The same is true for mental illness; it is a diagnosable medical condition.

Early intervention, proper diagnosis, and treatment are essential first steps in managing a mental illness. As a supporting spouse or caregiver, educate yourself as much as possible on the person's condition. Spouses and families must also develop coping strategies and safety plans for the person with the illness and the rest of the family. Someone who has clinical depression, anxiety, or has attempted suicide and survived may take weeks or even months before medication, therapy, and other interventions may reduce their symptoms and suicidal feelings. Empathy, kindness, and support from loved ones are valuable parts of their treatment. Of course, this may be extremely difficult for loved ones who are confused, frightened, and angry. Learning to cope with both the behavior of the mentally ill person and one's own reactions to that behavior often requires counseling for a spouse and the rest of the family.

Faith in God is an immense advantage for Christians living with a mentally ill relative. Recent studies have affirmed that a person's faith plays a vital role in helping such an individual cope with challenges in his or her life—including helping family members cope with the stress of caring

for a mentally ill relative. However, this faith must be intrinsic rather than extrinsic (Pargament, 2001), meaning the person must honestly believe what he or she claims to believe in— “***The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.***” Phillippians 4:9

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- <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/looking-at-my-genes>
- <https://988lifeline.org/> The National Suicide Prevention and Crisis Lifeline (USA only)

THE IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON CHILDREN

BY ALINA BALTAZAR

THE TEXTS

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.”
Psalms 127:3

“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Matthew 18:3-6

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this seminar is to review the impact of sexual abuse on children, possible causes, how to recognize it in children, protect children from molestation, and where to get treatment for children who have been sexually assaulted. This seminar is from a Biblical perspective.

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MATERIALS NEEDED

Laptop, PowerPoint software, and a projector. This seminar will probably take around 1-1.5 hours.

POLL QUESTION

How many of you personally know someone who was sexually assaulted as a child/teen or someone who has committed a sexual assault on a child/teen?

INTRODUCTION

Children are a special gift from God to humanity as mentioned in Psalms 127:3. Jesus tells us we should be more like little children in their humility, innocence, and dependence (Matthew 18:3). Children are completely dependent on adults to care for their basic needs and to provide nurturing love and guidance. Their brains take several years to develop to not only be able to care for their own needs but to have the executive functioning ability to know how their present behavior impacts their future. The human brain isn't fully mature until the mid-20s. A stable and nurturing environment is essential for children to become healthy contributing members of society. There are many ways sin hurts a child's development. One of the most devastating is sexual molestation.

Unfortunately, sexual sin is a common way the devil wants to hurt God's creation and our relationship with Him. There are multiple verses encouraging sexual purity and against sexual immorality. In modern times, sexual expression is considered a positive behavior and not harmful, but even secular individuals and scientists know the harm sexual molestation has on children. Due to the high expectations of sexual behavior among Christians, sexual immorality, especially pertaining to children, has a large stigma. Therefore, the topic is important to address within the church context.

RATES

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022), child sexual abuse is a significant public health problem. Sexual abuse of a child includes the involvement of a child (person less than 18 years old) in some sort of sexual activity that violates laws or cultural expectations that the child doesn't fully understand, does not consent to, or is developmentally unable to give consent. What may appear as a "consensual" sexual relationship between a 16-year-old teenage girl and a 21-year-old boyfriend is child sexual abuse according to these standards. What an adult may think is voluntary sexual behavior towards them by a child, if used intentionally to sexually arouse that adult, that is also child sexual abuse.

Children often don't realize sexual abuse has occurred or never report sexual abuse out of fear of stigma or reprisal so these estimates may be low. Estimates will vary across different studies and states, but research generally has found that:

- 1 in 4 females and 1 in 6 males in the U.S. will experience a sexual assault before the age of 18.
- 91% of the perpetrators are people known to the child (friends and family members)
- This abuse doesn't just impact the child and family, but also a society with a lifetime economic burden of at least \$9.3 billion as of 2015.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

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

IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE ON CHILDREN/TEENS

Of all the adverse childhood experiences a child can have, sexual abuse is the most harmful due to its long-term impact on a child's development. According to the CDC (2022), childhood sexual abuse impacts children/teens/adults in multiple ways.

BEHAVIORALLY

More likely to use and abuse substances, including opioids, participate in risky sexual behaviors (multiple sexual partners or unprotected sex), and more likely to perpetrate sexual violence.

EMOTIONALLY

Higher rates of depression, suicide, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). More likely to be victimized later in life. Females who experienced child sexual abuse are 2-13 times more likely to experience sexual assault and twice the risk of domestic violence in adulthood.

PHYSICALLY

Higher rates of sexually transmitted infections, physical injuries, and chronic conditions later in life (heart disease, obesity, and cancer).

SPIRITUALLY

Since the vast majority of sexual assaults are committed by trusted adults, this can impact a child's view of a caring heavenly Father. In addition, a child may have wondered how a loving God could have allowed the abuse to happen or didn't save him/her from an abusive home. Jesus knew how harming a child can have devastating effects when he said, "Whoever causes one of these little

ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.” Mark 9:42.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Those of you who knew someone who was sexually assaulted as a child/teen, how did it impact them?

Check-in with the participants at this point. Becoming aware of the harm sexual abuse has on a child can be triggering for those who are more emotionally sensitive and especially for those who have experienced childhood emotional trauma themselves. You will want to acknowledge this and reassure them that all these consequences do not happen to all victims and that there is hope and healing for those who do.

RECOGNIZING SEXUAL ASSAULT IN CHILDREN/TEENS

Children naturally explore their sexuality and reproductive parts as they develop, especially around toilette training and then puberty. When children stop wearing diapers, they seem suddenly aware there is a body part they didn't realize was there that has a function related to the toilette and has certain sensations when touched. As a result, children may touch themselves more or expose themselves to get a reaction. It may continue into the early elementary years when they start interacting more with their peers. Children do notice adults' reactions to these behaviors. Sometimes they like the attention they get for these problematic behaviors. These are signs of normal child development and not symptoms of sexual abuse. Of course, children do need to be trained to set up boundaries related to their reproductive parts, but they shouldn't feel horrified by their body parts based on adults' reactions. Parents are encouraged to teach their children the difference between good and bad touch.

Children tend to enter a latency phase around the age of 7 to puberty where there is limited sexual development. Children get more involved with their same-sex peers and focus more on those relationships and school. As children enter puberty, they may notice more hair growing around their genitals, and then they notice physical changes that lead to new bodily sensations. This is another time of natural curiosity about their reproductive parts that can lead to an increased awareness of and interest in sexuality. This is also normal child development.

It can be difficult to recognize signs of sexual abuse in children. The best way is just to notice any behavior or emotional differences that aren't explained by any other changes in the child's life. They can be very subtle because the abuser is good at hiding what he/she is doing and has probably threatened the child if he/she told anyone. Children often don't realize what is happening to them or how to express their fears and discomfort. Here are some signs a young child might

be experiencing sexual molestation, according to the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN, 2022):

Physical signs:

- Sexually transmitted infections
- Signs of trauma around the genital area or unexplained blood on sheets, underwear, or clothing

Behavioral signs:

- Excessive talk about or knowledge of sexual topics
- Keeping secrets, not talking as much as usual
- Not wanting to be left alone with certain people or being afraid to be away from primary caregivers, especially if this is a new behavior
- Regressive behaviors or resuming behaviors they had grown out of, such as thumb sucking or bedwetting
- Overly compliant behavior
- Sexual behavior that is inappropriate for the child's age
- Spending an unusual amount of time alone
- Trying to avoid removing clothing to change or bathe

Emotional signs:

- Change in eating habits
- Changes in mood or personality, such as increased aggression
- Decrease in confidence or self-image
- Excessive worry or fearfulness
- Increase in unexplained health problems such as stomach aches and headaches
- Loss or decrease in interest in school, activities, and friends
- Nightmares or fear of being alone at night
- Self-harming behaviors

For teens some signs are the same, others are different. If you notice these signs, it is best to mention those concerns to the teen to open a dialogue.

- Unusual weight gain or loss
- Unhealthy eating patterns, like a loss of appetite or excessive eating
- Signs of physical abuse, such as bruises
- Sexually transmitted infections or other genital infections
- Signs of depression
- Anxiety or worry
- Failing grades

- Changes in self-care, such as paying less attention to hygiene, appearance, or fashion than they usually do
- Sexual behavior and dress that is inappropriate and a change from usual behavior
- Self-harming behavior
- Expressing thoughts about suicide or suicidal behavior
- Alcohol or drug use

This list may be difficult to remember and there are other explanations for these behaviors. The best thing to do is to trust your gut and don't ignore your feelings that something is off. The most important thing to remember is to listen to a child if he/she says he/she doesn't feel comfortable around someone or if he/she tells you about some inappropriate sexual behavior with an adult. Believe them, protect them, and get them the help they need. It is not the child/teen's fault, even if he/she chose to be alone or initially agreed with the inappropriate behavior. It is the perpetrator who began the sexually abusive nature of the relationship.

Admittedly, there is a concern about falsely accusing someone of sexual molestation when it didn't occur, but it is best to let the experts figure that out. There are professionals who go through specialized training to investigate accusations of sexual molestation who understand child development and can recognize what reports and symptoms are related to abuse. It is best not to question the child too extensively because it could cause confusion with the child's memory that isn't fully developed yet. The place to go for any concerns of sexual abuse of a child or teen by an adult family member is your local Child Protective Services Agency or Children and Family Services. These reports are anonymous. If the perpetration is being done by another adult, then the local police department is the first step. This is done to protect the child and other children who may be harmed. Child molesters very often victimize multiple children.

RISK FACTORS

How could someone cause such harm to children? You may think these people are monsters and don't go to your church or live in your community. On the surface, many appear to be upstanding citizens, a good spouse and parent, and may even be involved in church leadership. That is part of the manipulation that is also used to groom the child for victimization. Not all child molesters are pedophiles and not all pedophiles molest children. A pedophile is an adult or late-aged adolescent (typically 16 years or older) whose preferred sexual object is pre-pubescent children (typically infants to 13-year-old). Adolescents who are 16 years old must have a 5-year age difference between the child and themselves to be considered a child molester (DSM-IV, TR 2006).

Incest has been a problem in the family since Bible times. Even Moses wrote about it in Leviticus 18:6, "None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness: I am the Lord". God must have known the harm incest does to families. The usual

incestuous relationship is a father with his daughter or stepfather and stepdaughter. Research has identified some risk factors for father-daughter incest (Stroebe, 2013):

- Verbal or physical abuse in the family
- Families that accept father-daughter nudity
- Families in which the mother never kisses or hugs her daughter
- Families with an adult male other than the biological father in the home (stepfather or mom's boyfriend)

Society is more aware of the sexual abuse that can happen by church clergy. This abuse happens even in Seventh-day Adventist churches. Some research studies have identified patterns of sexual abuse by clergy, including demographics of those typically involved in abuse. Frawley-O'Dea (2004) reported that many alleged sexual abusers in the Catholic Church were newly ordained priests who focused on youth ministry, which is typical for protestant churches too. They would develop friendships with youth, often pre-adolescent or adolescent boys. Slowly the relationships would become physical—then the priest would introduce sexual activity into the relationship. In a detailed analysis of the situation, the John Jay College Research Team (2011) found that—just like non-priest child sexual offenders—there were certain vulnerabilities for those who committed these acts. Perpetrators had an emotional congruence with children and adolescents.

Emotional congruence is an adult overly identifying and connecting emotionally with children (John Jay College, 2011). This congruence is involved in the initiation and maintenance of sexual offences against children and young adolescents because children and youth respond positively to the relationship and feel that they have found an adult who understands them.

Abusers are often lonely, experience increased stress at work, and in their minds, have neutralized their intended sexual activity. Cognitive dissonance may also occur, forcing the abuser to struggle with their view of themselves as “a good person,” yet having committed an deviant act. The result of this struggle is often rationalizing the behavior, focusing on the positive of the relationship as outweighing the cost of the abuse, thus diminishing feelings of responsibility, guilt, and shame (Finkelhor, 1984). In reality, they are grooming the victim and working hard to ensure opportunities for sexual abuse. The development of a strong emotional, even trusting bond with a person in authority is often an essential part of initiating and continuing sexual abuse and reducing the likelihood of reporting. The victim often becomes an “apparent” willing participant and years later may feel they are as “guilty” as the offender is, leading victims to be unsure if they were abused (Doyle, 2003).

Though the abuser is the cause of the abuse, there are known risk factors for children. According to research, certain patterns have been identified:

- Children whose parent(s) is(are) not working
- Children living in poverty

- Children who live in rural areas (Sedlack, et al., 2010)
- Children who witness or are a victim of other crimes (Finkelhor, et al., 2010)
- Perpetrators look for passive children who are quiet, troubled, and lonely who come from single-parent or disrupted homes (Elliott, et al., 1995).
- Children who are trusting, so the perpetrator can develop a trusting relationship with the child before abuse occurs (De Bellis, et al, 2011). This may include building a trusting relationship with the family as well (Elliott et al., 1995).

APPLICATION QUESTION

What would you say to a 12-year-old girl who believes she committed adultery because she didn't fight off her cousin's husband who forced himself on her? She is afraid to tell her mom because she thinks her stepfather already doesn't like her and now will think she is a sinner.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM SEXUAL ASSAULT

Not all children who are abused fit the risk criteria, it can happen to any child. There is no foolproof way to protect all children, but there are steps that can be taken to decrease the risk, according to RAINN (2022).

- Show interest in their day-to-day life
- Get to know the people in their life
- Choose caregivers carefully
- Talk about it. When there are news stories on this topic, that is an opportunity to educate your child to help him/her understand.
- Know the warning signs
- Teach children to set boundaries
- Teach children how to talk about their bodies by knowing the names of their reproductive parts so they can communicate when there is something wrong.
- Let your child know you are available and ready to talk about anything that bothers him/her and then make sure to do that to show you mean what you say.
- Make sure they know they won't get in trouble. Perpetrators often threaten them or make them feel it is their fault.
- If you have any concerns, try using open-ended questions to encourage them to talk, like "What is something that happened today?"

Though having caring adults in a child's life helps with resilience, there needs to be some awareness on how to protect our children from molestation by adults. Families, neighborhoods, schools, and churches are prime places for these relationships to develop. Due to the risk for the development of emotional congruence that can lead to a sexual relationship between the adult and youth, there needs to be boundaries where there isn't excessive time alone or interactions that wouldn't be appropriate if others were around. Adults need to have relationships with other adults for their emotional support so they don't turn to children to fill that need that could develop into a sexual relationship. Adults who have been diagnosed or are aware they have pedophilia must stay away from children to protect both the adult and the child.

Research has identified six recommendations for preventing child sexual abuse at the community level: (1) zero tolerance of child sexual abuse, (2) community involvement in prevention and detection, (3) training in identifying potential abusers, (4) supporting victims of child sexual abuse, (5) protecting those who stand up for victims from harassment, and (6) for church communities to tie the rejection of child sexual abuse with religious values (Pulido, et al., 2021).

APPLICATION QUESTION

What can you do to increase your child's safety and for the children in your life?

GETTING HELP

Parents struggle with a lot of guilt once they realize their child has been sexually molested. Protecting a child is a primary responsibility of parents, but we can't stop all harm. The harm to the child will vary depending on how young, how long, what abuse occurred, the role of the abuser in the child's life, and the support given by adults. Adults should watch for the problematic symptoms listed earlier and get the child help from a counselor who is trauma trained and works with children who have been molested. A child/teen may not connect well with the therapist. Be open to trying different counselors until the child is comfortable. Counseling may not seem to help much at first, especially if the child is resistant. Once these children become adults, they often see counselors as a resource for when they are ready to heal from childhood traumas. Family counseling may also help to address any conflict that led to or happened after the molestation.

There is help for churches to protect children since perpetrators often take advantage of the trusting relationship that parents and children have with church volunteers or ministry leaders. End it Now is a wonderful resource from the Seventh-day Adventist church. Their website includes information on child protection, screening policies for volunteers, what pastors can do, information about clergy sexual misconduct, how to maintain healthy boundaries for spiritual leaders, and how to deal with sexual predators in church.

CONCLUSION

When God created man and woman, He began with a relationship based on mutual love and trust. That relationship was designed to be the foundation for a stable, happy family where all members are treated with dignity and worth. Parents are expected to protect, nurture, and protect care for children.

The Bible strongly condemns child sexual abuse. It is a betrayal of God's original plan. When trust is taken advantage of and that relationship with the authority figure causes harm to the child, not only does it harm the child but distorts his/her view of a loving God. Jesus knew this so used strong language to condemn anyone who causes a child to stumble.

The evil one wants nothing more than to harm God's children and hurt families. Sexual sin is a common tool that is used. The Bible gives clear guidance that sets standards, but when those standards aren't kept, there can be a stigma that stops children and families from getting the help that they need. Let us all watch out for our children and speak up when there are concerns.

EXERCISE

How can we get past the stigma of talking about the sexual assault of children?

RESOURCES

SEXUAL ABUSE

National Sexual Assault Hotline
Available 24 hours crisis hotline
1-800-656-4673

National Organization for Victim Assistance (NOVA)
Available 24-hours crisis hotline
1-800-879-6682

Rape, Abuse, Incest National Network.

For additional resources check out this website:

<https://www.rainn.org/national-resources-sexual-assault-survivors-and-their-loved-ones>

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH RESOURCE

End it Now <https://www.enditnownorthamerica.org/>

Official statement on child sexual abuse:

<https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/child-sexual-abuse/>

COUNSELORS

Substance abuse and/or mental health professionals

<https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

Seventh-day Adventist Counselors

<https://www.nadfamily.org/resources/counselors/>

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.pdf>

https://www.cdc.gov/injury/pdfs/priority/ACEs-Strategic-Plan_Final_508.pdf

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SHAPING YOUR CHILD'S WORLDVIEW THROUGH MODELING, TEACHING, AND MINISTERING

BY JOSEPH KIDDER AND KATELYN CAMPBELL WEAKLEY

THE TEXTS

“In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility.” Titus 2:7

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45

“In the family, fathers and mothers should ever present before their children the example they wish to be imitated. They should manifest one to the other a tender respect in word, and look, and action. They should make it manifest that the Holy Spirit is controlling them, by representing to their children the character of Jesus Christ. The powers of imitation are strong; and in childhood and youth, when this faculty is most active, a perfect pattern should be set before the young. Children

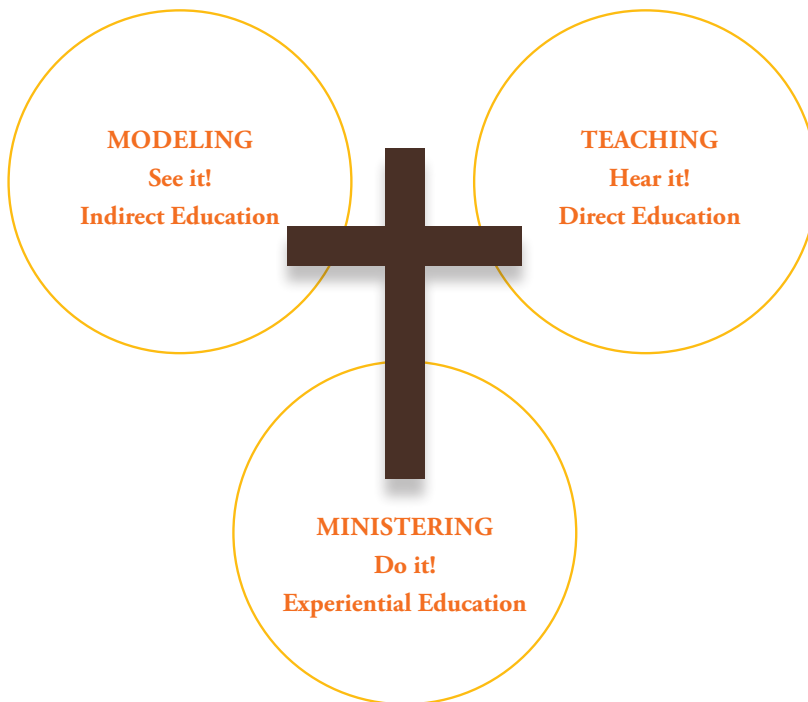
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should have confidence in their parents, and thus take in the lessons they would inculcate.” Ellen White¹

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The lessons a mother and father can demonstrate both intentionally and unintentionally significantly impact a child. In the 2022 Adventist Family Ministries resource book, *I Will Go with my Family: Family Resilience*², is the article discussing how loving relationships make the difference in developing a Biblical worldview in your child. In this seminar, we will discuss a threefold path of education which has the capacity, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to form your child's worldview through the teachings of Scripture. The first and most pervasive avenue of education is modeling, which provides constant indirect teachings as your child watches and observes you. The second avenue is direct education given through daily teachings based on everyday life. The third avenue is ministering together with your child, an experiential opportunity for education. By teaching your children through these three avenues, you can help them develop a Biblical worldview.



Shaping the Worldview of Your Child Through Modeling, Teaching, and Ministering

Worldview refers to how we see our lives: our assumptions about the world and our answers to life's deepest questions.³ Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I come from? Where am I going?

What is real? What is right and wrong? Who is God? All of these questions and more are answered by the worldview your child develops, shaping his or her outlook and basic assumptions. No decision is made without a worldview. Our worldviews are formed through various influences in our lives. As Christians, we seek to have a Biblical worldview. A Biblical worldview is a way of thinking based on Scripture that helps us view and interpret the world around us through a Biblical understanding. To make positive, healthy decisions, a child needs a positive, healthy Biblical worldview.

GROUP DISCUSSION

In groups of 4-5, discuss what it means to have a biblical worldview versus a secular worldview? Discuss the challenges you face as a Christian and as a parent in being consistent in transmitting this worldview to your children.

MODELING LIKE CHRIST

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The light that we shine for our children will direct them to the Source of all light, meaning that the actions we choose to take have the potential of teaching them about God.

If you don't buy into your faith, your children will not buy into it either. The most committed believers are the ones who transfer belief to the next generation. Vern Bengtson notes that parents who are active in living out their faith produce children who are more likely to stay committed to Christ. However, “if the parents are not themselves involved in religious activities, if their actions are not consistent with what they preach, children are rarely motivated to follow in their parents' religious footsteps.”⁴ Christians who are weak in their own faith will likely raise children who will be weak in their faith as well. Therefore, parents need to demonstrate Godly values in their own lives, otherwise, the lessons they would teach would be but empty words. When Jesus was ministering on earth, His words were always backed up by His behavior: how He engaged with others, how He reacted to circumstances, and simply how He lived His life. This non-verbally explicit teaching is as important as the intentional lessons you give your child.⁵ It is in watching your behavior that your child learns what is right and what is wrong.

The apostle Paul writes to his young prodigy Timothy, “don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12, NIV). There are 5 key aspects of modeling that Paul touches on in this single verse, and although he is speaking to a young person, these principles of modeling are important for parents, grandparents, and caregivers of all ages to demonstrate for their own children.

Speech: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). Our conversations should be

kind and helpful to others, building one another up instead of tearing each other down. It is both *what* you say and *how* you say it that makes a difference. As you communicate with others, do so lovingly. Your children will see and learn that this is the Christ-like way to engage with other people.

Conduct: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Keep God and His kingdom at the forefront of your mind as you go through your day. From the books that you read to your reaction when someone cuts you off in traffic, conduct yourself in a manner that is not of this world. How your children see you behave will guide them in their own behavior and teach them what is appropriate for a follower of Christ.

Love: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Love should be the basis for all that you do and say. Demonstrating a sacrificial, unselfish love for others and God will give your child a picture of what their heavenly Father’s love is like. Love others well and your child will do the same.

Faith: “That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (1 Corinthians 2:5). Put your trust in your heavenly Father. When times are tough, turn to God and demonstrate your faith to your child. If your reaction is to put your faith in God, your child will learn that He is trustworthy, and soon your son or daughter will make putting their trust in God their natural reaction, too.

Purity: “All a person’s ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord” (Proverbs 16:2, NIV). Keep in tune with your heart’s intentions. Devote yourself wholly to God and allow Him to cleanse you of your sinful tendencies. As God works within you, He will purify you and give your child a better picture of the life He wants to give us.

Your children are always watching and listening, observing all that you say and do. You are the one who gives them cues about what is right and wrong, even when you are not explicitly saying such things. Be sure to pray and ask God to work within your own life so that as you are drawn closer to Him, your child may be drawn closer as well.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Individually, think about your parent(s), guardians or other adults you looked up to, what can you remember from observing their actions. Did their actions match their words? Reflect on how their commitment to God, verses they shared, or lack of commitment influenced your worldview. What modeling from your parents would you like to keep for your own children and what would you like to discard?

TEACHING AS GOD INSTRUCTED⁶

As the Israelites were wandering in the desert, the Lord gave them a command concerning 24/7 education for their children. This command, known as the Shema (שמע, literally translated as

“hear”), was memorized by all faithful Israelites throughout time, and it would be a wise idea for us to follow today.

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

A key implication of the Shema is the ongoing experience of educating children. The Lord instructs parents to teach their children about Him at all times—from morning until night, at home and while traveling, at every given opportunity. God’s love for us and our love for Him must continually be on our lips, passed along to our children. This sentiment is echoed throughout both the Old and New Testaments:

Psalms 78:2-4: “I will open my mouth in a parable. I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. 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.”

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

Ephesians 6:4: “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.”

2 Timothy 1:5: “When I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.” Through the faithful teachings of Lois and Eunice, the young preacher Timothy was raised to teach countless others about God.

How can parents possibly spend *all* of their time teaching their children? When we begin to look through the lens of daily instruction, we can begin to see lessons about God all throughout our daily experiences.

Of course, Scripture can be used to instruct our children. The Shema reminds us to write and know the concepts of the Word of God. History and the current events around us can also be opportunities for instruction. We can point out how God is present and engaging with the world today. Nature too can be a significant way to teach your children about God. The psalms are filled with examples of ways to connect creation to the Creator.

“O Lord, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions. This great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great” (Psalm 104:24-25).

As your family experiences life together, whether you are driving to school or standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon, see what connections to God you can find. What lessons of morality can be learned? How can you feel God's presence in your life? What aspects of God's character can be seen? Pray that God would open your eyes to see what lessons you can bring out of everyday life, and then simply begin sharing with your children. Ask them questions about what they see and experience. Ask them how it connects to what they know of God and the Bible. As you practice having these conversations with your children, it will gradually become part of your daily routine, and your children will eagerly engage.

TEACHING WITH RELEVANCY

Thomas and Tabita are the parents of three young boys. They are intentional about reading through the Bible with them and even encourage them to memorize verses of Scripture. Here Thomas gives an example of how Scripture is helping to form the worldview of his eldest son Lukas, who was four years old at the time of this story:

“We’ve been reading through the book of Exodus, but last night Lukas was up a bit later than Philip, so we decided to wait with the next chapter and read one of the stories from 2 Kings that Lukas listened to recently from Your Story Hour. This was part of it: ‘As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven.’ 2 Kings 2:11. Of course I had not thought of what happens at the end of the chapter after Elisha picks up Elijah’s mantle, and after he heals the waters of Jericho: ‘Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up by the way, young lads came out from the city and mocked him and said to him, ‘Go up, you baldhead; go up, you baldhead!’ When he looked behind him and saw them, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and tore up forty-two lads of their number. He went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.’ 2 Kings 2:23-25.

“As we finished reading, I asked Lukas, ‘So what do you think?’ And he immediately started talking about the chariot, and Elijah going up to Heaven. Afterward, I directed the conversation to the part about the bears and the boys. ‘Why did that happen? What were they doing?’ I asked. ‘They were making fun of Elijah, and that he went up to Heaven,’ Lukas replied.

“It was evident from what followed that Lukas had no problem with the story, and I’d been wondering for a while what impact learning Bible verses has on children and how it shapes their worldview. So, after he got up, I asked him the following question: ‘Lukas, of all the Bible verses that we’ve learned, which one makes you think that what happened in this story was OK?’ He stood there for a few seconds. Then he looked up at me and said, ‘Will not the judge of all the earth do right? Genesis 18:25.’

“Both Tabita and I were awestruck. I know that there are plenty of things that he does not understand, and what he does understand is obviously processed in his own 4-year-old way. But he made the connection! He knew that God is just. And that helped when he heard a story that many of us would most likely question.”⁷

Lukas saw the Scripture in its totality. In order to interpret the story in 2 Kings, he went to Genesis 18:25. This shows us how important it is to be saturated with the Word of God and to guide our children to be filled by and guided by God’s Word too. With Scripture in the hearts of our young boys and girls, we can guide them into interpreting and understanding whatever they may encounter in life with relevancy and practicality.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discuss the experience of Tabita, Thomas and Lukas. What impact did learning Bible verses have on Lukas, and how did it shape his worldview?

MINISTERING AS THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS

Many have found plenty of benefits to engaging in service: it is a healthy activity for learning and growing.⁸ Taking time to engage the whole family in ministry can be a powerful and spiritually formative experience for your children. Ellen White wrote in *Christian Service*, “True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayer, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits and grow naturally upon a good tree.”⁹ The values and lessons taught at home are best cemented through action. Besides this, we as Christians are called to serve through the direction of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:13b says, “but through love serve one another,” and Romans 12:11 reminds us that this service to God should be done passionately and with zeal. This attitude of service should be passed on to our children, especially as it teaches them about the God we serve.

When my, Joseph’s, two children were still quite young, our little family began a Christmas tradition. My family had been praying about how to minister together, and one Christmas we felt the Holy Spirit lead us to a certain project. Each December, our church participated in an Angel Tree program. A Christmas tree was brought into the church and it was covered in tags with the names of needy families on them. Each year, our family of four would select another family from the tree, and we would go out and purchase gifts for them. My kids would excitedly wrap these presents, and we would proudly bring them back to the church to be given to the family we had selected. This was an easy and fun way to get my children involved in ministry, and it grew within them a heart of service and care for those in need.

Ellen White writes, “Children should be so educated that they will sympathize with the aged and afflicted and will seek to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and distressed. They should be

taught to be diligent in missionary work; and from their earliest years self-denial and sacrifice for the good of others and the advancement of Christ's cause should be inculcated, that they may be laborers together with God.”¹⁰

Children thrive in ministry when given an appropriate opportunity to practice the Christian values they have been learning. Not only does this give your son or daughter a chance to grow in their faith, but it can also help others in their faith. Cheri Fuller writes, “Don’t tell them to wait until they’re grown up for God to use them. Discover what it’s like to share God’s love together, so they can have some peak experiences.”¹¹ Let your child enjoy the experience of ministering together. It will greatly develop them in their own walk with God.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Share examples in your own life when your parents, or you as parents were intentional about teaching your children from life experiences. (Note: Remember, not all life experiences are helpful, relevant or appropriate to share with your children. Be sure to assess the value of the life experience you are sharing, whether it’s age appropriate, and if it will be helpful or cause more harm.)

THE EFFECTS OF MODELING, TEACHING, AND MINISTERING

Ellen White writes, “You must instruct, warn, and counsel, ever remembering that your looks, words, and actions have a direct bearing upon the future course of your dear ones. Your work is not done to paint a form of beauty upon canvas or to chisel it from marble, but to impress upon a human soul the image of the Divine.”¹² It is God’s desire and command that mothers and fathers train up their children to follow Christ. Everything that is done—every word and action taken—should be Christ-centered, demonstrating a Biblical worldview to young minds.

In Genesis 18:19, God speaks of Abraham, saying, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice...” This is what parents are called to do: grow and instruct their children in the way of the Lord. As author Craig Hill says, “If parents do nothing else on this earth regarding their children, the one thing God intended for them to do is to make sure that they are agents of God’s impartation of identity and destiny to their children...”¹³

The best example we could find of a parent who left a legacy of faith using all the tools we discussed was that of a woman named Susanna Wesley. Many people know of John and Charles Wesley, two prominent figures in Christianity known for making music, preaching and, founding Methodism. But not many know about their mother, Susanna. Susanna gave birth to 19 children, though only ten survived. She took her care for her children very seriously and devoted herself to their education and maturation. While her husband Samuel was often away from the home either

preaching or spending time in jail for unpaid debts, Susanna was the one raising their children to follow Christ.

She gave all of her children, both boys and girls, a rigorous education. All of her children knew how to read by the age of five, and all were taught Latin and Greek. What is most impressive, however, is how Susanna infused spirituality into daily homelife. She sectioned off two hours of every day to be her personal time with God, and so her children grew up seeing how important a relationship with God was. When the local church seemed to be dying, Susanna invited people to come to their home where she led out in family worship. This resulted in more people attending her meetings than the church! Her children participated in worship with their mother—for them, it was simply a way of life in the family. Before going to sleep each night, Susanna would spend an hour one-on-one with a child, a different girl or boy each night.¹⁴

Through her modeling, ministering, teaching, and love, Susanna Wesley raised up her children to be strong in their faith. The impact she had on them as children continued to thrive within them as they grew into adults and long afterward. This impact even extended to greater Christianity at large through the contributions of her sons Charles and John Wesley especially. The influence parents have on their children can be beyond belief. By starting them on a trajectory pointed towards Jesus, parents set their children up to maintain a Biblical worldview and close relationship with their Savior for the rest of their lives.

This is what it means to leave a legacy of faith. Susanna Wesley, Eunice (Timothy's mother) and Lois (Timothy's grandmother), and Paul himself are all clear examples of the kind of legacy that can be created when we are intentional about shaping the worldview of our children. The decisions we make in helping to shape their worldviews can have everlasting effects. May the legacy we leave be one that points our children and even others to Christ long after we have gone.

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

GROUP DISCUSSION

Independently, with your spouse or in small groups, discuss and pray about the following:

1. Discuss what it means to shape the worldview of your child through modeling, teaching and ministering.
 2. Think about how your actions, direct education, and experiences you plan will educate and impact the lives and worldview of your children. What are ways you can be more intentional about transferring your beliefs to your children?
 3. What are two ministry outreach projects you can get your family involved with to put into practice the Christian values that are important to your family? Add those to your calendar today!
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NOTES

- ¹ Ellen White, *Child Guidance*. (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 215.
- ² S. Joseph Kidder & Katelyn Campbell Weakley, "Shaping Your Child's Worldview Through a Loving Relationship," in *I Will Go with my Family: Family Resilience*, (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 2021), 116-123.
- ³ For additional explanation of worldview, see James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); and George Barna, *Think Like Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003); Kevin J. VanHoozer, "Being Biblical in a Pluralistic Age," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 57 no. 2, 2019.
- ⁴ Curtis Miller, "Helping Kids Keep the Faith," *Fuller Youth Institute*, Dec. 15, 2013. <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/helping-kids-keep-the-faith>.
- ⁵ For more discussion on different types of teaching—nonverbal, situational, and planned teaching—see Dorothy Bertolet Fritz, *The Child and the Christian Faith* (Richmond, VA: CLC Press, 1964), 61-97.
- ⁶ See also Debbie Rivera, "The Shema," *Adventist Review*. September 13, 2010. <https://www.adventistreview.org/2010-1530-26>.
- ⁷ As told to us by Thomas Rasmussen, March 28, 2019.
- ⁸ A few examples and discussions can be found at the following sites: Elizabeth Hopper, "Can Helping Others Help You Find Meaning in Life?" February 16, 2016. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/can_helping_others_help_you_find_meaning_in_life/success; "7 Scientific Benefits of Helping Others," Mental Floss, accessed Dec. 16, 2021. <http://mentalfloss.com/article/71964/7-scientific-benefits-helping-others>; Adam Lupu, "How Do People Learn Most Effectively," November 20, 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2017/11/20/how-do-people-learn-most-effectively/#1b8753d01f05>; Kimberly Yam, "10 Facts That Prove Helping Others is a Key to Achieving Happiness," accessed Dec. 16, 2021, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/international-day-of-happiness-helping_n_6905446.
- ⁹ Ellen White, *Christian Service* (Silver Spring, MD: Review and Herald, 1999), 96.
- ¹⁰ Ellen White, *Testimonies, vol. 6*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), 429.
- ¹¹ Cheri Fuller, *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows: Ideas to Nurture Your Child's Relationship with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 209.
- ¹² Ellen White, *Child Guidance*, 218.
- ¹³ Craig Hill, *Bar Barakah* (Littleton, CO: Family Foundational Int., 1998), 8.
- ¹⁴ See Diane Severance, "Susanna Wesley: Christian Mother," Christianity.com, May 3, 2010, <https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1701-1800/susanna-wesley-christian-mother-11630240.html>; Jackie Green and Lauren Green-McAfee, "The Praying Example of Susanna Wesley," Faithgateway, June 5, 2018, https://www.faithgateway.com/praying-example-susanna-wesley/#.XJu_QyhKhPY.

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

 *Leadership Resources* are carefully selected to assist you in addressing current and relevant family issues with your local church.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL WITH HOMOSEXUALITY?

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

What's the big deal with homosexuality? The older people in my church often refer to homosexuality as a sin. Why would it be a sin if God made a person that way? Isn't God and the Bible all about love? So why should it make a difference who a person loves? Does God really expect someone to live without love for their entire life if they were born homosexual? This doesn't seem fair. What do you think?

Your question is one often asked by sincere Christians trying to know God's truth about the issue of homosexuality. Yet, in contemporary society, bombarded by divergent voices and seemingly individual *truths*, it isn't difficult to confuse Christian ethics with utilitarian, secular, and/or humanist ethics. So we begin by asking you to consider the message the Bible offers in 1 Corinthians 2:14: "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."

Genesis 2:24, 25 chronicles God's original plan for sexual activity, and it's clearly in the context of a heterosexual marriage between a man and a woman, when it says: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

When sin entered the earth through the choices made by our first parents—Adam and Eve—the entire planet became tainted by disobedience to God and its results—death—including the manifestation of aberrations in nature that have nothing to do with God's Creation plan. So, in God's attempt to save humankind, rather than having them experience the results of sin—death—the

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apostle Paul submits in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.”

God further clarifies the boundaries of sexual relationships for those who choose to be His disciples in the message of 1 Corinthians 7:1, 2: “Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’ But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.” Here again, God underscores the boundaries of sexual activity within a heterosexual marriage, and as a venture that should exclude sexual immorality.

The Bible also shares a list of persons who will not have a place in God’s eternity—including those involved in immoral heterosexual activity—when it submits in 1 Corinthians 6:9: “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality.”

The truth is, being a follower of Jesus is characterized by sacrifice and obedience to His principles regardless of one’s sexual orientation. After all, whether someone has a heterosexual or homosexual orientation, unless their sexuality is under the lordship of Jesus Christ—meaning that they’re obedient disciples—they’re in trouble. The Bible unambiguously states in Matthew 16:24: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” This is the challenge of every follower of Jesus, regardless of sexual orientation.

Our deepest desire to love and be loved was placed in us by God at Creation. He made us to desire His love more than anything else. The greatest love of all is God’s steadfast, unconditional love. Jesus Himself states in John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” This is exactly what Jesus did for us all, because He loves us better than any other love we’ll ever experience on earth. When filled with this abiding love we’re enabled to love others as purely as God loves us. This love should not be confused with sexual attraction and drive—which is often the way love is portrayed in our contemporary context.

While our human love relationships are often inconsistent and filled with frequent breakups and the reality of abandonment, we can depend on the incomparable love and presence of Jesus in our lives. In fact, He declares in Matthew 28:20: “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Regardless of the nature of our sin—even if it is homosexual practice—we can find acceptance, forgiveness, restoration, and salvation in Jesus when we respond in obedience. We see this evidenced when Jesus said to the woman caught in adultery: “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more” (John 8:11).

We hope that what we’ve shared will give you an opportunity to further reflect on God’s will for His followers. You are in our prayers.

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DISCIPLING OUR CHILDREN WITH LOVE

BY DAVID AND BEVERLY SEDLACEK

Parents stand in place of God in the lives of their children. Before children develop a personal relationship with God, they learn about God experientially through their primary caregivers. The seeds of love are awakened in the loving welcome given to a newborn baby, the awe and wonder of their birth, and the adoring look of the parents in the child's eyes. During the child's development to maturity, these seeds sprout into plants that produce fruit, the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, and so forth (Gal. 5:23).

Unfortunately, some parents are incapable of offering such a loving welcome. Parents who have unhealed trauma from their childhood, who have not experienced being seen, soothed, safe, or secure, cannot give their children what they have not received. Deuteronomy 5:9 declares that the iniquity of the parents is visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation. The word iniquity implies a bending or distorted shaping of the child. Trauma research helps us to understand that children experience the harmful effects of generational trauma. Let's explore the spiritual trauma that children experience at the hands of well-meaning parents.

Spiritual abuse in families is a form of emotional and psychological trauma or neglect. Some parents fail to pour into their children spiritually. They do not talk about God or spiritual realities. These parents may be kind and loving and, in that sense, reflect God's love, but the children have no spiritual framework in which to put these realities. A hunger for God is planted, but the seeds fail to sprout due to spiritual neglect.

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Other parents who identify as Christians may have been taught a fear-based view of God. Unless they have looked closely at how they experienced God through their parents, they will unconsciously pass this view of God to their children. This form of spiritual abuse has many faces. One form of spiritual abuse occurs when parents require children to obey to earn their love and acceptance. Jesus connected love and obedience when he said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 15:9-10). When children are loved well, they want to do what their parents ask them to do.

One of the most common forms of spiritual abuse occurs when parents overcontrol their children and fail to teach them how to make decisions. When parents make decisions for their children, the message is, “I have to make decisions for you as you are incapable of doing so on your own.” Children must be encouraged and empowered to make age-appropriate decisions as early as possible. Children benefit from the guidance of parents when making decisions and grow in the process when parents help them review the outcomes. A by-product of these interactions between parents and children includes strengthening the relationship and passing on wisdom.

Another face of spiritual abuse is using the Bible or the writings of Ellen G White as a club to beat the child. Conveying to a child that they are not measuring up to what God expects in a way that is not lovingly instructional but demeaning or condemning creates shame in a child. False humility conveys the understanding that we will never measure up to God’s expectations, and it is difficult to please him. On the surface, this false humility looks very spiritual. However, it requires hypervigilance to perform perfectly to earn God’s love or to keep him from being angry.

Neuroscience reveals that hypervigilance creates anxiety and causes stress. The amygdala, found in the brain’s limbic system, is responsible for scanning the internal and external environment for danger. With imminent threat, the amygdala signals the sympathetic system to mobilize for a fight or flight response. If the threat is too overwhelming, the individual may freeze. When the sympathetic system is constantly under stress, the immune system is impaired, and the prefrontal cortex (the thinking part of the brain) becomes paralyzed. Love, growth, development, and healthy thinking decrease when fear increases (Jennings, 2020). None of these mechanisms foster intimacy or a trusting relationship with God. A child may know that God is real but must be kept at a distance because he is to be feared. A child’s unconscious thought might be, “If God knew me, he wouldn’t love me; he will reject me forever.” The truth that they are loved with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) will always be elusive.

Even more damaging to a child is the spiritual trauma that occurs when parents physically abuse their child in the name of discipline. There is often a misunderstanding of the word “rod” found in texts like Proverbs 13:24, “Whoever spares the rod hates their children...” and 29:15, “A rod and a reprimand impart wisdom, but a child left undisciplined disgraces its mother.” This misunderstanding of the word has allowed parents to beat their children in the name of discipline. The shepherd’s staff was used to guide the sheep and the rod was used to

fend off predators. Ellen White suggests that corporal punishment should be used as the last resort when all else has failed and done with love, not anger. The child may receive the message that God is abusive and magnified even further when parents discipline their child when angry. Both the old and new Testaments teach that love is what must motivate a parent's discipline (Proverbs 3:11-12, Hebrews 13:5).

Words can also be very destructive. They are like arrows shot into the heart of a child that can wound deeply. One of the primary love needs of every child is affirmation. When a parent only points out the negative aspects of a child's existence, e.g., "You should have gotten all A's," "You are not as handsome/beautiful as your sibling," "You are damaged goods, and no one will ever want you," children form negative, shaming thoughts about themselves and this produces anxiety about their value and worth. These neuropathways are hard to eradicate. A child's sense of identity, value, and worth are formed by words and actions that convey negative messages. New neuro-pathways need to be formed based upon the truth of a child's value as a child of God, one of infinite worth.

Sexual abuse is especially damaging to a child's view of God. When a parent fails to protect a child from an abuser, the child's sense of God as a protector is damaged. The child's anger is often displaced onto God with thoughts such as, "God, why did you let this happen to me? If you loved me, you would not have let this happen!" If a parent, who professes to serve Christ, sexually violates a child, a question is often asked, "Why God did you give me these messed up parents?" The child's view of themselves may become so distorted that they internalize themselves as a sexual object and begin to embrace a sexually destructive life in the form of sexual promiscuity, prostitution, or even becoming porn stars.

The results of spiritual trauma include a shattered sense of self and a shattered worldview. A shattered self consists of a range of symptoms of post-traumatic distress, such as intrusive memories, hyperarousal, hypervigilance, anxiety, depression, numbness, dissociation, compulsion to reenact, restriction of range of effect, and sleep disturbances (Freedman, 2006). The shattered worldview includes what a person thinks is true, such as believing oneself at fault for the trauma, thinking oneself to be unsafe, or believing certain kinds of people pose a risk to oneself or others (Panchuk, 2018).

Healing begins by recognizing that spiritual trauma has occurred. Many involved in unhealthy spiritual communities may be in denial of their spiritual trauma. They may be unaware or not realize what genuine spirituality is. There is often a need to deconstruct a person's erroneous view of God and to reconstruct a more accurate idea of who He is. Many adults still carry the picture of God they learned as children and must now re-consider the character of the God they choose to believe. Children and adults must also be empowered to learn to say "no" and set healthy spiritual boundaries on the healing journey. They will be better able to perform this vital task once they know the God of their understanding for themselves.

These steps open the door for the person to begin exploring the world around them in new and exciting ways. They will be out of the spiritual imprisonment they have been confined to for so

long. They have the potential to experience God in a way that engenders their personal growth. This journey aims to experience God being on the journey with them, leading them, and growing them. Some people learn from the experience of others who can relate to them and their stories. Others may need the help of a trauma-informed therapist. If you recognize that you are among those who have been spiritually traumatized, we would invite you to begin the painful, yet courageous journey of healing.

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THE MENTAL EFFECTS OF GRIEF

BY CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

Rachel McKinley died a week after her husband of fifty years, Raymond, had died. Why is it that elderly couples die together, or so close to each other's death? Is there really such a thing as dying of a broken heart? According to the American Heart Association (n.d.) Broken Heart Syndrome, also called stress-induced cardiomyopathy or takotsubo cardiomyopathy, can happen even to healthy people. Evidently, women are more likely than men to experience the sudden, intense pain which can be caused by an emotional stressful event such as the death of a loved one, separation or divorce, or a betrayal or romantic rejection.

So, we know that grief can bring about detrimental physical effects. In addition, grief can also cause mental illness. Hensley and Clayton (2008) write about a longitudinal study that found that one month after people were widowed, 40% of these people meet the criteria for a major depressive episode. The good news is that this depression caused by grief decreased over time, and after one year, only 15% of this population met the criteria for major depression. In addition, according to Hensley and Clayton (2008) in some rare cases, grief can cause psychosis or the development of psychotic symptoms.

WHAT IS GRIEF?

We need to stop for a moment and talk briefly about grief which is the intense pain that accompanies a loss. And when the death is that of a loved one, someone very close to us, we

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experience a loss unlike any other or many others together. As Consuegra & Consuegra (2021) explain, “While grief is not limited to the loss of people, when it follows the death of a loved one it may be compounded by feelings of guilt and confusion, especially if the relationship was a difficult one.” C.S. Lewis attempts to describe his feelings of grief:

“No one ever told me that grief was so much like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing” (Lewis, 1978, p. 1).

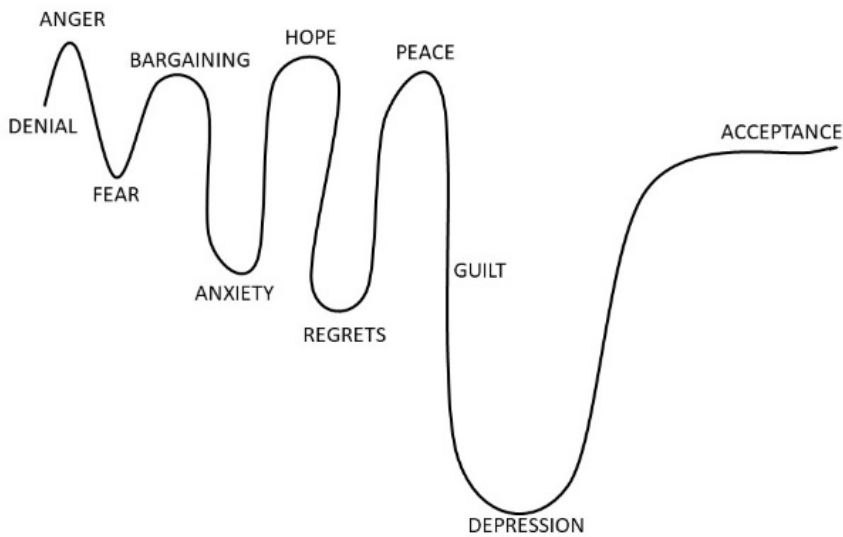
Swiss psychiatrist, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969), first introduced what she called the five-stage grief model in her bestseller, *On Death and Dying*. While working with terminally ill people, Kübler-Ross observed certain common experiences many of these patients felt and which led her to develop the model for which she became known, misunderstood, and criticized. Kübler-Ross originally developed this model to illustrate the process of bereavement, but she eventually adapted the model to account for any type of grief, particularly that experienced by someone who is dying. Kübler-Ross noted that everyone experiences at least two of the five stages of grief and that some people may revisit certain stages over the weeks or months until their death and their loved ones also may go through any or all of the stages for many years or even throughout life. Most of the criticism of her model was due to the mistaken belief that everyone linearly goes through the five stages, that is, one stage following the other all the way to the end (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



However, Kübler-Ross explained that these stages are not linear, and some people may not even experience any of them. In fact, some people might only experience one or two stages rather than all five, or three stages, etc. It may be easier to understand these experiences as reactions a person may have to their illness instead of stages they go through. Oncologist, Robert Buckman (1989), included other reactions people have such as fear, anxiety, hope, and guilt. Think for a moment about the ups and downs of each of the emotional reactions we just mentioned. If you were to put them on a graph, they may look something like Figure 2.

Figure 2



Again, the danger in doing it this way is that we may still think that a person who is dying of a terminal illness experience one reaction or one emotion right after the other.

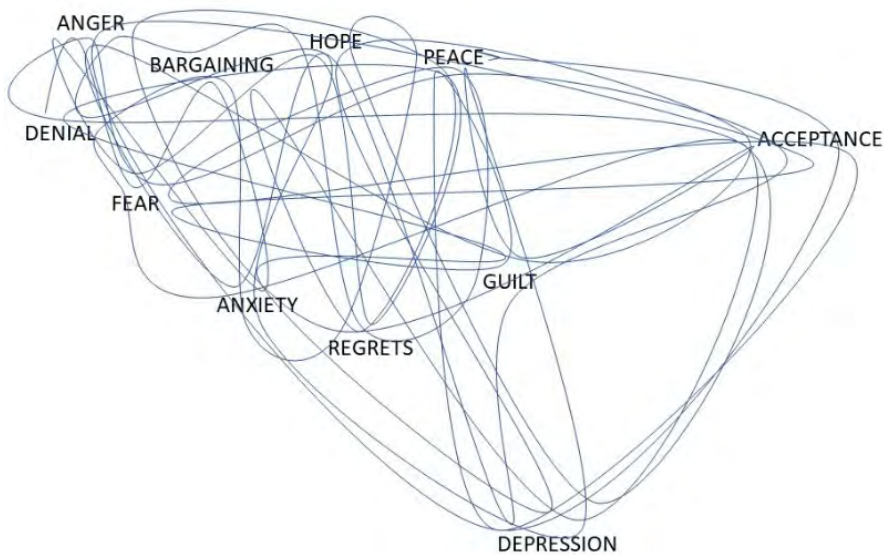
Instead of thinking of each of the stages or reactions taking place one after the other, think of it as emotions or reactions that a person may experience either one at a time, or sometimes several at the same time, or at different times. They may have some of these reactions for a while, then move on to others, but later experience the same reactions again. In fact, they may experience several reactions, conflicting as they may seem, at the same time. You can also view it as a tangled ball of feelings and reactions that roll in and out, back and forth, to-and-fro, with no one able to control it, change its course, or stop it. It simply happens. (see Figure 3)

Figure 3



Instead of thinking of the experience or reactions to the diagnosis of a terminal illness as a nicely defined path in the grief process, which is not true for anyone, think of the new reality of the journey through grief as a very convoluted path (see Figure 4). It is confusing, it is maddening, it is frustrating, and it is unique to you or your loved one. The value of knowing this is that it can help the person going through these emotional reactions understand why they are feeling that way, what is happening to them, and that what they are feeling is normal. It also enables you, as a friend or caregiver, to be a more effective helper to them as they write their last chapter on earth.

Figure 4



Why is it that some people manage through their grief until they reach a new normal and others seem stuck in the dark valley of grief? It is possible that some already have an underlying mental health disorder that is exacerbated by the recent loss and resulting grief, a genetic predisposition to mental illness, substance abuse, or some brain changes that make it harder for them to process their loss.

The work of grieving is not a smooth, linear path, but rather it is at times convoluted, taking us through different feelings, reactions, and experiences and often back to many, or all of them. Even years later, something may trigger memories that send us back, even if temporarily, to the grief we experienced right after our loved one died. Kate Bowler writes, “I used to think that grief was about looking backward, old men saddled with regrets or young ones pondering should-haves. I see now that it is about eyes squinting through tears into an unbearable future. The world cannot be remade by the sheer force of love. A brutal world demands capitulation to what seems impossible — separation. Brokenness. An end without an ending” (Bowler, 2019, p. 70). C.S. Lewis describes his experience so realistically and brilliantly:

“I thought I could describe a state; make a map of sorrow. Sorrow, however, turns out to be not a state but a process. It needs not a map but a history, and if I don’t

stop writing that history at some quite arbitrary point, there's no reason why I should ever stop. There is something new to be chronicled every day. Grief is like a long valley, a winding valley where any bend may reveal a totally new landscape. As I've already noted, not every bend does. Sometimes the surprise is the opposite one; you are presented with exactly the same sort of country you thought you had left behind miles ago. That is when you wonder whether the valley isn't a circular trench. But it isn't. There are partial recurrences, but the sequence doesn't repeat" (Lewis, 1978, p. 68-69).

THE GRIEVING PROCESS

As we stated before, grieving is a process, a personal journey toward learning to live a new normal without our loved ones. This process of grieving requires that you do things that will help you move further along toward healing and recovery. We recommend the following:

1. Give yourself time to heal. There is no set schedule for grieving. It is your personal journey and only you get to decide how fast you move along that path. As Chuck Swindoll (2009) expressed, "The length of a person's recovery says nothing about his or her spirituality. The mourning process is just as individual and unique as a fingerprint." So, give yourself the time it takes to heal emotionally, keep a routine, get lots of rest, and try not to attempt too much but direct your energies toward healing. And always remember that you are never alone.

Not giving yourself time to grieve will only make it more difficult later in life, and only you can make the decision as to when and how to grieve. Smith and Jeffers write:

"Grievors must take responsibility and make decisions about whether they will go through grief or grow through the experienced loss, and either choice has long-term consequences. No few have moaned after a loved one's death, "I wish they would go ahead and bury me, too." But that is not how it works unless you make that decision. Incidentally, some individuals have died with a spouse or child's death, t but the funeral was just delayed for another five or twenty-five years!" (Smith & Jeffers, 2001, p. iv).

2. Think. Ironically, some people will suggest the opposite and tell you to "put it out of your mind...don't think about it." As Chaplain Yeagley recommends, "I would encourage you to be unafraid of your thoughts. Let them happen" (Yeagley, 1984, p.27). For instance, if you remember a special place and event, go to that place and in your mind relive that event and the good memories the occasion evokes. In your home, take a trip down memory lane by going from room to room recalling things that happened in each, words that were spoken, and memories that were made.

3. Talk to others. Spend time with friends and others; don't isolate yourself. Talking through the events of your life with your loved one, from the earliest to the latest, is not only therapeutic but could help you accept the possibility of having meaningful relationships after the death of your loved one. In other words, it will help you see that there is life and there are other people in it, that your life has not come to an end because the life of your loved one did.

4. Write what's on your mind and in your heart. Keep a journal. Write down the details but also the feelings associated with them. If you're angry, write it and explain why. If you feel lonely, write it down as well. If you are afraid, confused, frustrated, or you had a good day, full of joyful experiences, reflect on that as well.

5. Cry. While those who love you and are concerned for you are telling you not to cry, we recommend you let the tears flow freely. Of course, there will be people who are uncomfortable seeing you cry, but as Jennifer Stern (2017) writes:

“It is not the job of the griever to make others comfortable with their expression of grief. It is the job of the griever to grieve. To grieve is to actively feel and express sorrow. If your tears appear to make others uncomfortable calmly speak your truth, teach them about your tears. I cry because I grieve. I cry because I am profoundly sad over the loss of my loved one. I cry because life will forever be bittersweet. I cry because there are no words to adequately express how I am feeling. I cry because I am brave enough to face another day, to endure, to push forward, to live with grief in my heart. I cry to express, to relieve, to release.”

6. Feel the Pain. Dealing with your loss in a healthy manner can be a major avenue to growth and life-transforming change. So, move forward in experiencing your grief. That is actually a healthy part of the process. At the same time, keep a good, healthy balance by rejoining the living through acts of giving and receiving. As my good friend, pastor, chaplain, and counselor, Mike Tucker explains, “The journey of grief has mile markers. As you pass the mile markers, you realize you are making progress. Skip over a marker, and you will pay for it” (Tucker, 2018, p. 37).

Again, you can suppress or deny the anger, which can only compound the problem and prolong the journey through grief, or you can give it a name, accept it, express it (point number four above), and be free of it.

7. Take care of yourself – physically. During the first few days after the death of a loved one you may not have much of an appetite, or barely have enough energy to put one foot in front of the other, but it is important, as part of your recovery from your loss and grief, that you watch what you eat and drink and that you engage in a healthy exercise routine.

8. Take a vacation from grief. This is another concept we learned from our dear friend Mike Tucker. It is not healthy to be consumed with your grief twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, month after month. Mike recommends taking a vacation from grief. In his words:

“A vacation from grief can be something as simple as taking a bubble bath, reading a novel, or going to a movie. Or it can be as big as traveling to a vacation spot for a weekend or even a week or two. I played golf from time to time in order to take a vacation from my pain, and I even took a cruise by myself in an effort to have a respite from grief” (Tucker, 2018, p. 122).

If we may give you some practical advice, as you make this journey through grief, it would be to allow yourself to go through the process. Don't suppress it, don't deny it, don't ignore it. That may only lead to adverse physical and mental injury. As painful and difficult as it is, going through the journey will be healthier in the long run.

Authors' note: Portions of this article were taken from our book, *Helping Write the Final Chapter: Ministering to the dying and those who love them*, published by AdventSource, 2021.

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THE MANLY WAY TO LEAD

BY JEFF BROWN

Not to brag, but I've won my share of athletics medals. High jump, 200 meters, and relay were my specialties. In the relay there was one thing they stressed: run in your own lane. If you cross into another lane, you will be disqualified. So let me tell you what this article is not about.

This article is not about women in leadership. It is not about what women should and shouldn't do. Women will speak for themselves. This article is about men in leadership. Who we should and shouldn't be. What we should and shouldn't do. Let's just examine ourselves fairly, deeply, and honestly, and trust our women to do the same.

So often we are hard on others and easy on ourselves. Jesus repeatedly asked us to go easy on others and be hard on ourselves. He never said the other group was without fault. He did ask, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and fail to notice the plank in your own?" (Matt. 7:4, Phillips), and He did advise, "Let him [a man] who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her [a woman]" (John 8:7, MEV). Our goal will be to run in our own lane, because I've seen what disqualification looks like.

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My wife, Pattiejean, and I were conducting a seminar for young people in Manchester, England. In one exercise I went with the young men to one location and Pattiejean stayed with the young women. The assignment was to list what we can be or do to enhance relationships. I had the flip chart and marker pen ready for the guys. I wasn't prepared for what they unloaded.

"They need to respect us." "They need to know their place." "They need to sit still when I'm with my friends." "They need to know when to speak and when to be quiet." Each person emboldened the next until it was time to rejoin the women. The men marched over like an army. Strengthened by each other's statements, they chanted as they marched.

The young women were thrilled with the assignment. They excitedly listed all that they would be and do for the young men. They would be patient, they would be attractive, they would be hardworking, they would be ambitious, and they would be faithful. Then they heard it: the sound as of a marching army.

The chants filled them with dismay. They heard, "We're going to tell them this time." "Now they're going to listen to us." All the love drained out of the women. When the men came in, they covered up their flip chart. Smiles gave way to frowns, and arms once open were now crossed. The men never did see the women's list. I wept inside because both men and women lost out. Both were disqualified.

Church leader and historian Norman Miles tells the story of the man who broke into a Quaker's house. Awakened by the sound of an intruder, the peace-loving Quaker took up his shotgun and declared to the startled thief, "Sir, I mean thee no harm, but I'm about to shoot where thou standest."

This article will examine the place of men in leadership from a biblical perspective. Understanding our role necessitates comprehending our mission: "To restore in men and women the image of their Maker, to bring them back to the perfection in which they were created—this was to be the work of redemption." Here we find our outline, the three acts in the biblical drama: Creation, Fall, and redemption. Our journey will encounter mountains and valleys, compliments and criticisms, affirmations and disappointments. I may shoot where you stand, but understand—I mean you no harm.

CREATION

Scripture is clear—men and women were equally created in the image of God and equally given dominion over the earth. " 'God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth. . . . So God created man in his own image, . . . male and female created he them.' Here is clearly set forth the origin of the human race; and the divine record is so plainly stated that there is no occasion for erroneous conclusions." What is this indisputable conclusion? "When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal."

Richard Davidson comments, "Genesis 1 teaches us that male and female participate equally in the image of God. 'So God created man [Heb. *ha'adam*, "humankind"] in His own

image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.’ . . . Both have been commanded equally and without distinction to take dominion, not one over the other, but both together over the rest of God’s creation for the glory of the Creator.”

The fact that the woman was created out of the rib is one for which men may rightly stake a claim but wrongly take the credit. However roles were shared in Creation, there is no hint of ranking. The fact that Eve’s creation followed that of Adam is not determinative of rank, though Creation does tell the story in an ascending order of significance.

“Feminists and patriarchalists are equally in need of redemption.”

Genesis 2 makes clear that the initiative belongs to God. God places the man in a deep sleep. He is not aware, conscious, responsive, or responsible. The need was not for completing roles or competing roles, but for complimentary roles. God created an environment in which men and women would need each other. “[Jesus] answered, ‘Haven’t you read in your Bible that the Creator originally made man and woman for each other, male and female?’ ” (Matt. 19:4, Message). Thus: “Neither maleness or femaleness connotes a disparity in rank or function.”

The creation of woman is critical to the topic of men in leadership because Scripture makes an inseparable connection. “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him’ ” (Gen. 2:18, NLT). Werner Neuer wrongly interprets “helper” and concludes that woman is an assistant, a supporter, occupying merely a secondary position. The Hebrew word for “helper” is used overwhelmingly in the Old Testament to describe God Himself, and thus a term highly unlikely to signify subordinate female roles: “God the Helper (‘ezer, Ex. 18:4) provided a helper (‘ezer, Gen. 2:18) to deliver man from the void of aloneness.”

Leadership in the Garden of Eden was shared leadership. Both were leaders and both were helpers. Ellen White states, “God made from the man a woman, to be a companion and helpmeet for him, to be one with him, to cheer, encourage, and bless him, he in his turn to be her strong helper.” Leadership in the Garden was an equal leadership. “She was not to control him as the head, nor to be trampled under his feet as an inferior, but to stand by his side as an equal, to be loved and protected by him.” Leadership in the Garden was a mutual leadership. Frances and Paul Hiebert assert that Adam and Eve enjoyed before the Fall “a relation of full mutuality in equality.” Ellen White says, “In the creation God had made her the equal of Adam. Had they remained obedient to God—in harmony with His great law of love—they would ever have been in harmony with each other.” So “the biblical ideal of the relationships of husband and wife is not so much equality, however, as mutuality, sharing at every level of life.”

FALL

Genesis 3 is the record of the fall of humankind. The position of Adam and Eve in the Fall is that of the subjection of the wife to the husband. “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and

he shall rule over thee” (Gen. 3:16, KJV): “Sin had brought discord, and now their union could be maintained and harmony preserved only by submission on the part of the one or the other. Eve had been the first in transgression; and she had fallen into temptation by separating from her companion, contrary to the divine direction. It was by her solicitation that Adam sinned, and she was *now* placed in subjection to her husband.”

Theologians aplenty concur with these insights. Walter Brueggeman comments: “In God’s garden, as God wills it, there is mutuality and equality. In God’s garden *now*, permeated by distrust, there is control and distortion. But that distortion is not for one moment accepted as the will of the Gardener.”

David and Diana Garland state: “Their sin resulted in dire consequences for their relationship: the husband *now* shall rule over the wife. This new development implies that it was not what God had originally determined for their relationship.”

Ellen White states, “Had the principles enjoined in the law of God been cherished by the fallen race, this sentence, though growing out of the results of sin, would have proved a blessing to them; but man’s abuse of the supremacy thus given him has too often rendered the lot of woman very bitter and made her life a burden.”

As time progressed, the original image became more distant and less distinct. Distortions led not only to the abuse of power, but also to the abuse of privilege. Garland and Garland state, “The hierarchical pattern of marriage [was] something less than God’s intention for humanity. . . . If anything, the hierarchical pattern is a perversion of God’s intention.”

Ellen White also states: “The Lord Jesus has not been correctly represented in His relation to the church by many husbands in their relation to their wives, for they do not keep the way of the Lord. They declare that their wives must be subject to them in everything. But it was not the design of God that the husband should have control, as head of the house, when he himself does not submit to Christ. He must be under the rule of Christ that he may represent the relation of Christ to the church. If he is a coarse, rough, boisterous, egotistical, harsh, and overbearing man, let him never utter the word that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she must submit to him in everything; for he is not the Lord, he is not the husband in the true significance of the term.”

Humanity’s fall into sin distorted God’s ideal. As Gilbert Bilezikian maintains: “The ‘he shall rule over you’ should not be viewed as prescribing God’s will any more than death may be regarded as God’s will for humans.” Ruling, then, is introduced as a consequence of the Fall. Genesis 3:16 becomes God’s description, not His prescription. Phyllis Tribble states: “We misread if we assume that these judgments are mandates. They describe; they do not prescribe. They protest; they do not condone. . . . This statement [Gen. 3:16] is not license for male supremacy, but rather it is condemnation of that very pattern. Subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation.”

Extreme care needs to be taken to ensure that statements and quotes pass the test of “the law and . . . the testimony” (Isa. 8:20, KJV), because there are extremes to the left and to the right. Indeed, as Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen affirms: “Feminists and patriarchalists are equally in need of redemption.”

REDEMPTION

The world is witnessing war—and questioning why. James asks, “What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don’t they come from the cravings that are at war within you?” (James 4:1, HCSB). While we may excoriate bully behavior outside the church, we must examine abusive conduct inside the church. Ellen White disturbingly connects the two. “Special instruction has been given me for God’s people, for perilous times are upon us. In the world, destruction and violence are increasing. In the church, man power is gaining the ascendancy; those who have been chosen to occupy positions of trust think it their prerogative to rule.”

“Man power” is the passion to rule that some consider a divine right, leading to the most evil abuses. Jesus said this was “not part of God’s original plan. I’m holding you to the original plan” (Matt. 19:8, Message). What was the original plan? Ellen White declares, “Woman should fill the position which God originally designed for her, as her husband’s equal.”

Before loving leadership can be executed in the church, it has to be demonstrated in the home: “The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home.” Here, the biblical emphasis is not so much on the submissiveness of the wife but on the radical change in behavior expected of the husband. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23, KJV).

If we miss the newness of the New Testament, we have missed everything.

Key concepts here are headship and submission. The Greek word for “head” (*kephale*), used some 75 times in the New Testament, never involves the sense of domination. The husband’s headship does not signal superiority and the wife’s submission does not indicate inferiority. The husband does have the role of headship, but it is selfless, sacrificial, and agapic love. Submission for a wife is to freely choose to accept this Christlike love. Submission, then, is not to the husband’s wishes but to the husband’s love. Elizabeth Achtemeier finds Ephesians 5, on headship and submission, “ingenious. It has preserved the traditional view of the male as the head of the family, but that headship is a function only, not a matter of status or superiority. The understanding of the headship and of the wife’s relation to it has been radically transformed.”

In the view of S. Miletic: “The text is deceptively simple. It contains all of the trappings of an androcentric worldview and could easily be misunderstood as a justification of patriarchal domination. It is very much a ‘sheep in wolf’s clothing.’ It must therefore be read in light of its theological message about the power of living for others rather than as a justification for male domination, itself an absolute contradiction to the very nature of agapic love.” And for William Barclay: “The basis of the passage is not control; it is love.”

Headship does not belong to a man; it belongs to a husband. The husband’s example of headship in the home, mirroring the headship of Christ, is to exemplify spiritual authority in the church exercised by male and female. Submission does not belong to a woman; it belongs to a wife. The wife’s example of submission in the home, mirroring the submission of Christ, is to exemplify

spiritual obedience in the church exercised by male and female. The husband and wife's example of unity in the home, mirroring the oneness of the Trinity, is to exemplify spiritual oneness in the church exercised by male and female leaders and followers.

Headship in the home does not equate to headship in the church. A man may be leader of his family at home, but his wife or children may be his leader in society or at church. "As the Scriptures say, 'A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.' This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one" (Eph. 5:31, 32, NLT).

WHAT'S "NEW" GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Two statements of Scripture lay the foundation for what loving leadership ought and ought not to be: "It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:26, KJV) and "As I have loved you" (John 13:34, KJV). The point of these statements in their context was that there is to be a radical difference between leadership in the church and rulership in the world.

Ellen White has commented on Jesus' "new commandment" to love as He loves (John 13:34, KJV): "To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. . . . The command to love one another had a new meaning in the light of His self-sacrifice. The whole work of grace is one continual service of love, of self-denying, self-sacrificing effort."

Garland and Garland concur: "It was certainly nothing new to tell the husbands to love their wives, but this love was given a new dimension when the standard is Christ's love for his people. . . . Christ loved through his sacrifice; he was willing to pay the supreme cost and cherish the beloved even when she was unworthy of that love (Rom. 5:8). He loved without conditions. He experienced the failings of the beloved and yet gave of himself to overcome them. This is the love that the husband is expected to have for his wife, and it is an awesome demand without parallel in the ancient world."

If we miss the newness of the New Testament, we have missed everything. There was now a new standard of love, radically different from the contemporary customs and culture. This new standard had the potential to quietly undermine the abuses of a society enslaved in rulership, without advocating a social revolution. "Such love is without a parallel."

There is a new mutuality in relationships. There must be a mutual submission if there is to be an authentic relationship (Eph. 5:21). Wives must still respect their husbands, but husbands must now love their wives as Christ loved the church (verses 25, 33). David Field muses that "Paul never seems to have quite resolved the conflict between a view of women consistent with his new Christian insights and the view which he inherited from his Jewish past." In reality, when Paul spoke about men in leadership, he faced the challenge of placing new wine into old wineskins. Jesus faced the same challenge: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40, HCSB). That's leadership.

There is a new ordering of relationships. The leader is now the servant. The greatest is now the least. The last is now the first. There is no more Jew or Gentile, male or female, single or married. Distinctions exist, but their significance is subjected to the mission of the church. Choice bows to the call, preference submits to priority, and emotion succumbs to devotion.

The New Testament model of leadership parallels God's ideal in Creation. Eradicating supremacy or subjection in family and church, eclipsing tolerance and equality in family and church, and reaching for mutuality in submission. This biblical model of leadership does not discriminate or elevate one above the other. Equality is not trampled; it is transcended. Authority is not human-focused; it is Christ-centered.

There is an interdependence between husband and wife that was severed in the Fall and cemented in redemption. This marital interdependence is to be replicated in the church. The focus now is not the fall of the woman in Genesis 3, but the call of the woman in Acts 2. It is not about the gender, but about the Sender.

A MAN'S ROLE?

Are leadership roles based on gender—or worse, rights? David Williams states: “Many persons in our society view the socially determined role of husbands and wives as established by God for all cultures, societies, and times.” He notes that the verse “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands” (Eph. 5:22, KJV) is the most famous passage used to justify the abuse of wives by their husbands, and observes: “Many wives accept violence as part of their God-ordained lot in life.” He asserts that some husbands think Scripture gives them a license to use abusive force in their efforts to “command their children and household after them” (cf. Gen. 18:19).

There is a wonderful role interdependence between men and women. Yes, “the mother is the queen of the home, and the children are her subjects,” but “the children are his as well as hers, and he is equally interested in their welfare.” Yes, the husband is a priest and mother is a teacher, but Ellen White calls fathers *and* mothers priests and heads of families. “Parents standing as heads of families, priests of the household, as teachers and as governors, must” “obey the highest Authority.”

Thus, Garland and Garland have maintained: “The scripture does not lay out specific role expectations or provide a how-to-do-it marriage manual. What is clear is that God does not order relationship roles by gender. In that spirit, couples may—must—choose to order their lives to fit their context and the task to which they have been called.”

Man's desire for supremacy was to be transformed into initiating love. “Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom. 12:10, ESV). H. Page Williams states: “I often talk with men who say, ‘When my wife changes her attitude, then I’ll change mine.’ But from God’s point of view, men are to initiate love, and the male leader is to initiate reconciliation. It is not a matter of giving in, it’s a matter of being honest and assuming the lead in your God-given responsibility.”

Headship in the home does not equate to headship in the church

There ought not be a line in the sand that women cannot cross. Especially should we, men, not draw the line. In the great controversy between Christ and Satan, the symbol of destruction is the man. “Because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man” (Rom. 5:17, ESV). In this great conflict the symbol of salvation is the woman. “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17, KJV). It is therefore strangely ironic that we ponder whether women can join men in proclaiming the gospel.

Ask yourself if this sounds like a spiritual leader: “It was Mary that first preached a risen Jesus. . . . If there were twenty women where now there is one, who would make this holy mission their cherished work, we should see many more converted to the truth.” “The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and this will give them a power that will exceed that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their work is needed.” “We may safely say that the distinctive duties of woman are more sacred, more holy, than those of man.”

We stand in awe of women’s giftedness and are joyfully honored to lead together. Ellen White says, “God’s cause at this time is in special need of men and women who possess Christ-like qualifications for service, executive ability, and a large capacity for work, who have kind, warm, sympathetic hearts, sound common sense, and unbiased judgment; . . . striving constantly to uplift and restore fallen humanity.” “When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will see the loss if the talents of both are not combined.” Scripture highlights different roles, but never endorses different ranks.

FOLLOWERSHIP

The scourge of war perpetrated by men is paralleled in evil only by the scourge of femicide. I thank God today that men of integrity can still be identified. Not only can you hold your head up, but know that godly women also notice—even in the midst of their own pain. “Let us also remember that there are men in this world that are still admirably playing the role of provider and protector and we need to acknowledge and appreciate these men and sincerely hope that the rest will strive to follow their example.”

Perhaps at the end of the day, that’s what we want—for people to follow our example. Paul said, “Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NLT). “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do” (Phil. 4:9, KJV). “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe” (1 Thess. 1:6, 7). Followers connect with leaders and become disciples.

Perhaps “followership” has been underrated and leadership overrated. The goal of followers and leaders is to become disciples. “And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you

fishers of [people]” (Matt. 4:19, KJV). Becky De Oliveira states, “The preference for leaders over followers is certainly apparent in the Christian church. There are endless seminars created and books published with the aim of instructing individuals on how to be leaders, but very little material available addressing what it means to be a good follower.”

Lunden and Lancaster concur: “We all know that leaders are expected to be visionary, decisive, communicative, energetic, committed, and responsible. But what about followers? Are the characteristics of successful followers so different from those of leaders? Not really.” Yet we are infatuated by leadership, even when we say “servant leaders”? Why not “leading servants”? Our Lord and Leader says, “And whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:27, 28, ESV). The leadership model cannot be prosecuted outside of the family model. The distinguishing criterion for Christian service is not who can lead, but who can serve. Scripture knows no hierarchy. Followers are sometimes leaders, leaders are often followers, and both are always disciples “ordained unto God to bear fruit.”

Men and women together must restore and reflect the image of God by their united ministry in redemption.

These are whom the world needs. “The greatest want of the world is the want of those men and women who will not be bought or sold, those who in their inmost souls are true and honest, those who do not fear to call sin by its right name, those whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, those who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”

Only as we understand the heights of the one flesh union in Creation and the depths of the distortion of God’s image in the Fall can we understand the breadth of ministry necessary for restoration in redemption. The image of God was defaced by the sins of independence and indulgence. It is to be reproduced by a ministry of mutuality and oneness. Men and women were together in the Fall. They separated from each other and hid from God together. Now men and women must be together in restoration. It cannot be otherwise.

Men and women together thwarted and aborted the plan of God by their united missteps in the Fall. Men and women together must restore and reflect the image of God by their united ministry in redemption. Labels are eradicated, status is eliminated, and Jesus is the head of all. It is Adam and Eve restored. It is the great controversy ended. It is earth’s love story consummated. It is intimacy at its highest. It is inclusion at its widest. It is love at its greatest.

REMOVE YOUR COAT

My most vivid memory of my father, Maurice Brown, is of one winter in Birmingham, England. We were traveling home from Aunty Ruby’s house with my mom and four siblings. The snow was falling heavily, and we reached that street in the city center ominously called Hill Street.

We had a powerful car, but our Ford Zodiac was not making it. The wheels began to spin, and then we felt it—we started to slide backward. Quick as a flash, my father pulled up the handbrake and cried, “Stay here!” Next thing we knew, Dad leapt out of the car, whipped off his coat, and placed it under a tire. Jumping back into the car, he maneuvered our vehicle with dexterity (Dad taught us all to drive), and we made it over the hill.

Dad is now 90 years old, enjoying his retirement years in Mandeville, Jamaica. Like Moses, his eye is not dim, nor his natural force abated. We remain indebted to our father, forever grateful for the day that we witnessed confidence, care, compassion, from a man who led us safely home. I don’t remember if my mother dialogued with my father before his leap out of the car, but as a social work lecturer at Oxford Brookes University, I’m sure Carmen Brown would have had something to say.

My mother did not subscribe to the “Total Woman” philosophy that women should please and keep their mate by adhering to the formula “Adapt to his way of life. Accept his friends, food, and lifestyle as your own.” Neither did she imbibe the analogy likening the husband to a company manager and the wife to an assistant manager “who is comfortable in sharing her suggestions concerning the management of the company and is not upset when she is overruled.”

[The focus now is not the fall of the woman in Genesis 3, but the call of the woman in Acts 2.](#)

Mom was a wife, mother, lecturer, and activist—and my parents arranged for Grandma to come to live with us. Ellen White says, “Seventh-day Adventists are not in any way to belittle woman’s work. If a woman puts her housework in the hands of a faithful, prudent helper, and leaves her children in good care, while she engages in the work, the conference should have wisdom to understand the justice of her receiving wages.” “This question is not for men to settle. The Lord has settled it.”

We are caught in a vehicle that is sliding precariously toward destruction. The causes of the slide are many and complex. The voices of anger are deafening, and the fingers of blame are many. But God is calling men to do their part in stopping the slide and getting the vehicle to its destination. We are not called to forsake leadership; we are called to abandon rulership. God asks us to replace abusiveness with servanthood.

The time has come for men to take off our coats of privilege and authoritarianism and lay them down. Let our strength lie not in power and pride. “You’ve observed how godless rulers throw their weight around, how quickly a little power goes to their heads. It’s not going to be that way with you. Whoever wants to be great must become a servant. Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That is what the Son of Man has done” (Matt. 20:25-28, Message). Men, let’s remove our coats.

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NOTES

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FAMILY TRIANGLES

BY SVEN ÖSTRING

The word “triangulation” in family communications immediately evokes negative thoughts. Gossip, unhealthy indirect communication, relationship breakdowns, and family members being excluded from relationships, just to name a few. I mean, who would want to be part of those types of unhealthy family dynamics? The reality is however, according to Murray Bowen’s theory of family systems, relationship triangles form all the time in families. Having only two people in a relationship is unstable. The natural tendency is to always bring in a third person and create a family triangle.

OLD FAMILY TRIANGLES

That was certainly true in my family. My sister and I are twins, which is very special. However, even though we are virtually identical in age, we have different personalities and we developed different relationships with our parents. As I am sure you have observed, it does not take long for a child to work out which parent has a soft spot when they are asked for toys or food, even if the other parent has said “No!” Once you have figured it out, the natural pull is to make use of that softness to go to the right parent to get what you want. It is just human nature. Family triangles form easily.

There is another important relationship dynamic, and that is self-differentiation. I spent many years living in my family home. I grew up in Hong Kong and then moved to New Zealand to study electrical engineering. It was only after I finished a PhD in computer networking that I finally moved away from home to take up a postdoctoral research position at Cambridge University in England. While

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I was close with both of my parents, I needed to differentiate myself, extract myself out of my beautiful family triangle and establish my own unique identity.

One of my close friends, Jared, from New Zealand was very worried about my move to England. He thought that I might lose my faith in God. However, several interactions that I had there with agnostics and atheists only served to build my faith. It was my time in England and being asked the question, “Where is the evidence that God exists?” by an atheist that led me to make a major career shift and follow God’s calling into ministry.

NEW FAMILY TRIANGLES

Through the process of heading into ministry, I formed a strong relationship with God. I also ended up meeting and then marrying Marilyn, the girl of my dreams. We have been married fifteen years now and have two delightful children. As my own family has grown up, I can see family triangles starting to form in our family as well.

PRAYER TRIANGLES

Family triangles are typically seen as negative. However, relationship triangles can be constructive and stabilizing as well. Close family relationships, even family triangles, can be very positive and bear valuable fruit.

Turn with me to the beautiful passage found in Ephesians 3:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father...

This commences one of the most sublime and visionary prayers in the Bible. We can see a relationship triangle beginning to form. Paul is praying to the Father on behalf of the churches in Ephesus.

There is an interesting statistic that is valuable to point out right at the beginning of this prayer which is highlighted in the table below:

Section	References to God	Called Father	Percentage
Old Testament	1,448	15	1.0%
New Testament	413	245	59.3%

There are many references to God in the Old Testament, but He is only referred to as Father 1.0% of the time. However, in the New Testament, God is referred to as Father 59.3%. That’s a huge jump! What led to such a massive increase?

The answer is simple—it is because of Jesus. What is hinted at in the Old Testament becomes really clear in the New Testament and that is that there is a triangle embedded deeply within the very nature of God: Father, Word, and Spirit. The relationship is at the very heart of the nature of God. That is why God is love! It was Jesus who revealed most clearly this divine triangle to us.

A SALVATION TRIANGLE

The Bible tells us the story of another relationship triangle that broke down very quickly. Originally, Adam and Eve were created to be in a close triangular relationship with Yahweh their Creator. However, that relationship was broken. Sin and death were the results.

Yet, in their great love for humanity, the Trinity decided to execute a plan of salvation that would restore the broken relationship. Jesus left heaven and came down to earth. In the process, He formed a salvation triangle between us and the Father so that we could now call God our Father again, just as Paul prayed.

It is because of God's great love for us and Jesus' willingness to step out of His relationship triangle in heaven that Paul could now pray this beautiful Trinitarian prayer:

Divine Focus	Prayer
Father	For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father , from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,
Spirit	that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being
Christ	so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,
God	that you may be filled with all the fullness of God .

What an incredible thought! God was willing to have His divine triangular relationship broken so that our relationship triangle with Him could be restored! And the amazing thing is that all the families on the earth will be blessed:

Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power at works in us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus **to all generations**, forever and ever. Amen Ephesians 3:20-21.

It is important that we are aware of family triangles, but the most important relationship triangle that we need to become aware of is the relationship triangle that leads to salvation.

Praise be to our Triune God!

REPRINTED ARTICLES

— In this section you will find timeless articles that are carefully selected to assist you in your work with families.

COMFORTING THE GRIEVING

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

One of my good friends just lost her husband to COVID-19. He was only 49 years old. She feels lost and is angry at God for allowing this to happen. She told me the other day that she's in deep pain and despair with a big hole in her soul that she doesn't believe will ever be filled. I want to do something to help her feel better and come to grips with what's happened to her, but I don't know what to say or what to do. Please help me.

We're very sorry for your friend's loss, and in a manner of speaking this is also your loss. No one should have to lose a spouse at such a young age. What a tragedy! Yet, this is a reality many are experiencing during this awful pandemic that has taken over the world.

Most of us don't know what to do or say when someone close to us has lost a loved one, especially a spouse. The truth is, when someone experiences the death of a loved one their emotions can be quite erratic. They may be very calm at times, and then suddenly cry uncontrollably as they experience deep sorrow and tremendous vulnerability. To be sure, grief comes in waves.

While the death of a loved one is excruciatingly painful—like the feelings your friend described—there's much you can do to support her through this incredibly challenging time in her life. Consider the following list of ideas you might employ to support your friend in her time of grief:

Be present. Reach out to your friend with a telephone call or a text message to let her know

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“I’m here for you.” It’s possible your friend may not want to talk. Yet, let her know that you’re just a phone call away whenever she’s ready to talk.

Go for a walk in the park. Being outdoors where she can get some fresh air will calm her down, lower her stress levels, and strengthen her immunity.

Walk down memory lane. Don’t be afraid to talk about good times you had with your friend and her husband. Looking at old photos and reminiscing about memories you made together are healing to the grieving person.

Bring food. Nothing says community more than sharing a meal with a friend. When people are grieving they lose energy for life and for doing anything, including cooking and eating. Tasty, nourishing food conveys care more than you can ever imagine.

Take care of it. If you notice the kitchen needs cleaning or the house needs tidying up when you’re visiting, take care of it. This will convey that you really care and sincerely want to help.

Don’t be in a hurry. Let your friend know you’ll be there for her as long as she needs you, not by saying so but by doing so. Then be ready to be a real friend for the long haul.

Be of spiritual support. Even people of faith often feel alienated from God or even angry at Him when they’ve lost a loved one. Be ready to read passages from the Bible to your friend that give comfort and the assurance of God’s care. And pray for God’s peace and the promise of His presence.

These are difficult days, and more of them are still ahead. Nevertheless, stay close to Jesus for your own peace, comfort, and strength so you can be of encouragement to those you care about.

We leave you with the consolation of Psalm 46:1, which says: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* You’re in our prayers.

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AMBIGUOUS LOSS

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

I am a single parent of three children, one of them a young adult who has never left home and has recently been diagnosed with serious mental illness. Although I've lived through the challenges most single parents experience, having to care for my mentally ill daughter has been very difficult. I often find myself extremely depressed and don't know what to do. I hope there's something you can share to help me cope better than I have been doing for the last several months.

We're very sad to hear about your current situation with your daughter. Yet, this is an opportunity to come to grips with the unpredictability of life on this earth. The truth is, the only place of security in this world is found in Jesus. The Bible tells us: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8).*

Emerging theories of grief, such as *ambiguous loss*, may help us understand what you're currently experiencing with your daughter who was recently diagnosed with serious mental illness (SMI). The difference with experiencing the loss of a loved one by death—which in a matter of speaking is final—and the loss of "normal" life by a loved one recently diagnosed with mental illness, is what defines what you're experiencing as ambiguous loss.

Ambiguous loss lacks clarity regarding loss. The feelings experienced by a parent when their young adult child is diagnosed with SMI—as in your case—is one of uncertainty that carries confusion, along with high levels of emotional distress, grief, and stigmatization.

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What makes SMI so singularly burdensome is that its arrival often takes place during late adolescence and young adulthood, a time when parents have an expectation that their children will develop greater independence and autonomy. So when SMI shows up at this most inopportune time in the parent-child relationship, it is an unusual and very perplexing experience.

As a parent—like most other parents—you’ve had significant emotional investment in the future well-being of your children. A part of that expectation is that the care you’ve provided will become less and less as your children develop into adults and become independent. There’s also anticipation that your investment in your children’s development will climax in your hopes and dreams for them—including completing their education, getting a job, developing meaningful friendships, as well as finding a spouse with whom to settle down and establish their own families.

What you’ve described about the way you’ve been feeling is grief. So we encourage you to find a good grief program—preferably one that affirms your faith in God—that will help you to acknowledge your grief and loss, and help you to process your grief in a healthy way.

As you deal with your grief, remember that there are many other parents dealing with similar experiences as yours. And more important, remember that you’re not alone. Jesus Himself states in John 14:1: “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me.” And in John 16:33 He says: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

We hope you’ll find the help you need as you follow the counsel we’ve provided. Please also know that you’ll continue to be in our prayers. Remain encouraged and faithful.

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HOPE IN THE FACE OF DIVORCE PART 1

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

After 10 years of marriage my husband just asked for a divorce. We disagree about almost everything we speak about. As a Christian, however, I know divorce is not God's plan. I've asked my husband to join me in counseling to find solutions to our dilemma, but he isn't interested. We have two children in grade school who I am very concerned will be badly affected if we get divorced. Please help.

Thank you for your sobering and important question. We are very sorry to hear about your dilemma, but pleased that you are very interested in finding a way to keep your marriage together.

Marriage was God's idea from the very beginning. Genesis 2:18, 24 states: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.' . . . Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*

Like yours, most marriages are filled with disagreements and misunderstandings. The truth is, there are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. Romans 3:23 confirms: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Since we are all sinners, we should expect misunderstandings and disagreements in marriage.

What we know based on social scientific research and personal experience with couples we have worked with, is that the difference between couples that make it and couples that don't is

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their attitude. Those who go into marriage expecting to encounter difficulties and knowing that it will take effort to work together to learn skills to manage their differences are more likely to make it. On the other hand, couples who go into marriage expecting to live happily ever after are more likely to end in divorce.

You are correct when you say divorce is not God's plan. In fact, the Bible is very clear about God's intent. Matthew 19:3-6 shares: "And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?' He answered, 'Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'"

Many couples become discouraged when they spend most of their conversations disagreeing with each other. We understand that. We encourage couples, however, to see their marriage as a tooth that has a cavity. There is pain and deterioration because of the lack of proper maintenance. But most people don't just go into the garage, find a pair of pliers, and pull out the tooth. Reason tells us to go to the dentist—who has been trained to repair cavities in teeth—and get the necessary professional help to repair and save the tooth. The same needs to happen in marriage. Just because there are challenges doesn't mean you should throw in the towel.

We encourage you to keep praying to God to change your husband's attitude. Then find a good Christian counselor who can help you repair the dysfunction in your relationship. We will also pray for God to perform the needed miracle in your marriage, so your family may not only survive but thrive in the days ahead.

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HOPE IN THE FACE OF DIVORCE PART 2

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

After 10 years of marriage my husband just asked for a divorce. We disagree about almost everything we speak about. As a Christian, however, I know that divorce is not God's plan. I've asked my husband to join me in counseling to find solutions to our dilemma, but he's not interested. We have two children in grade school, who I'm very concerned will be badly affected if we get divorced. Please help.

Our experience and the marriage and divorce literature are clear that most couples whose marriage ends in divorce have lost hope in the possibility that their marriage can be restored. Of course, we're not referencing marriages where there's sustained abuse of all kinds and serial infidelity. We believe, though, that with God's help all marriages can experience change and transformation—and survive and thrive—if the persons involved are willing to do their part to help repair the relationship with the help of a good Christian marriage therapist/coach.

The apostle Paul encourages every person facing your situation with the message in Romans 15:13: “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” This kind of hope only God can give. And it's given only to those who come to God—with their spouse—in deep humility, believing in and expecting a miracle.

The truth about marriage is that it takes hard work and sacrifice, regardless of whom you

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marry. There's no such thing as a perfect marriage because there are no perfect people. Couples who make it must come to grips with the realization they married a human being. This means—to be sure—that they will need to develop the ability to manage disappointment and cope with frustration.

The biggest challenge in making marriage work and having it go the distance is coming to grips with the fact that the euphoric feelings that led you to say “Yes” are not sustainable—regardless of how madly in love you felt at the beginning of your relationship. Every good marriage—despite how wonderful it feels at first—will inevitably face disenchanting moments when the expectations in each person's mind fail to materialize as each imagined. In fact, even romantic love, regardless of how blissful it was during your courtship and early marriage, is not enough to sustain a formidable marriage.

“How then can any marriage succeed?”—you and others may be asking. That's an excellent question! In fact, an important first step is for married couples to grasp that a good marriage is much more than a few moments of romance—as wonderful as that may be. That love—the fuel that makes marriage work—isn't a feeling, as most people believe. Rather, love is a decision that must be made day after day after day for any marriage to thrive. “What decision?”—you may ask. The answer is to be patient and kind, as the apostle Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13:4; and to be faithful, gentle, and self-controlled, as he offers in Galatians 5:22, 23.

So, we're praying for God to perform a miracle in your marriage. We hope this will give you and your husband an opportunity to come to grips with the concepts we've shared and recognize that your marriage can find success as you trust God to show up and transform your marriage reality every day for the remainder of your lives.

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WHERE DID WE GO WRONG?

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

My husband and I feel a certain level of sadness and disappointment that our children—who are now working young adults, college graduates, and on their own—have left the church. We know we were not perfect parents; however, we did our best to love our children and to provide them with a stable and spiritually involved home environment. We also sent them all to church school. Even though the children of many of our friends have left the church, we didn't expect this would also be our story. Where did we go wrong? What could we have done better? Is there anything we can still do? Thank you for your help.

Thank you for trusting us with such a personal and delicate issue. We are also sad to hear that your children have left the church. This is one of the most difficult realities Christian parents invariably experience after doing their best to raise their children to love God. Still, our world is filled with sin and evil, which humans are naturally drawn to. It's been in our DNA since Adam and Eve chose to disobey God in the Garden of Eden.

At this point you and your husband can choose either to allow Satan to make you feel like failures, or you can trust God to help you work through the pain of your experience and to keep sharing and showing His love to your children in every interaction with them. This is your opportunity to make this a growth-producing experience for yourselves and for your children. Find strength and hope in the Bible. Psalm 25:5, 7 says: "Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you

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are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long. . . . Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!”*

To be sure, we are all a spiritual work in progress, even those who have not left the church and attend services on a regular basis. We still need the guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The apostle Paul offers in Ephesians 5:15-17: “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

You must also continue to employ the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study, so that instead of being discouraged you might draw closer to God yourselves, as you trust Him with the salvation of your children. Claim promises such as the one found in Luke 11:9, 10: “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened.”

Finally, remember that God didn’t do anything wrong, and yet a third of His children (the angels in heaven) turned their backs on Him. So instead of beating yourselves up—recognizing that there are no perfect parents because there are no perfect people—claim the promise found in Isaiah 49:25: “For I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children.”

Remain encouraged and faithful.

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RESOURCES

 The Seventh-day Adventist Church
is constantly creating new materials
to support your work with families.

REBUILDING THE FAMILY ALTAR

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald® Publishing Association

July, 2022

42 pages



During the 2022 Family Togetherness Week of Prayer, our desire is for families to build or rebuild the altar of family worship in their homes. Family worship gives every family an opportunity to daily rebuild the altar of God.

Rebuilding the family altar means to establish a regular habit of setting aside time to worship God as a family. The most important thing is to make a commitment to doing something that intentionally points your family to God daily. Bring God into your big and small moments!

Digital download at **family.adventist.org**

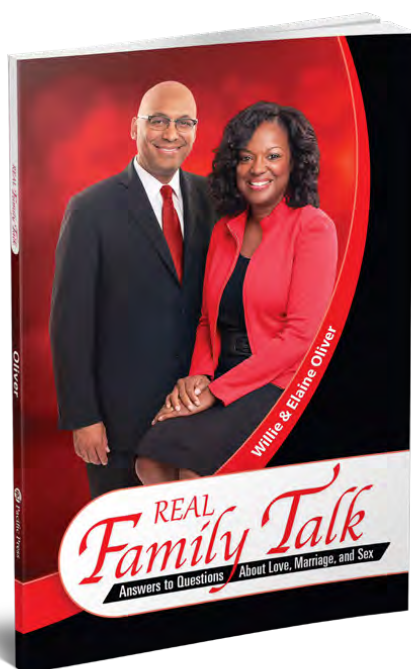
REAL FAMILY TALK: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT LOVE, MARRIAGE AND SEX

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Pacific Press® Publishing Association

Nampa, Idaho, 2015

127 pages



This book is a compilation of selected columns on relationships written by Willie and Elaine Oliver for the Message magazine in response to questions from real people. The authors provide expert advice, based on biblical principles, for questions about marriage, sex, parenting, being single and other real relationships issues. In their counsel, the authors remind us of the reality that we all face challenges in our relationships and in our homes. Their discerning answers direct us to seek God's guidance, reminding us that God's plan is for us to have healthy homes and relationships where each person seeks the harmony that God desires for us to experience.

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.

Season 11 of *Real Family Talk* with Willie and Elaine Oliver with all new episodes will begin airing on the first week of July 2022. Please lookout for the new and improved look and feel of the show with this new season. Watch the show on www.hopetv.org

CONNECTED: DEVOTIONAL READINGS FOR AN INTIMATE MARRIAGE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Stanbrough Press Ltd., 2020

162 pages

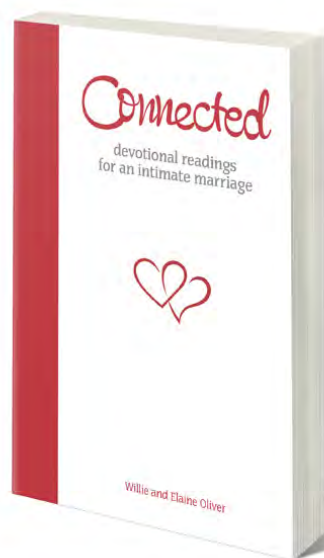
Imagine if you could take your marriage up to the next level. What if it were possible to go from a relationship that survives to one that thrives? What if there were a way to strengthen your commitment to each other? What if better communication could create greater trust? And, best of all, what if grace could help you see the best in your spouse?

In *Connected: devotional readings 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.

With 52 devotional reflections, there's a thought for each week of the year, specifically designed to help couples to pause (reflect on the ideas shared), pray (about the ideas shared and how they relate to their experience) and then choose (determine to experience change together).

Discover more within!

Available at <https://adventistbookcenter.com/connected-devotional-readings-for-an-intimate-marriage.html>



COUPLE'S BIBLE

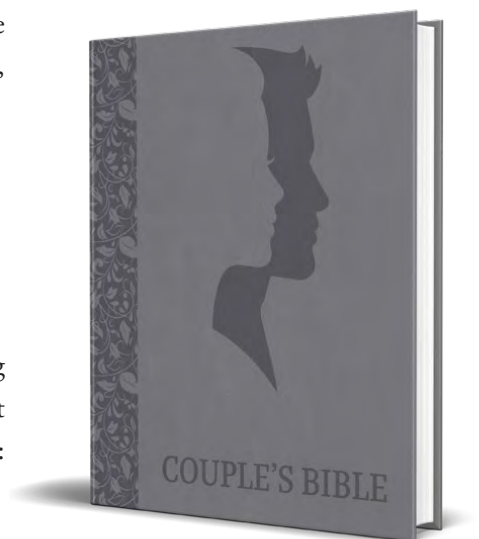
Safeliz, 2019

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



HOPE FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES

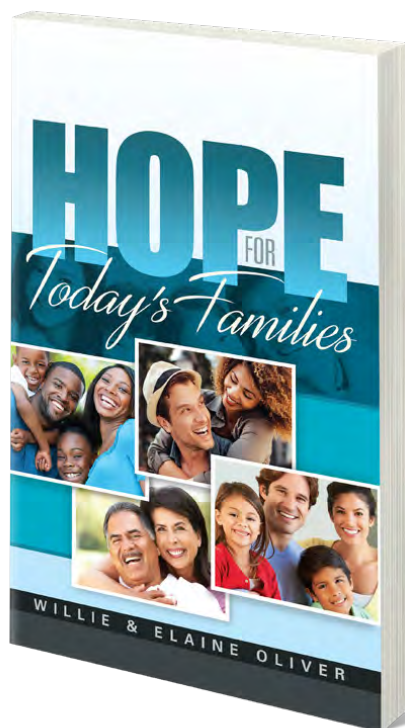
BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

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.

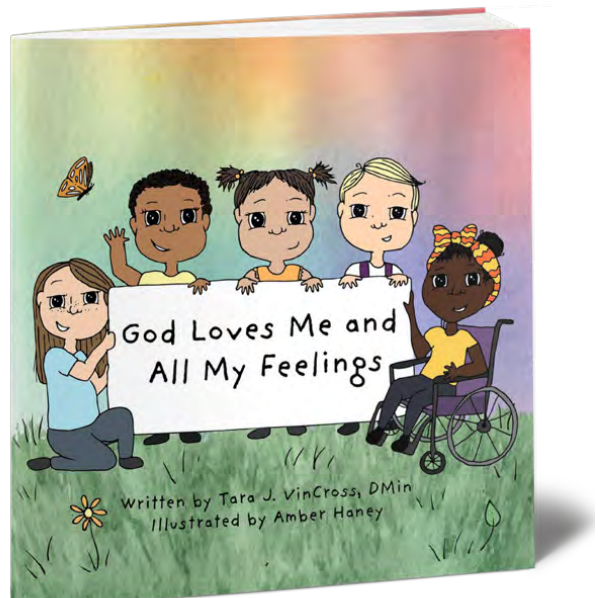


GOD LOVES ME AND ALL MY FEELINGS

BY TARA J. VINCROSS

AdventSource, 2020

God Loves Me and All My Feelings gives children language to name their feelings and empowers them to know what to do in response to what they feel. This book builds a foundation of God's acceptance and love for the whole range of their human experience, building resilience and a willingness to face feelings that are sometimes difficult. For kids ages 2-8 and includes questions a loving adult can ask as they read the book with the child.



MARRIAGE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS, VOL. 1

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2015

304 pages



This book offers thoughtful and detailed studies on several areas of concern for pastors, church leaders, and members. After showing the beauty of marriage and the relevance of Scripture to a sound understanding of marriage and sexuality, this volume tackles crucial topics such as singleness, gender and roles in marriage, sexuality, religiously mixed marriages, and divorce and remarriage.

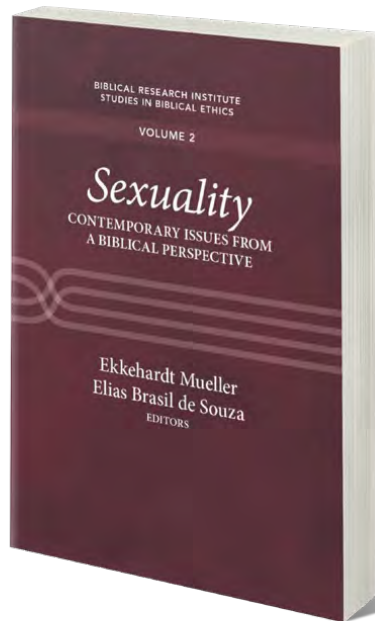
SEXUALITY: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE, VOL. 2

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Insitute, 2022

643 pages

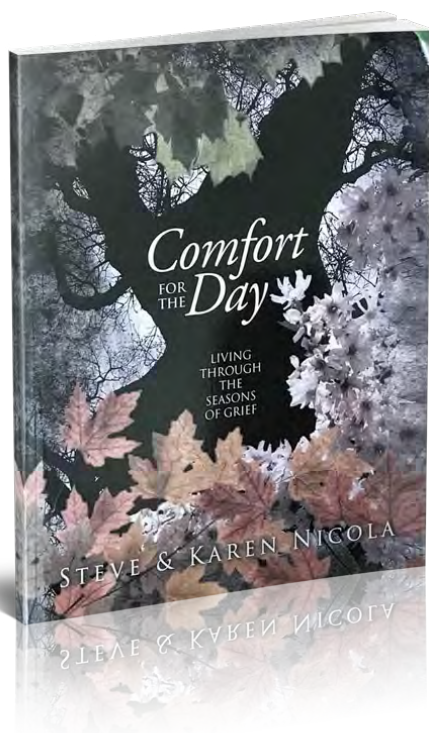
Sexuality: Contemporary Issues from a Biblical Perspective is the sequel to Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects. Focusing on sexuality, this volume addresses several topics of contemporary relevance to individual Christians and church communities around the world. It wrestles with matters directly or indirectly related to marriage, such as cohabitation and polygamy. It also examines topics not necessarily connected to marriage, such as sexual addiction, cybersex, robotic sex, rape, female genital mutilation, child sexual abuse, and queer theology and practice.



COMFORT FOR THE DAY: LIVING THROUGH THE SEASONS OF GRIEF

BY STEVE & KAREN NICOLA

Westbow Press, 2016



Your heart is crushed. Finding it even difficult to breathe, you wake up to the reality that someone you treasure is gone. Death has stolen your loved one from your arms. Now the seemingly insurmountable difficult work of living through grief begins. Is there anything that can soothe this overwhelming ache? Is there a safe place for the anger? Will depression become a constant companion? Does the painful malaise last forever? How can I just get through the day? *Comfort for the Day* offers a personalized grief recovery experience, drawn from the source of all comfort—God. His Word will become a guide and friend as the reader lives through the seasons of grief.

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 may need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws where you live.

DOWNLOADABLE MATERIAL

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: family.adventist.org/2023RB

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.

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:

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

Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name.....

Address Telephone.....

Area(s) of specialty.....

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

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Afternoon	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

COMMUNITY FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION SURVEY

1. What do you believe is the number one problem facing families in this community right now?

.....

2. Would you consider attending any of these Family Life Seminars if they were offered in this area?
(Select as many as you wish.)

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ How to Handle Conflict | ☐ Divorce Recovery |
| ☐ Communication in Marriage | ☐ Stress Management |
| ☐ Marriage Enrichment or Encounter | ☐ Overcoming Loneliness Weekend |
| ☐ Understanding Children | ☐ Family Finances |
| ☐ Self-Esteem | ☐ Grief Recovery |
| ☐ Parenting Skills | ☐ Time Management and Life Priorities |
| ☐ Dealing with Teenagers | ☐ Planning Retirement |
| ☐ Childbirth Preparation Class | |
| ☐ Other (Please specify)..... | |

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

	Sun.	Mon.	Tue.	Wed.	Thu.	Fri.	Sat.
Morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Afternoon	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4. It will help strengthen this survey if we could obtain the following information about you:

Sex: ☐ M ☐ F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

☐ 17 or under ☐ 19-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51-60 ☐ 61-70 ☐ 71+

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

Are you:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ☐ Never married | ☐ Married |
| ☐ Separated | ☐ Divorced |
| ☐ Widowed | ☐ Remarried after divorce |

SAMPLE EVALUATION

1. What inspired you most about this workshop?

.....

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

.....

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

.....

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

.....

5. How could this workshop be improved?

.....

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

☐ 1	☐ 2	☐ 3	☐ 4	☐ 5
Generally 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:

☐ Never married ☐ Married
☐ Separated ☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed

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

..... years months

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

APPENDIX B

VOTED

STATEMENTS

— The following *Voted Statements*
are official positions of the
Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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.

¹This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on April 23, 1996.

STATEMENT ON HOME AND FAMILY

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

The church's Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 22 states the marital relationship "is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. ... Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, marriage partners who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words they are to teach them that Christ is a loving disciplinarian, ever tender and caring, who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God."

Ellen G. White, one of the founders of the church, stated: "The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are the 'issues of life' (Prov.4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences." -The Ministry of Healing, p. 349.

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of 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:
 - h. Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
 - i. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
 - j. Fostering Christlike relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.
8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.
9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators.

(The above statement is informed by principles expressed in the following scriptural passages: Gen 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Lev 18:20; 2 Sam 13:1-22; Matt 18:6-9; 1 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 6:1-4; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 5:5-8.)

STATEMENT ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

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

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

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

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

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

It is our belief that the Church has a responsibility-

1. To care for those involved in family violence and to respond to their needs by:
 - b. Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.
 - c. Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.
 - d. 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.
 - e. Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.
 - f. 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.
 - g. 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.
 - h. 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:
 - c. Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.

- d. Increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to family violence.
 - e. Developing ways to prevent abuse and violence and the recurring cycle often observed within families and across generations.
 - f. Rectifying commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up family violence. For example, while parents are instructed by God to redemptively correct their children, this responsibility does not give license for the use of harsh, punitive disciplinary measures.
3. To accept our moral responsibility to be alert and responsive to abuse within the families of our congregations and our communities, and to declare that such abusive behavior is a violation of Seventh-day Adventist Christian standards. Any indications or reports of abuse must not be minimized but seriously considered. For church members to remain indifferent and unresponsive is to condone, perpetuate, and possibly extend family violence.

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

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

This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on August 27, 1996, and by the General Conference Executive Committee at the Annual Council in San Jose, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.

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 statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland on October 16, 2019.

GUIDELINES FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RESPONDING TO CHANGING CULTURAL ATTITUDES REGARDING HOMOSEXUAL AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES

THE DIVINE IDEAL OF SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE

Issues related to human sexuality and marriage can be seen in their true light as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for humanity. God's creative activity culminated in making humankind in His own image as male and female and instituting marriage. Marriage as a wonderful divine gift to humanity is a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, referred to in Scripture as "one flesh." Jesus Christ affirmed marriage to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In addition, throughout Scripture such heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity.

The harmonious relation 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. The Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose but also to provide joy, pleasure, and physical completeness. At the same time, 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, a living embodiment of their oneness, thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

While 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 intimate sexual expression,¹ singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design

as well. Scripture, however, places a distinction between acceptable conduct in friendship relations and sexual conduct in marriage.

Unfortunately, human sexuality and marriage have been corrupted by sin. Therefore, Scripture does not focus only on the positive aspects of human sexuality but also on wrong expressions of sexuality and their negative impact on people and society. It warns humans of destructive sexual behaviors such as fornication, adultery, homosexual intimacies, incest, and polygamy, (e.g., Matt 19:1-12; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 6:9-20; 7:10-16, 39; Heb 13:4; Rev 22:14, 15) and calls them to do what is good, healthy, and beneficial.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation to the divine ideal of pure, honorable, and loving sexual relations within heterosexual marriage, believing that any lowering of this high view is detrimental to humanity. It also believes that the ideals of purity and beauty of marriage as designed by God need to be emphasized. Through the redemptive work of Christ, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered, and the delightful and wholesome experience of matrimony may be realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in a lifelong marriage covenant.

THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it has been called into existence by God to proclaim the everlasting gospel to the entire world, and to invite persons everywhere to be ready for the second coming of Jesus. The Church pursues God's mission around the globe, currently teaching, preaching, caring, and serving in more than 200 nations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has no creedal statement: it believes that its teachings rest on the authority of the Bible alone. It summarizes those beliefs, however, in a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, currently 28 in number. Central to the Church's understanding of God's plan for ordering human society is its teaching on "Marriage and the Family."²

Because Seventh-day Adventists live, work, and minister in every part of the world, individual Seventh-day Adventists and the institutions by which the Church pursues God's mission relate to and interact with all levels of human government. The Bible instructs Christians to be obedient to the laws enacted by civil government, and wherever morally possible, Seventh-day Adventist members and Church organizations will seek to be subject to the governing authorities, even as they seek counsel about how to respond when the claims of government conflict with the truths of the Bible and the Fundamental Beliefs of the Church.

THE CHURCH'S RELATIONSHIP TO CIVIL LEGISLATION ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY AND ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIORS

The Word of God is replete with instruction and illustration bearing on the believer's relationship to the authority and jurisdiction of civil government. Because the Seventh-day Adventist

Church values the entirety of the Word of God as its ultimate authority for truth, doctrine, and way of life, it always seeks to reflect in its teaching and practice the full message of Scripture regarding appropriate interaction with civil government. To that end, the Church periodically offers counsel to individuals, leaders, and church institutions when the claims of civil government and the teachings of the Bible appear to be in conflict. This document focuses on the growing divide between the enactments of some civil governments and the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church about acceptable sexual behaviors.

The following principles, though not comprehensive, undergird the Church's consistent application of biblical truths to the societies and cultures in which it operates and the governments to which it responds. These principles will be especially important in framing, for a Church ministry or organization, an appropriate response to any level of civil government that may attempt to impose on the Church its perceptions of legally and morally acceptable sexual practices.

1. All human governments exist through the provision and allowance of God. The apostle Paul clearly instructs both individual Christians and the Church to place themselves willingly in submission to human governments that have been ordained by God to preserve God-given liberties, promote justice, preserve social order, and care for the disadvantaged (see Rom 13:1-3). Insofar as they act in concert with the values and principles articulated in the Word of God, civil governments deserve the respect and obedience of individual believers and the corporate Church. Wherever possible, individual Seventh-day Adventists and Church organizations in a given state or nation will seek by their behavior and statements to be understood as loyal citizens, participating in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Additionally, believers are instructed to pray for those in civil authority (1 Tim 2:1, 2) so that believers may practice the virtues of God's kingdom.

2. Although the authority of human government is derived from the authority of God, the claims and jurisdictions of human governments are never ultimately definitive for either individual believers or the Church. Both individual believers and the Church owe supreme allegiance to God Himself. On those occasions when the claims of civil government directly conflict with and contradict the teaching of the Word of God as understood by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, both the Church and its members are bound by that same Word of God to obey its precepts rather than those of human government (Acts 5:29). This expression of a higher allegiance is specific only to the claim of government that is in contradiction to the Word of God, and does not otherwise diminish or remove the obligation of either the Church or individual believers to live in submission to civil authority on other matters.

3. Because individual believers and the organized Church enjoy the rights and liberties given them by God and ratified by civil government, they may fully participate in the processes by which societies organize social life, provide for public and electoral order, and structure civil relationships. This may include a clear articulation of the Church's beliefs in such things as (1) the preservation of liberty of conscience; (2) the protection of the weak and disadvantaged; (3) the responsibility of the state to promote justice and human rights; (4) the divinely ordained state of marriage between one man and one woman and the family that results from this union; and

(5) the values of God-given health principles and practices in building up the social and economic welfare of the state. Neither individual Seventh-day Adventists nor the congregations, institutions, and entities through which they engage in their God-given mission should surrender their privileges and rights as a result of opposition to their allegiance to biblical teaching. With its long history of defending religious liberty and freedom of worship around the globe, the Seventh-day Adventist Church defends the rights of all persons, of whatever faith, to follow the dictates of their conscience and to engage in the religious practices to which that faith compels them.

4. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes and practices a wholistic understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, its evangelistic, educational, publishing, medical, and other ministry organizations are integral and indivisible expressions of its fulfillment of the commission given by Jesus, “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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19, 20, ESV). While Seventh-day Adventist congregations, publishing and media ministries, educational institutions, hospitals and medical centers, and ministry organizations appear to share certain similarities with other social and cultural institutions, they have historically been organized and continue to be organized on a faith and missional basis. They exist for the express purpose of communicating the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through their multiform methods and initiatives, and to advance the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and should enjoy all the privileges and liberties accorded to the religious organization of which they are essential parts. The Seventh-day Adventist Church vigorously asserts and defends the nonseparability of its various forms of mission, and urges all civil governments to accord to each of its organizations and entities the rights of conscience and freedom of religious practice asserted in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed in the constitutions of most world states.

5. In their interface with civil governments and societies, both the Church and individual Seventh-day Adventists must conduct themselves as representatives of the kingdom of Christ, exhibiting His characteristics of love, humility, honesty, reconciliation, and commitment to the truths of the Word of God. Each human being, of whatever gender, race, nationality, social class, faith, or sexual orientation, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the entities and organizations through which it pursues God’s mission. Because it defines itself as the body of Christ, who “died for us” “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8), the Church holds itself to the highest standards of speech and conduct toward all human beings. Recognizing that God is the ultimate Judge of all persons, the Church believes in the opportunity of all persons to be included in the kingdom of heaven as they acknowledge and forsake their sinfulness, confess Christ as Lord, accept His righteousness in place of their own, seek to obey His commandments, and live His life of service. The Church affirms its right to describe some behaviors, ways of living, and the organizations that promote them as contrary to the Word of God. The Church is also responsible, however, to differentiate clearly between its critique of those beliefs and behaviors, and its respect for the persons expressing those beliefs and behaviors. The

Church does not condone and will not allow its public statements on matters of social concern to be characterized as contempt or verbal humiliation of those with whom it disagrees. In exercising its freedoms, the Church's public speech must exhibit the grace always seen in Jesus. All Seventh-day Adventist entities and organizations, as well as individual members of the Church, are urged to express their respect for individuals or groups of persons with whose behavior and opinions they are compelled to disagree because of allegiance to the Word of God. The Church earns the credibility to participate in difficult social and national issues by its clear identification of itself as a redemptive entity.

In light of the above principles derived from the Word of God, the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to offer counsel to congregations, church organizations and entities, and those who lead church organizations and entities. The complex issues surrounding civil governments' responses to the reality of homosexuality and alternative sexual practices in contemporary society underscore the importance of this counsel.

THE CHALLENGES OF STATE LEGISLATION

In a growing number of nations, governments enact special legislative or judicial protection to prevent what they consider discriminatory behavior. Those protections sometimes appear to impair the religious-freedom rights of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, leaders, and Church organizations to employ persons, perform weddings, offer employment benefits, publish missional material, make public statements, and provide education or educational housing on the basis of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching about the sinfulness of sexual behaviors prohibited by Scripture.

Conversely, in a number of nations, homosexual or alternative sexual practices result in harsh penalties imposed by law. While Seventh-day Adventist institutions and members may appropriately advocate for preserving the unique and God-given institution of heterosexual marriage in their societies and legal codes, it is the position of the Church to treat those practicing homosexual or alternative sexual behaviors with the redemptive love taught and lived by Jesus.

THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS OF THE CHURCH

The Seventh-day Adventist Church will encourage all its congregations, employees, ministry leaders, organizations, and entities to uphold church teachings and faith-based practices in Church membership, employment, education, and marriage ceremonies, including officiating at weddings. These teachings and faith-based practices, built upon the Bible's instructions about human sexuality, are equally applicable to heterosexual and homosexual relationships. It is inconsistent with the Church's understanding of scriptural teaching to admit into or maintain in membership persons practicing sexual behaviors incompatible with biblical teachings. Neither is it acceptable for Adventist pastors or churches to provide wedding services or facilities for same-sex couples.

In upholding these Scriptural standards, the Church relies upon the faith-based exemptions usually and customarily extended by civil government to religious organizations and their affiliated ministries to organize themselves according to their understanding of moral truth. The Church will also attempt to provide legal counsel and resources to Church leaders, organizations, and entities so that they operate in harmony with its biblical understanding of human sexuality.

Congregational leaders, Church employees, ministry leaders, and institutions are advised to review carefully the Church's existing policies with regard to membership, employment, and education to ensure that local practices are in harmony with the Church's expressed teachings about sexual behavior. Consistent expression and application of organizational policies and teachings regarding such behavior will be a key feature of maintaining the faith-based exemptions customarily allowed by civil governments.

FAITH-BASED DECISION MAKING IN EMPLOYMENT AND ENROLLMENT

The Seventh-day Adventist Church asserts and reserves the right for its entities to employ individuals according to Church teaching about sexual behaviors compatible with the teaching of Scripture as understood by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While each institution and ministry operates in its own society and legal climate, each also expresses the worldwide belief system and teachings of the global Church. The Church maintains the right of these ministries and institutions to make decisions based on the teaching of Scripture and will provide legal review of relevant law and ordinances.

Wherever possible and feasible, the Church will continue to advocate, both legislatively and in courts of law, for faith-based preferential hiring and enrollment practices for itself and its ministries.

THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC SPEECH

The Church asserts the right to express its commitment to biblical truth through the communication it makes available to its members and to various publics, as well as to defend the free-speech rights of its employees to express the Church's teaching about sexual behavior in public environments, including worship services, evangelistic meetings, educational classrooms, and public forums. Church leaders accept the responsibility to keep themselves and Church employees informed about government regulations regarding acceptable speech, and to invite periodic legal review of how those regulations should affect the Church's mission. Those responsible for the Church's official communication and those who preach and teach should emphasize the importance of surrendering all behavior, including sexual behavior, to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The standard for both published material and public statements about sexual behaviors must be that they are widely understood as both "clear and respectful," expressing biblical truth with the kindness of Jesus Himself.

THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC SPEECH

To achieve a consistent application of a “clear and respectful” standard in its ministries, the Church urges all its ministries, including pastoral and evangelistic ministries, educational ministries, publishing and media ministries, and health and medical ministries, among others, periodically to provide training and counsel to employees who interface with the public through media and public presentations. This training should include a review of current national or community law pertaining to public speech about sexual behaviors, and examples of appropriate ways to communicate the Church’s beliefs and teachings.

NOTES

- ¹ See the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s Official Statements about “Same-Sex Unions” and “Homosexuality.”
- ² Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, “Marriage and Family,” No. 23.



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